

# Sports marketing communication in the promotion of football academy in Yogyakarta

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## Abstract

This research aims to analyze the marketing communication strategies implemented by two football academies in Yogyakarta, namely MFP Academy and Mataram Utama, based on the framework of Shank and Lyberger (2014), which emphasizes target market, product/service, and promotion media. Method in this study uses a qualitative approach with data collection through in-depth interviews with academy managers and field observations. Results and discussion in this study show that MFP Academy primarily targets children and teenagers aged 6–17 years by emphasizing intensive training programs and promotional activities through social media, brochures, and tournament participation. Meanwhile, Mataram Utama focuses on player development with professional pathways, highlighting alumni achievements and organizing tournaments to enhance credibility. Conclusion, both academies face limitations in promotion media effectiveness and lack of systematic evaluation. The study suggests that academies should maximize digital content such as alumni testimonials and player stories to strengthen engagement, while further research could involve quantitative surveys to measure parental satisfaction and return on investment (ROI) from promotional activities.

**Keywords:** sport marketing communication; football academy; MFP academy; mataram utama; promotion media

## 1. Introduction

Football is the most popular sport in Indonesia, with a massive and continuously growing fan base. However, despite its enormous potential, the achievements of Indonesian football at the international level are still far from expectations. One of the main obstacles is the lack of structured and high-quality development, particularly in nurturing young players from an early age. In this context, football academies have emerged as an important solution to build the foundation for the future of national football. Through modern training methods, academies play a key role in shaping the technical, physical, and mental abilities of young players to prepare them for professional competition (Suryana, 2018). Football academies in Indonesia are also considered a crucial step in strengthening the long-term foundation of the sport. In addition to technical training, academies equip young players with values of discipline, fighting spirit, and character building that support professionalism (Heryanto & Kartini, 2017). These academies have already contributed significantly to improving player quality in major national clubs, even though many are still in the development stage.

On the other hand, there are still significant challenges to overcome. Limitations in training facilities, lack of professional academy management, and suboptimal promotional strategies remain serious barriers (Jafar, 2019). Many football academies have not maximized the use of social media and digital technology as promotional tools, making their presence less recognized by the wider community. As highlighted by (Sugema et al., 2021), one of the main weaknesses of football academies lies in the lack of promotion, especially through social media, which makes their marketing strategies less effective. In this situation, sports marketing communication plays a vital role. The application of proper communication strategies can help academies build a positive image, attract new students, and expand their networks. According to (Mullin et al., 2014), effective sports marketing must be able to integrate various elements, including digital marketing, social media engagement, and experiential marketing, to reach the target audience more effectively.

Based on this background, this study examines sports marketing communication in two football academies in Yogyakarta, namely MFP Academy and Mataram Utama Academy. Both academies share similarities, one of which is their relatively young age of less than five years. Therefore, this research focuses on exploring how marketing communication strategies are implemented in promoting football academies in Yogyakarta and the challenges encountered in the process.

Marketing communication is a crucial element in organizational strategy as it helps deliver relevant messages, persuade audiences, and build long-term relationships with consumers. (Kotler & Keller, 2016) emphasize that marketing communication is a managed process to provide information, convince the target market, and strengthen customer loyalty, while (Belch & Belch, 2018) highlight its role in both attracting new customers and retaining existing ones through continuous interaction. The elements of marketing communication include advertising, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing, personal selling, and digital media (Kotler & Keller, 2016), which together form an integrated system to achieve marketing objectives.

In the sports context, communication plays a significant role in shaping public perception, motivating participation, and strengthening the relationship between sports organizations and their communities. According to (Pedersen et al., 2007), sports communication is the process of delivering sports-related messages through mass, digital, and interpersonal media, while (Billings, 2014) stresses its function as a tool for identity formation and opinion shaping in society. The objectives of sports communication include building a positive image, increasing community engagement, expanding audience reach, and providing relevant information about sporting events or programs (Mullin et al., 2014). These processes involve senders such as athletes or organizations, messages related to sports activities, communication channels, and audiences as receivers, with (Pitts & Stotlar, 2013) underlining that the choice of media is a key determinant of communication success in the digital era.

Furthermore, sports marketing communication integrates both communication and marketing principles to promote sports products, services, and organizations in a more targeted and engaging way. (Shank & Lyberger, 2013) define it as the process of conveying messages related to sports offerings with the aim of building emotional connections and increasing audience engagement. Within this framework, three important aspects emerge. First, the identification of the **target market**, which in the case of football academies often includes children and teenagers with an interest in football, as well as parents as decision-makers. Second, the **products and services** offered, which extend beyond physical facilities to include training quality, professional coaching, and the overall learning experience that shapes participants' skills and character. Third, the use of **promotional media**, ranging from traditional channels such as print and broadcast to digital platforms and social media that allow two-way interaction and more personalized communication. Together, these aspects demonstrate that sports marketing communication is not only about promoting sports activities but also about creating value, fostering loyalty, and ensuring long-term community engagement.

## 2. Method

The object of this research is two football academies in Yogyakarta, namely Maguwoharjo Football Park (MFP) Academy and Mataram Utama Academy. These two academies were selected because they involve influential figures in their management, such as Kahudi Widodo at MFP Academy, known as a PSS Sleman legend and coach in League 2 and League 3, and Dessy Arfianto at Mataram Utama, who serves as the chairman of Asprov PSSI DIY. The presence of these figures makes both academies relevant and interesting subjects in the context of sports marketing communication. This study employed a qualitative research approach with data collection techniques consisting of interviews and documentation. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with the managers and digital marketing teams of each academy to explore the marketing communication strategies they applied (Sugiyono, 2019). The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format to allow flexibility in exploring the participants' answers while still adhering to the main research questions. In addition, secondary data were collected through documentation techniques. Documentation included promotional brochures, social media posts, sponsorship reports, and marketing campaign materials used by the football academies (Sugiyono, 2019). This documentation was crucial to provide concrete evidence supporting the interview findings and to enhance the validity of the research data. By combining both primary and secondary data sources, this study aimed to present a comprehensive understanding of the sports marketing communication strategies implemented by the two football academies in Yogyakarta.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

#### **3.1. Research Results**

This study found that the primary target market of both football academies, MFP Academy and Mataram Utama, consists of children and adolescents aged 6 to 17 years. MFP Academy is open to both male and female participants, while Mataram Utama is predominantly attended by male players with a stronger orientation toward competitive and professional development. In terms of products and services, MFP Academy provides comprehensive facilities, including a full-sized pitch, mini soccer field, classroom for theory sessions, gym, physiotherapy, and nutrition consultation to support early-age athlete development. Training sessions are held three times a week with a holistic approach, covering technical, physical, and tactical aspects. Meanwhile, Mataram Utama also holds training three times a week at Kenari Field with the support of 16 licensed coaches. The academy places strong emphasis on competitive development by engaging players in official tournaments such as Soeratin U-13, U-15, and U-17, and has produced alumni who successfully joined professional clubs. In terms of promotion, both academies rely heavily on social media, particularly Instagram, as the main platform for delivering updates on activities, training schedules, and achievements.

MFP Academy supplements its promotional activities with printed brochures and participation in local events. In contrast, Mataram Utama highlights performance-based promotion by showcasing competitive achievements and alumni success as proof of quality. Word of mouth also plays a dominant role in attracting new participants in both academies. Recommendations from parents, family, and surrounding communities strongly influence the decision to enroll children in the academies. The findings also reveal differences in Customer Perceived Value (CPV). At MFP Academy, parents place higher importance on safety, comfort of facilities, and character education. On the other hand, parents at Mataram Utama prioritize their children's achievements, opportunities to participate in tournaments, and pathways to professional football careers. Overall, MFP Academy is positioned as an academy with strengths in modern facilities, comprehensive supporting services, and holistic training, while Mataram Utama excels in competitive performance, tournament experience, and its reputation as a stepping stone to the professional level.

#### **3.2. Discussion**

Based on the findings, the sports marketing communication strategies implemented by MFP Academy and Mataram Utama are both directed toward the segment of children and adolescents aged 6–17 years who have an interest and potential in football. However, despite having a similar target market, the strategies adopted show significant differences in terms of products, services, and promotional media. MFP Academy emphasizes inclusivity by welcoming both male and female participants from various socioeconomic backgrounds, as long as they demonstrate strong interest and willingness to follow the structured programs offered. This approach is supported by relatively complete facilities, including a full-sized pitch, classrooms, mini-soccer fields, nutrition services, and physiotherapy. These additional services can be classified as augmented products that add value and strengthen parents' perceptions of the academy's training quality. In this context, parents feel more confident enrolling their children, as the academy not only focuses on technical skill development but also pays attention to health, comfort, and character building.

In contrast, Mataram Utama builds its main appeal through reputation and structured pathways to professional teams. The programs offered not only cover basic skills, physical development, and tactical training but also provide real opportunities for outstanding players to be promoted to the senior team competing at the national level. This added value creates a strong psychographic pull, especially for parents who aspire for their children to pursue professional football careers. The academy's track record of producing players who advance to Indonesia's professional league strengthens its credibility and makes word-of-mouth (WOM) promotion highly effective. Positive experiences of alumni and the satisfaction of parents function as opinion leadership (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), where recommendations from trusted figures carry greater weight than formal promotional efforts made by the academy.

From the perspective of promotional media, the differences in strategy are also evident. MFP Academy adopts a multichannel approach by combining digital media such as Instagram and WhatsApp with conventional media such as brochures. Instagram is used to build brand awareness through visual

content showcasing training activities, achievements, and parent testimonials. However, Instagram's effectiveness in converting awareness into actual registrations remains limited, as the final decision strongly depends on parents' trust in the program. Therefore, brochures and participation in tournaments serve as important channels, providing concrete evidence of the academy's activities and facilitating direct engagement with potential participants. In contrast, Mataram Utama focuses more on using Instagram, its official website, and WOM as its main promotional tools. Instagram helps establish a professional image, while WOM operates as an organic strength that is difficult to rival, given the academy's proven track record in producing professional players.

Thus, it can be understood that the sports marketing communication strategies of both academies are adaptive and aligned with their respective resources and competitive strengths. MFP Academy excels in comprehensive facilities, diverse services, and multichannel promotion strategies targeting parents through multiple avenues. Meanwhile, Mataram Utama excels in reputation, achievements, and professional career pathways that deliver strong added value for parents with specific psychographic orientations. These differences show that while both academies target the same market segment, reaching them requires differentiated approaches based on the needs, expectations, and considerations of parents as the primary decision-makers.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study shows that both MFP Academy and Mataram Utama implement sports marketing communication strategies with different approaches according to their target audiences. MFP Academy focuses more on promotion through social media, particularly Instagram, as well as participation in tournaments as a way to introduce the academy to prospective players and their parents. Meanwhile, Mataram Utama emphasizes the achievements of their alumni who have successfully advanced to professional levels as their main promotional strength.

Based on the framework of (Shank & Lyberger, 2014), both academies have implemented elements of sports marketing communication consisting of the core product (football training), the tangible product (facilities, coaches, and curriculum), and the augmented product (networking, career opportunities, and academy reputation). However, the effectiveness of their promotional efforts can still be improved, for example by utilizing more varied content and measuring its impact. This is crucial not only to attract new participants but also to maintain the trust of parents and the wider community.

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