



Marketing techniques of the elite football clubs in the social media

Técnicas de marketing de los clubes de fútbol de élite en las redes sociales

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Abstract

Communication has always had an important role managing the clubs, which is influential in sporting institutions and economic events in the society. In the area of communication, social media has advanced during the last years, and became a basic part of professional football clubs leading to a greater support of the fans and generating more confidence and media outreach in society than ever before. In this research, it has been done analysis of the management of official soccer clubs social media accounts, with historic success in international competitions, of the international confederations CONMEBOL, CONCACAF and UEFA. The methodology of the study, has been based in observation and the analysis of content, and the research objective is evaluate the utilization of content categories related with marketing, and considering the communication department of each football club as issuer of content in the official Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts. The results show big differences in emission of marketing content. The data obtained are useful for improve the strategic management of digital communication of these entities.

Resumen

La comunicación siempre tuvo un papel importante en la organización de los clubes de fútbol, instituciones influyentes a nivel deportivo y económico en la sociedad. Dentro del ámbito de la comunicación y en específico en las redes sociales, se ha avanzado mucho en los últimos años, siendo parte fundamental de los clubes de fútbol profesionales para conseguir mayor apoyo por parte de la afición y generar mayor confianza y alcance mediático en la sociedad. En esta investigación, se ha realizado un análisis de la gestión de las cuentas oficiales en redes sociales de diez clubes de fútbol, con gran palmarés histórico y número de participaciones en competiciones internacionales, pertenecientes a las confederaciones continentales: CONMEBOL, CONCACAF y UEFA. La metodología del estudio, se ha basado en la observación y el análisis de contenido, y el objetivo de la investigación es la evaluación de la utilización de las categorías de contenido relacionadas con el marketing, teniendo en cuenta al departamento de comunicación de cada club como emisor de contenido en las cuentas oficiales en las redes sociales Facebook, Instagram y Twitter. Los resultados muestran grandes diferencias en la emisión de contenidos relacionados con el marketing, además los datos obtenidos resultan de gran utilidad para mejorar la gestión estratégica de la comunicación digital en estas entidades.

Keywords | Palabras clave

Analysis of content, soccer clubs, organizational communication, sport, marketing, social media.

Análisis de contenido, clubes de fútbol, comunicación organizacional, deporte, marketing, redes sociales.

Introduction and state of the issue

Sponsors play a key role in the management of the world's elite football clubs, as they are business partners with huge influence on their economic management, as well as having an impact on the image of each club vis-à-vis their respective audiences and society in general.

In this research, based on the hypothesis that there is content related to advertising and sponsors, which influences in a notable way the broadcast of content in the analyzed media, the categories of contents related to marketing are analyzed, which the Football clubs share, social networks Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The obtained results can be very useful for a better management of the official accounts of the football clubs, because it can generate a positive image and the improvement of the reputation for these entities, and the different external companies with commercial interests in the same. One of the great objectives in the 21st century in marketing and communication of elite clubs is the internationalization of their image; therefore the management of it is also important in the management of social networks in sports clubs. On the image of the companies on the internet, it is worth noting: "They reflect the image of the organization before anyone who visits it, at any time and in any place in the world" (Domínguez et al., 2012, p.54). The communication of the two most important Spanish football clubs at the international level has two essential objectives at the beginning of the 21st century: the international expansion of some (few) brands (Fútbol Club Barcelona or Real Madrid Club de Fútbol) And the reinforcement of the loyalty of the fans. (Ginesta, 2010, p. 161). Also remarkable are the internationalization strategies, regarding the availability of web pages and official profiles on social networks (especially on social networks Twitter and Facebook) in different languages of professional football clubs, highlighting the case of Real Madrid Club de Fútbol, the club which is analyzed in this study.

Regarding the importance of the internet as a communication platform for the sport, it should be noted that the media offer an exhibition platform for it, which constitutes the free audience necessary to promote the participation of a greater number of athletes, spectators and consumers (Moragas, 2003, p.26). Other outstanding features of the Internet include: "Instantaneousness, multimedia, personalization and interactivity appear as the defining features of sports cybermedia in communication 2.0" (Favaretto, 2014, p.239).

In relation to the advantages and opportunities of new technologies for those who manage communication: “New technologies have brought speed and convenience and have opened a range of unthinkable possibilities. In this sense, the Internet has provided great advantages and opportunities for those who manage communication” (Cancelo & Almansa, 2013, p.424). Therefore, it is important that professional football clubs have the ability to adapt to the new media that can be exploited in the Internet and ways of communicating “Clubs have had to reinvent themselves and adapt their structures” (López & Fernández, 2015, P. 38.).

Regarding the management and use of social networks, by those responsible for the management of communication in professional clubs, special consideration should be given to the relationship with the audience. One of the most important objectives of professional football clubs in the current century is the loyalty of followers and supporters, as well as other audiences that can decisively influence the marketing management of these entities, and in this sense, Social networks play an essential role.

World football directives are called upon to design and use the marketing and communication possibilities to ensure that customers, whether fans or supporters, relive a holistic football experience as a product (Thrasou et al., 2012, P.300).

Therefore, good communication management when targeting audiences can help improve the economic management of professional football clubs. Interactive communication in football clubs responds to characteristics different from those used in other business sectors, since the main target groups in the communication are basically followers with strong roots, commitment and identification with the entities (Olabe, 2010, p.97). In this sense, the companies that sponsor and support football clubs may also have these characteristics that are defined by the author.

It is important to note that the management of social networks is increasingly important in relation to the success of the entities. In the case of professional football clubs it is also something that must be taken into account if the entities are to be as successful as possible. They suppose means that gives the opportunity to professional football clubs to reach the audience, since it enables the clubs to reach a very important audience, not only by quantity, but also by the level of loyalty. These entities have profiles in the main social networks (Lobillo & Muñoz, 2016, p. 199).

Regarding the importance of having presence in social networks by all types of entities, it is important to note that digital technology burst

in the mid-1990s, as it was a medium that seduced mainly by its capacity to store large volumes of data in multiple formats, allowing it to be distributed at high speeds to interact with its audiences (González, 2013, p.300). Currently most professional football clubs are present in the most important social networks.

Regarding the convenience of social networks for professional football clubs as an organizational communication tool, it is important to emphasize that they are constantly used by sports organizations, allowing interaction with audiences with immediacy and effectiveness (Lobillo & Muñoz, 2016, p.197). It is important to point out that social networks that have more follow-up, ahead of others, such as Youtube or Google Plus, are Twitter and Facebook (Armijos, 2015, page 32).

The category of content that is mainly analyzed in this research is the one related to marketing. In relation to this category, in social networks it is necessary to emphasize the great importance of contents related to the marketing and the enormous potential that this medium offers, thanks to the possibility to cross databases in this media (De Salas, 2009, p.3. 4).

Content posted in online newsrooms and on the social network Twitter can often be similar. Although more often content categories related to matches are used: "Regarding the use of Twitter, all the clubs that use it update almost daily to broadcast the same news they offer on their websites and also to narrate the matches" (Sotelo, 2012, p. 223).

Professional football clubs must have a communication plan established for the management of communication in their respective online press rooms and official accounts in social networks. Any institution that wants to achieve effective communication must draw up a communication plan defining its objectives and the communication actions that will be carried out (Salazar & Prieto, 2015, p.21). Therefore, it is possible to elaborate a strategy on the part of the football clubs in which the categories of content are collected and their degree of use in this medium. Sports organizations are obliged to professionalize in all their departments. Due to the complexity that has been achieved in the functions they perform and the activities they carry out, the entities must consider the incorporation of professionals prepared for the specific management of these functions. It is not enough to handle a large club only with good will, as it is necessary to plan the activities to be carried out, formalize the procedures and the roles and functions to be performed, correct coordination between the different areas and establish a process for decision making. All this will lead

to greater efficiency and efficacy in the management of the sports entity (Gómez & Opazo, 2007, p.4).

However, it is important to note that clubs in many cases do not usually have a communication plan in place. Only a minority of football clubs have a Communication or Audience Relations plan (Arceo, 2003, p. 30). Facebook is the social network that brings together more supporters and followers of professional football clubs, ahead of Twitter, Instagram, Youtube and Google Plus: "With regard to the presence of clubs in the leading social network (Facebook), all the teams analyzed totaled about 50 million fans in it at the end of January 2012 "(Sotelo, 2012, page 223).

In the management and use of the online press rooms and social networks by those responsible for the management of communication in professional football clubs, special attention must be paid to the relationship with the audience. One of the most important objectives of professional football clubs in the 21st century is the loyalty of followers and supporters, and in this sense, social networks play an essential role in this goal. Regarding the stability of the relationships maintained by organizations with their different audiences, all organizations have relationships with different audiences. According to this author, regardless of the stability or not of the relationship with the different types of audience, the organizations' environments are composed of a whole amalgam of audiences on which the same organization has or can have consequences and vice versa. There are types of audiences with whom organizations relate more and other types of audiences with whom less. In most cases, the audience with whom the greatest relationship is established is with workers, the media, the crazy community, customers and consumers (Xifra, 2011, p. 131).

Communication departments of football clubs give importance to carrying out communicative actions aimed at external, internal and intermediate audiences, with the media being the most important audience of professional football clubs. In this sense, football club communication cabinets seek to condition the agenda, and the routines of the media to which it is directed, using prominently the categories of content related to press conferences, official announcements, interviews, Reports and use of the official website, with periodic updating of content within it (Olabe, 2010, p. 100).

Social media must be fully implemented in the communication of clubs:

In any case, it is assumed that social media are fully implemented in the communicative routines of companies, since 100% of respondents say that Web 2.0 has substantially changed the way organizations relate to their audiences (Almansa & Godoy, 2012, p 61).

Good exploitation of the brand can allow football clubs to differentiate themselves from other competitors when it comes to targeting followers or supporters.

In this sense the social web becomes fundamental for success: "A brand, a company or institution - in our case a professional school - its product or service, have become social objects and, as such, must communicate them through the social web" (Sánchez & Paniagua, 2013, p.30) The departments of communication when it comes to transmitting the corporate image must take into account the external audience, especially the media:

The importance given by these departments to the media as transmitters of the corporate image is understood when it is observed that 97% of the communicative actions developed by these departments are focused on mass media (Olabe, 2009, p.136).

Taking into account football clubs as trade partners of brands in other sectors:

Football has become the most popular sport in the world and with a higher degree of audience. Therefore, clubs with more fans are considered ideal trading partners for brands that want to enter new markets (Ginesta, 2011, p 154).

It is important to consider the brand image that is built in professional football clubs, it is noted:

This brand image is built on the strategic assets of immaterial nature, which are the club's own players and the historical achievements of the club. Hence, the exploitation of the brand is intimately linked to the image rights and other commercial income of the players (García & Pujol, 2008, p.102).

Material and methods

The techniques used in this research have been observation and content analysis. With regard to observation, it becomes a scientific technique, when it serves a formulated objective of research, is systematically planned, relates to more general theories, so that it does not remain as a set of curiosities, and is controlled and Verified with criteria of validity and reliability (Ruiz, 2012, p.75).

In relation to content analysis, it is important to note that “it means systematically applying previously established rules that serve to measure the frequency with which elements appear to study some of the aspects that seem useful to us in accordance with the purposes of our investigation” (Berganza & Ruiz, 2005, p.223).

The social networks analyzed in the study are Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The analysis was performed from April 1 to April 30, 2015. This study aims to analyze the social media management of elite football clubs of the confederations CONMEBOL, CONCAFAF and UEFA. The selection criterion of football clubs in this study has been made following the results of historical records at the international level. The selected clubs must have official accounts in the social networks analyzed at the time of analysis of the research.

Five of most successful European clubs in the UEFA Champions League have been selected: Real Madrid Club de Fútbol, Fútbol Club Barcelona, Associazione Calcio Milan S.p.A., Fußball Club Bayern München e.V. And Liverpool Football Club. Four clubs of America, following the criterion that each club has more historical succes international competitions of the countries with greater historical weight of each American confederation: Club Atlético River Plate of Argentina and São Paulo Futebol Clube (CONMEBOL); And Club de Fútbol América S.A. Of C.V. And LA Galaxy (CONCAFAF). Finally, it was added the club with the highest international honors of Ecuador, Liga Deportiva Universitaria.

Access to each page, profile or official account in social networks, has been obtained from the official website of each football club.

Chart 1. Identification of official web pages, profiles and official accounts in social networks of the clubs selected for the analysis.

	Official Web page	Facebook page	Instagram profile	Twitter account
AC Milan	acmilan.com	ACMilan	acmilan	@acmilan
CA River Plate	cariverplate.com.ar	riverplateoficial	carpoficial	@CARPoficial
CF América	clubamerica.com.mx	ClubAmerica.com..mx	cf_americaoficial	@CF_America
FC Barcelona	fcbarcelona.es	fcbarcelona	fcbarcelona	@FCBarcelona
FC Bayern	fcbayern.de	FCBayern	fcbayern	@FCBayern
LA Galaxy	lagalaxy.com	lagalaxy	LAGALAXY	@LAGalaxy
LD Universitaria	ldu.com.ec	LigadeQuitoOficial	ldu_oficial	@LDU_Oficial
Liverpool FC	liverpoolfc.com	EspanolLFC	liverpoolfc	@lfc
Real Madrid CF	realmadrid.com	RealMadrid	realmadrid	@realmadrid
São Paulo FC	saopaulofc.net	saopaulofc	saopaulofc	@saopaulofc

Source: Official websites of the analyzed clubs .Own elaboration.

The research methodology has followed the following analysis template:

We have analyzed the type and amount of content of each official Twitter account, the official Facebook page, and the official Instagram profile of each club, previously establishing a questionnaire that allows to move the objective of finding out the types of content that each football club Generates in each account in variables, and the variables to indicators. The variables in this case are classified in the type of content that each published content has which is shared in the analyzed social networks.

For the corresponding record, first the title, the URL, the date and the time of the emission of a certain content in the corresponding analysis sheet have been noted.

The content of the different analyzed social networks in the following classes and content categories has been classified on the analysis sheets:

The content with reference to the audience of the club refers to the publications related to the internal and external audiences of the analyzed club. It also includes content that refers to the supporters, communication,

institutional, professional players of the club, the youth academy, press conferences and interviews.

With regard to the content referred to the sports theme, it should be noted that these are publications that refer to information related to training, preparation for matches, and the development of matches or subsequent reflection. Included in the category is the related multimedia content.

In relation to the emission of content issued with marketing techniques, it should be noted that this category of content have been classified content, that tries to persuade the followers to answer and participate by mentioning in its content the official account of the Corresponding professional football club. Included in this category are links to other media or other social networks. Also included in this category, are all publications related to sponsors and commercial commitments of the entity.

Analysis and results

First, the results of the research carried out in the official pages of the clubs analyzed in the social network Facebook are exposed: The Associazione Calcio Milan S.p.A. Has made 12 publications of contents related to internal and external audiences of the club, 20 publications of sports content and 3 of marketing; The Club Atlético River Plate has made 8 publications of contents related to the audiences of the club, 40 of sports content, and 6 of marketing; Club de Fútbol América S.A. Of C.V. Has made 13 content publications related to the audiences of the club, 62 sports content, and 6 marketing; FC Barcelona has made 24 publications of contents related to internal and external audiences of the club, 79 of sports content, and 5 of marketing; The Fußball Club Bayern München e.V. Has made 20 publications of contents related to audiences of the club, 84 of sports content and 2 of marketing. LA Galaxy has made 15 content publications related to club's audience, 42 sports content, and 2 marketing; Liga Deportiva Universitaria has made 10 publications of content related to the audiences of the club, 6 of sports content and 12 of marketing; Liverpool Football Club has made 27 publications of content related to club audiences, 26 of sports content, and 4 of marketing; Real Madrid Club de Fútbol has made 15 publications of content related to audiences of the club, 70 of sports content, and 1 of marketing. São Paulo Futebol Clube has made 35 publications related to audiences of the club, 45 of sports content and 1 of marketing.

Chart 2. Results on the social network Facebook

	Content audiences club	Sports Content	Marketing Content	Percentage of marketing content
AC Milan (UEFA)	12	20	3	8,57 %
CA River Plate (CONMEBOL)	8	40	6	11,11 %
CF América (CONCACAF)	13	62	1	1,32 %
FC Barcelona (UEFA)	24	79	5	4,63 %
FC Bayern (UEFA)	20	84	2	1,89 %
LA Galaxy (CONCACAF)	15	42	2	3,39 %
Liga Deportiva Universitaria (CONMEBOL)	10	6	12	42,86 %
Liverpool FC (UEFA)	27	26	4	7,02 %
Real Madrid CF (UEFA)	15	70	1	1,16 %
São Paulo FC (CONMEBOL)	35	45	1	1,23 %
Total	179	474	37	5,36 %

Source: Official Facebook pages of the analyzed clubs. Own elaboration.

The results of the research carried out in the official profiles of the analyzed clubs in the social network Instagram are shown below: The Associazione Calcio Milan S.p.A. Has made 20 publications of contents related to audiences of the club, 13 publications of sports content, and none of marketing; River Plate has made 12 publications of content related to the audience of the club, 27 of sports content, and 2 of marketing; ; Club de Fútbol América S.A. Of C.V. Has made 8 publications of contents related to audience of the club, 27 of sports content, and none of marketing. The Fútbol Club Barcelona has made 47 publications of contents related to internal and external audiences of the club, 239 of sports content, and 1 of marketing; The Fußball Club Bayern München e.V. Has made 63 publications of content related to the audience of the club, 143 of sports content, and 2 of marketing; LA Galaxy has made 35 content publications related to club audiences, 71 sports content, and 3 marketing content; Liga Deportiva Universitaria has published 1 content related to the audience of the club, 9 of sports content, and 4 of marketing; Liverpool Football Club has made 30 publications related to club audiences, 102 sports content, and 18 marketing related content. Real Madrid Club de

Fútbol has made 11 publications of content related to the audience of the club, 48 of sports content, and no marketing audienceation. The Fußball Club Bayern München e.V. Has made 63 publications of content related to the audience of the club, 143 of sports content, and 2 of marketing; LA Galaxy has made 35 content publications related to club audiences, 71 sports content, and 3 marketing content; Liga Deportiva Universitaria has published content related to the audience of the club, 9 of sports content, and 4 of marketing; Liverpool Football Club has made 30 publications related to club audiences, 102 sports content, and 18 marketing related content. Real Madrid Club de Fútbol has made 11 publications of content related to the audience of the club, 48 of sports content, and no marketing audienceation. For its part, the São Paulo Futebol Clube has made 22 publications of content related to the audience of the club, 59 of sports content, and 30 of marketing.

Chart 3. Results in the social network Instagram

	Content audiences club	Sports Content	Marketing Content	Percentage of marketing content
AC Milan (UEFA)	20	13	0	0,00 %
CA River Plate (CONMEBOL)	12	27	2	4,88 %
CF América (CONCACAF)	8	27	0	0,00 %
FC Barcelona (UEFA)	47	239	1	0,35 %
FC Bayern (UEFA)	63	143	2	0,96 %
LA Galaxy (CONCACAF)	35	71	3	2,75 %
Liga Deportiva Universitaria (CONMEBOL)	1	9	4	28,57 %
Liverpool FC (UEFA)	30	102	18	12,00 %
Real Madrid CF (UEFA)	11	48	0	0,00 %
São Paulo FC (CONMEBOL)	22	59	1	1,22 %
Total	249	738	31	3,05 %

Source: Official Instagram profiles of analyzed clubs. Own elaboration.

Finally, the results of the research carried out in the official accounts of the analyzed clubs in the social network Twitter are presented: Asso-

ciazione Calcio Milan S.p.A. Has made 139 publications of contents related to audience of the club, 204 publications of sports content, and 2 of marketing; The Club Atlético River Plate has made 294 publications of contents focused on the audience, 504 of sports content, and 10 of marketing; Club de Fútbol América S.A. Of C.V. Has made 292 publications of contents related to the internal and external audiences of the club, 844 of sports content, and 24 of marketing; The Fútbol Club Barcelona has made 253 publications of content related to the audience of the club, 800 of sports content, and 24 of content related to marketing. The Fußball Club Bayern München e.V. Has made 330 publications of content related to the audience of the club, 663 of sports content, and 3 of marketing; LA Galaxy has produced 294 content related to the audiences of the club, 721 sports content publications, and 8 content focused on marketing; Liga Deportiva Universitaria has made 378 publications of content related to the audience of the club, 620 of sports content, and 26 of marketing; Liverpool Football Club has made 218 publications of content related to the audience of the club, 415 of sports content, and 48 of marketing. The Real Madrid Football Club has made 247 publications of content related to the audience of the club, 422 of sports content, and 31 of marketing. Finally, São Paulo Futebol Clube has made 112 publications of content related to the audience of the club, 333 of sports content, and 10 of marketing.

Chart 4. Results on the social network Twitter

	Content audiences club	Sports Content	Marketing Content	Percentage of marketing content
AC Milan (UEFA)	139	204	2	0,58 %
CA River Plate (CONMEBOL)	294	504	10	1,24 %
CF América (CONCACAF)	292	844	24	2,07 %
FC Barcelona (UEFA)	253	800	10	0,94 %
FC Bayern (UEFA)	330	663	3	0,30 %
LA Galaxy (CONCACAF)	294	721	8	0,78 %
Liga Deportiva Universitaria (CONMEBOL)	378	620	26	2,54 %
Liverpool FC (UEFA)	218	415	48	7,05 %
Real Madrid CF (UEFA)	247	422	31	4,43 %
São Paulo FC (CONMEBOL)	112	333	10	2,20 %
Total	2557	5526	172	2,08 %

Source: Official Twitter accounts of the analyzed clubs . Own elaboration.

Discussion and conclusions

The content related to the advertising and the sponsors, does not influence in a noticeable way in the emission of content in the analyzed social networks. The football analyzed clubs, very rarely issue publications related to marketing, as it has been observed that only 2.4% of the publications analyzed in the research correspond to this category of content. The issuance of publications related to the categories of sports content, and those that refer to the club's audiences, have had a higher emission level in terms of quantity and percentage.

The analyzed social network with the highest level of emission of percentage of content related to marketing, has been Facebook, with a higher level of publications than the average. With regard to the number of marketing publications, Twitter has been the analyzed social network with the highest level of broadcast, followed very far by Facebook and Instagram.

It is noteworthy that in the social network Facebook, the club with the highest percentage of marketing content has been Liga Deportiva Universitaria, followed by Club Atlético River Plate and Associazione Calcio Milan SpA, club that only stands out in percentage in this social network. The clubs with the lowest percentage of content in marketing, on Facebook, have been Real Madrid Club de Fútbol, São Paulo Futebol Clube and Club de Fútbol América S.A. Of C.V.

With respect to the Instagram social network, the clubs with the highest level of marketing content have been in this order: Liga Deportiva Universitaria, Liverpool Football Club and Club Atlético River Plate, while the clubs with the lowest percentage of broadcasting have been Associazione Calcio Milan SpA, Club de Fútbol América SA Of C.V. and Real Madrid Club de Fútbol. It has been observed, that the issue of content related to the audience of the club is much smaller in percentage in Instagram than in the other analyzed social networks.

As for the total number of publications in Instagram, the number of publications made from the official Liverpool Football Club account stands out, being the entity analyzed with more publications in this social network, with a significant difference over the rest.

With respect to the analyzed clubs in the social network Twitter, with greater percentage of emission of content related to marketing, it is necessary to emphasize the Liverpool Football Club, Real Madrid Football Club and Liga Deportiva Universitaria. In contrast, the analyzed clubs with the lowest percentage were Fußball Club Bayern München e.V., Associazione

Calcio Milan S.p.A. and LA Galaxy. It has been observed, that the contents related to the audiences of the clubs are used in greater proportion in this social network.

Taking into account all the publications analyzed, in the analyzed social networks, the football clubs with the most publications related to marketing have been the Liverpool Football Club and Liga Deportiva Universitaria, clubs belonging to different football confederations. Therefore, it has not been observed that there is correlation with respect to the membership of the clubs to a certain confederation or geographical origin and a higher percentage or amount of marketing-related content.

As for the future lines of research, according to the classification of Igartua and Humanes (2004); To social networks as means, according to the classification of Berganza and Ruiz (2005); and content issued and classified into content categories, according to the classification of Igartua and Humanes (2004); and taking into account the results of this research, new lines could be opened that deal with new areas of research: around audiences, according to Webster's (1998) classification, and cited in Berganza and Ruiz (2005), or in relation to To the effects on the receivers, according to the classification of Berganza and Ruiz (2005).

Glossary:

Youth academy: Training academy or place of origin of football players, in categories younger than adult age, dependent on a football club.

CONCACAF: Confederation of North America, Central America and the Association Caribbean Football.

CONMEBOL: South American Confederation of Football.

UEFA: Union of European Football Associations.

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