Communication strategies of selected Greek running events, digital environment and sports tourism

by

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Synopsis

Communication and sport have been interdependent concepts over the years and sport is the largest mass mobilization currently available on the planet via the internet (Statista.com). Over the last 20 years, the way and means of communication of sport to the public have changed. The interaction of fans with sports and the penetration of sports into societies around the world creates new opportunities for promotion, social and commercial messaging, constant connectivity through smart handheld devices and huge appeal through applications of the digital world. The purpose of the project was to study the communication strategy of sports events in the digital world to attract sports tourism. Also studied the rise of the running movement in recent years with the entry of new media and comparing cases of communication strategy of road races between urban centers and the regional cities of our country. Furthermore researched the bibliography of strategic sport communication and analysing qualitatively both of the promotion of sport and the digital movement in the digital world and the effort to attract sports tourism and digital impact. Analyzed qualitatively three cases of the running movement in Greece, the ‘’Alexander the Great’’ marathon in Thessaloniki, ‘’Sirris Challenge 22.7’’ in Serres and the ‘’Komorun’’ half-marathon in Komotini. Approaching the events methodologically by interviewing contest organizers, communication officers, state actors, athletes and journalists. The results we have outlined have shown that the strategic planning of a sporting event can, through the digital environment, create a successful communication strategy, which will mainly result in small-scale sports events, in increased participation of sport tourism. At the same time, with new media of communication and the contribution of some variables such as the region or the cooperation of local authorities and sponsors, can a small event achieve enormous appeal.

Keywords: Strategic sport communication, digital environment, running movement, sports events
To my newborn son
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Introduction

The rapid development of online technology and digital penetration in the communication of sports culture set new rules in shaping the communication strategy of sporting events. Web users reach up to four billion, and social networkers, who are up to three billion, are growing in a geometric progression (+21% from 1/2016) (Hootsuite.com, 2017), increasingly interacting with information consumption in general and especially in sports, as the global sports industry is continuously being linked to social networking platforms (crowdynews.com).

(Appendix, Figure 1)

At international conferences such as those of the "Olympic Agenda 2020 ", an important effort is being made to enable sport to benefit from technological developments and sports enthusiasts using social networking platforms to come into greater contact with athletes, sports, teams, events and of course the sponsors of the games. This is why we take into account all the major social media tools used by users of every continent, such as: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, VKontakte, QQ, Odnoklassniki, WeChat, Snapchat, Qzone, Tumblr, Tecent, Yoku, Tudou, Linkedin, Badoo, Whatsapp, Sina Weibo, Youtube, RenRen, Mobage, Gree, Google +, Mixi κ.α. (Mataruna, Melo, Guimaryes, Petersen-Wagner & Range, 2014).

(Appendix, Figures 2 and 3)
The IOC (International Olympic Committee) is cautious about all this, considering television as the top medium of sports content, but it does not overlook research that suggests internet is already the second most popular method in US sports. In the last 3 years, the viewer's perception is transformed into participation in a sporting event, since portable smart devices can now be part of the game, at the same time as it is held. All this is taken into account by those who organize major sporting events across the globe and are the leading example and we are soon expecting developments in the strategy of digital communication and marketing. (Mataruna, et al. 2014).

(Appendix Figures 4 and 5)

The globalization offered by the digital world in the sports industry gives an "open ground" for action in the areas of communication and marketing, having as a main aim the consumption of sporting content, whether this is going to happen on the spot, or through a screen. Athletic competitions have created athletic tourism since ancient times, mainly through the Olympic Games, and this is also the case today in any sporting event that strategically targets the attraction of athletic tourism anywhere on the planet (Polatidou, 2015). With the Internet promotion by the new means of communication, a huge and multifaceted dynamic is being developed in sports organizations and public administrations in every region, so that sport tourism can be an interlinked part of the system: sport, space, time, internet (Yfantidou, 2009) and to take an even greater share in the strategic planning of a sports event.

The comparative study of the present work on the communication policy of events of the running movement in our country and abroad was not only influenced by internet usage growth but also by the increase in the number of incentives for amateur participation in a sports event (Rizou, 2014). According to Yfantidou (2009) survey, theoretically small-scale events offer more opportunities for economic growth and increased sporting tourism in a regional area, because the local community realizes that there are more positive effects and "embraces" the event.

Marathon running consists of such sporting events in many different regions of a diverse demographic profile where the combination of travel and participation (as
a runner or spectator) is particularly popular. Of course, as we have seen in our conclusions, with the increasing visibility of sporting events in the new media, the scales of sports events can change regardless of region, because some local or small events manage to attract international attention.

Based on the above, we have identified that Web 2.0-Social Media's innovative structures in the development of communication of a sporting event have not been recorded, targeted and methodically delimited yet, or we have noticed that they have been researched in part and fragmentarily without a specific framework. There is inadequate information from sports events organizers about the use of new media and their available tools to achieve the basic goal of attracting sports tourism. Available data from the literature are scarce and scattered, while the gap covers statistical studies and journalistic surveys (Fairer-Wessels, Heath, Prinsloo, Pelser & Radikonyana, 2015).

Therefore, the incentives to conduct this research were identified in two areas: (a) practical utility and (b) internal structure. With regard to the first motivation, there is a desire for this research resource, to become a later tool for anyone wishing to organize a sporting event, mainly related to the running movement, and will try to communicate it methodically through the digital environment. As far as the second motivation is concerned, it is important to classify those items that are scattered and relate to the ways of communicating sporting events that are displayed in cyberspace either through the use of web or through social media.

The structure of the work was as follows. In the first chapter, the subject and the purpose of the work were presented, the main assumptions and the research questions that the present study attempted to address, and the necessary restrictions were put forward. Then, the bibliographic review, starting from the recording of a broad theoretical framework, was presented around the four basic concepts covered by the title of its scientific theme: communication strategy, digital environment, athletic tourism and running movement. The corresponding scientific literature on the communication strategy of sporting events have also been studied in addition to the relationships created with the parameters that affect the basic hypothesis or not.
The next chapters concern a research on the digital environment and its increasing participation in the sports industry, a brief study of sports tourism, as well as the presence of the running movement in the digital world, which launched it into popularity.

Next, the survey methodology of the research was presented, through the collection of data, recording the ways to achieve interviews. Also the parameters of the subject were defined. In the fourth chapter analyzed the qualitative analysis, by method of personal unstructured interviews carried out for the needs of the comparative study between the urban centers and the regional cities in Greece regarding the communication strategy of the events, on the running movement.

The last chapter is the summary of all the above and the condensation of the conclusions of the present paper is presented through the written discussion that is attempted with the aim of extracting science on our initial assumptions.
A.1 | Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research was to study the role of new media in designing strategic communication models in sports events, and more specifically events of the running movement, aiming at attracting sports tourism.

As the subject of marketing and communication science is the promotion of "products", sporting events gain commercial use and are treated as products for "consumption" by the public. Therefore, it is important to understand that there are a number of factors affecting the promotion of these products to a targeted consumer audience, such as sports tourism. The most influential factor being put to study is the internet and the digital culture as it is formed by the new media.

In this context, the power of new online tools and their applications used by the new means of communication is particularly important for information dissemination of an upcoming sporting event causing even greater appeal and better promotion of sports tourism. The new media give the opportunity for interaction between the public and sport factors building for them a strong new relationship.

Thus, new constants and changes are marked in the way of applying communication messaging. Therefore, communication strategy of running events, as defined in the present work, includes both the positive effects of the digital environment and the forms of relation and interaction created with the public in order to achieve digital and tourist appeal.

A.2 | Research Questions

The underlying assumption of this research is:

Any sporting event, anywhere on the planet, can be globally known (viral) if promoted right on the internet.

The research questions of this paper are as follows:

1. RQ1: What are the criteria for communication strategy in sporting events?
2. RQ2: What is the role of the digital world in the communication strategy of sporting events and its contribution to the events of the running movement?

3. RQ3: To what extent does the communication strategy of a sporting event take into account, maximize sporting participation and thus promote sports tourism?

4. RQ4: Are there differences between the events of the running movement organized in urban centers and in regional cities, in terms of communication strategy from the new media?

A.3 | Limitations of the study

This research was limited to the study of communication strategy in the digital environment and new media (Web 2.0 and Social Media), so the results drawn from it can not be generalized in the behavior of traditional mass media that strategically promote a sporting event. In addition, the comparative analysis of the data to the promotion of the dynamic running movement belonging to amateur sport was confined in three specific areas of Greece. So the findings do not concern the sport sector and organised running races(championships) and do not represent events of the running movement in every part of the country. Finally, while interviewing and collecting qualitative data, there is a restriction to the interviewees from the running races both in Serres and Komotini in comparison to the race in Thessaloniki due to the size of the third organisation that employs a large number of people in communication and tourism. On the contrary, in low population areas, organisers bear almost all responsibilities for an athletic event in the sector of communication and tourist appeal.

A.4 | Delimitations of the study

A.4.1 | Why the Running Movement?

During the bibliographic review, the strategy of communicating sporting events in the digital environment of various sports was extensively studied, either at large or small scale events, and communication tactics on the internet of several professional clubs was also presented. In the comparative case analyzed, it was
chosen to limit the study to the running movement and how this builds its communication strategy in the new media, because: The marathon is rooted in Greece and is one of the top Olympic sports. It has managed to attract massive participation of people and therefore offers conditions for athletic tourism, which was studied in the present work, and at the same time the running movement is experiencing impressive growth in Greece and abroad, with rising events every year. Its resonance in the digital world is enormous due to the fact that it is addressed to the whole community, therefore, there had been a great research scope.

Finally, the economic crisis experienced by our country and, by extension, sport, the municipalities and the regions, make it difficult to draw up the strategic sporting planning of Greece, as recommended by the General Secretariat for Sport. The running movement is wholly based on private initiative, with a view to social responsibility and sport, but it does not aim for profit, while the participation of public bodies is not assured. Therefore, it is organizationally and participationally addressed to everyone.

A.4.2 | Why the running events of Thessaloniki, Serres and Komotini?

The choice of the "Alexander the Great" marathon in Thessaloniki, the half-marathon road "Komorun" in Komotini and the road of endurance «Sirris Challenge 22,7» in Serres, was due to locality and better access to the qualitative and quantitative data acquired, and these three cases are excellent for different reasons.

The case of Thessaloniki impresses positively with the progress the event has made for the last 5 years in areas such as organization, athletic prestige, social appeal, participation and athletic tourism. Actually it has been helped by the change of strategic planning and methodological use of digital promotion, turning the Alexander the Great marathon into the second largest urban running event of the country that proceeds in parallel with the authentic marathon of Athens.

The case of Komotini is characteristic of this study on the running movement and the events in the region. A small town manages to organise road races in a short period of time, promoting them almost entirely through the digital world, creating a digital communication strategy and knowing significant progress without any differentiation from the urban centers.
On the contrary, in the case of Serres, a failure to carry out an enormously popular event has been spotted, despite the fact that there are events to take part in and a large number of its population loves running and participates in competitions in other cities. The devaluation of the race by the organisers, the lack of incentives for tourism development, the lack of sponsors and the poor use of digital media tools, are factors that do not favor the connectivity of society to the city's most important road show.
Chapter B | Survey Overview

B.1 | Theoretical Framework

B.1.1 | Communication strategy

Communication is the transmission of information, ideas, emotions and behaviors from one person or group to another (or others) primarily through symbols. In effective communication the concept transferred to the recipient must correspond to a large extent to that intended and designed by the sender. Communication is the basis for all social interactions, allows the transmission of accumulated knowledge and makes it possible to have an understanding among individuals, according to Theodorson G. A and Theodorson A. G. (1969).

Social sciences set parameters for a complete definition of communication to arise, like the meaning of influence which communication is capable of exercising, the questions, the doubts and the reactions of people to the understanding of a meaning and how they are clarified as well as the feelings emerging from delivering a message, which entails the meaning of communication. (Rosengren, 2000).

Communication Strategy describes the communicative "approach" or "method" that an operational programme adopts (Franke, 2017). The purpose of communication strategy is the desirable outcome of a certain communication act (Koustelios, n.d.).

B.1.1.1 | Sport Communication

The explanation and the definition of sport communication have many extensions, one of which is the concept of sport content presentation (Pedersen, Laucella, Kian & Gerunin, 2017). Pedersen et al. (2017), has expressed better than most researchers the definition of sport communication.

"Sport communications is a process by which people – in sport, in a sport setting, or through a sport endeavor – share symbols as they create meaning through interaction."
**B.1.2 | Digital Environment**

The definition of digital environment is difficult and is not formulated or distinguished in some source. Many researchers formulate their own definition of digital environment using it as they please, depending on the subject they are dealing with. The best definition we can give to the digital environment is found in the dictionary of the igi-global.com website, which defines this particular concept as follows:

"Digital environment is social regulation, produced through computer technology".

The penetration of computer technology is happening anywhere around us, and it would be difficult to define societies based on real and digital life. Wikipedia (2017) defines digital environment as a simulated "place" where one or more computers are used. This is more akin to the definition of cyberspace or video games, where there is the possibility of developing a virtual environment and individuals can acquire an 'entity' overcoming the constraints of the natural environment (Phillips, n.d.). This became gigantic with the entry of social networks and people's accounts on their platforms.

But with the advancement of technology and new media, over the past five years we have noticed that on the Internet there is no parallel world or the simulation of real life into virtual. There is identification of the two worlds and a undivided normal life of individuals, making the most of computer technology. In this new field of action, we find endless corridors of communication between users and consumers, where all different walks of life that societies have come to know to this day are developing.

Access to communication from any internet user anywhere on the planet and their interaction public or private to everything they are interested in, as well as the influence that companies can massively aim at through web site applications and social media is the definition of digital environment we are dealing with in this paper.

**B.1.2.1 | Digital Environment and Sports**

Sport is characterized by a unique need for competition. Since Web 1.0 and the first phase of the internet, professional sport has penetrated dynamically into new
digital media. Then with Web 2.0 and the interaction of the public, social media play an important and complex role in the world of sport as there are more on-line fans in the sports digital community. New types of marketing and communication tools have been developed and new developments have a great impact on professional sport (Pardalos & Zamarachev, 2014).

(Appendix, Figures 6 and 7)

According to the Hutchins & Rowe (2012) survey, the digital era of sports began to be significant when major telecommunications networks worldwide decided to get involved with sports media because they could provide content to multiple sources of information (Internet, mobile Telephone, TV, etc.). The companies invested in sports TV rights, paying enormously but benefiting from developing sports content on various digital platforms, profiting from customer supporters. We also notice how much the Internet has been affecting sport since blogs and social media were created. Diverse opinions on the same topic, the ability to easily access targeted information and interact with favorite groups of supporters and athletes was something that launched sport on the internet.

The importance of convergence and engagement on social networking platforms has had a significant impact on sports media. Sports news can now be published and spread by a variety of media in less time than in the world of "analogue" information,. Of course this is not always good if the codes of ethics and business conduct are not followed, because we can be led to cannibalism of primary information (Curran, 2011).

Since the 1990s, in the U.S. and Canada, professional basketball, baseball and hockey teams have attempted to develop the popularity of their teams by making use of direct communication, interacting with fan-users, making good use of the possibilities of the internet (Gibbs, 2013) at the time.

The first sports websites in the late 1990s were designed to only inform about game tickets, team gear and apparel and to provide some useful information to the fans about the historical data, the latest results and the ways of communication (email, telephones). This planning was based on Web 1.0, whose role was to inform. Today with Web 2.0, sports websites give users everything through video (YouTube channel
etc), through photography (instagram, pinterest etc.) completely interactive communication (facebook, twitter Etc.) and of course many applications on tablets and mobile phones.

Since the introduction of social media into sports industry in 2008, the way sports media work has changed forever. Now every fan can act autonomously and express themselves as they please through their beloved team, and the profile it keeps on Social Media (SM) without any particular knowledge in computers. Now every professional team, every college team and every sporting website, like the US network, ESPN.com, have an account on every top social medium (displayed on its website and vice versa) running in parallel with online users. Also, teams began to hire communication professionals and digital content experts (video, image), investing a large amount of money to create their own autonomous communities outside traditional sports media mentality (Gibbs, 2013).

(Appendix, Figures 8 and 9)

**B.1.2.2 | Digital Environment, Greek sport and Greek fans**

Greece experiences sport digital era very actively, with 67% of the population having internet access, 49% of them keeping an account on some platform of networking, 40% possessing portable online access (hootsuite.com, 2017) and most sports are represented on the internet either by teams, players, federations or even the events.

(Appendix, Figure 10)

According to a recent Focus Bari survey on Web ID (2015), the average Greek user exceeds 2.5 hours surfing and interacting with the digital environment, showing that the margins of promoting sports on the Internet in Greece are enormous. Greek users who are sports fans are greatly involved and informed by the internet, making extensive use of its tools and applications.
B.1.3 | Sports Tourism

Sports tourism is defined as follows: "All forms of active and passive involvement in sport activities where participation is random or organized, is for professional or non-professional purposes and requires moving away from the place of residence and work " (Terzakis, 2002).

From this definition of sports tourism also results the definition of the sports tourist. For someone to be considered a sports tourist, they must travel either for work or for leisure, in order to participate passively or actively in an organized and independent way, in a single sport or in numerous ones. Based on this definition, a sports tourist can also be someone who chooses a hotel for his holiday, which offers the necessary sport facilities and programmes which he may wish to join at some point during their holidays.

Kurtzman (2005) divided the types of sport tourism into 5 categories:

1. Sports events (eg Olympic Games, World Championships, Int. Meetings).
2. Sports shows (eg conferences, museums).
4. Sports shelters (eg camping camps, camps).
5. Cruises (eg sailing, diving, fishing).

Gibson (1998) divides sports tourism into three major categories:

1. Watching a sporting event.
2. Visiting a sporting show.
3. Active participation.

Thus, sport tourism is characterized as a well-rounded tourist experience where sports are at the very heart of the process. Also, as sports tourism is also defined the experience of the journey resulting from participating in a sport activity or event (Karlis, 2002), where the sporting event is the main reason for the journey. (Katerinopoulou, 2002).
The five forms of sport tourism deriving from the definition and occurring in Greece are (Glynia, 2003):

1. Training tourism / professional groups
2. Event tracking and viewing
3. Participation in major events
4. Outdoor activities
5. Sport entertainment hotels

Sports Tourism attracts many people, it offers unique experiences, not only to spectators but to every participant as well. The immediate profit for a place that organizes races is financially short-term from investments in the infrastructure of the area, the races we inheriting, revenues from TV rights, sponsorship, tickets, souvenirs. Income from domestic and inbound tourism, increased local entrepreneurship and taxes are also included in what we call long-term rewards, in addition to incentives offered for the development of professions related to sports and sports tourism (Paitsinis, & Yfantidou, 2015).

**B.1.3.1 | The evolution of sport tourism**

The first sports tourists were ancient Greek athletes, actually Herodotus reported that a father booked a room at an inn and accompanied his two sons to Olympia to prepare and take part in the ancient Olympics.

Today, sport and tourism are two great social institutions that are mainly found in one’s leisure time. These two institutions created after 1960 two industries, which bring enormous profits. The association of tourists with sports activities and the identification of holiday time, with time for sport, was the cause of sports tourism (Sfakianakis 2000).

The tourism sector is the largest and the fastest growing "industry" in the world. 1.1 billion people are involved in it. It employs nearly 200 million workers, about 10% of the world's workforce. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), about 1.6 billion tourists per year will travel to various destinations in 2020.
Today, Sport tourism pioneers are: Austria, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Cyprus, France ans Spain.

32 million (athletic) holidays are reported every year in Germany which is 55% of all tourism.

In Holland sport tourism is equal to 52% of all travelling for pleasure.

Italy counts 12 million people who travel to do a sport, combining sport and vacations. Sport tourism is 9 billion euros in Italym according to Coni, and 1.5 millions comes from water sports. (Tsolis 2016)

According to TURSAB, over 550,000 tourists visited Turkey for sports in 2014. The percentage is small, only 1.5% of total tourism, but the trend is growing and, as mentioned in their research, the average tourist spends $ 800 while the sport tourist spends $ 1,648, a bit more than double. Note, only 160,000 out of half a million sports tourists play golf in Turkey (while Europe has 7 million sport tourists playing golf) (Tsolis, 2016).

Sport tourism in France accounts for 23% of all tourism with 3.5 million trips. It is significant that 14% of travel agents are specialised in active holidays and 21 % of travel brochures include information about participation in sport.

As for the UK, 20% of package tours are for people keen on sport activities. Furthermore, 25% of visitors’ expenses are associated with packages where sport plays the main role.

B.1.3.2 | Tourism and the sector of sports tourism in Greece

Tourism is one of Greece's most important sources of revenue. About 20% of the labour force in our country is employed in tourism, while its direct and indirect contribution is estimated at 20% -25% of GDP (Koustelios, 2015). Approximately 27.5 million tourists visited our country in 2016, presenting a significant increase over the previous two years (SETE, 2017).

(Appendix, Figure 11)

Greece, the country where the Olympic Games were born, is ideal for developing sporting activities as well as organising sport events. In the last few
decades, our country has hosted major sports events (world championships, European competitions, important international tournaments etc.), with the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens as the top event. The influx of sports enthusiast and fans from around the globe has greatly enhanced our country's sports tourism and helped to boost GDP.

Now in the wake of the economic crisis from 2010 onwards, Greece has been unable to attract and organize big sports events, but has not stopped attracting sports tourism because it has invested in other areas of sports and recreation. The Greek sports federations no longer take an interest in investing in sporting activities. It is free enterprise that do so now, mainly by investing in large hotels or in municipalities and provinces all around Greece, underlining local social activities through sport (Gkoutzioupas, 2006).

(Appendix, Figure 12)

Let's look at some typical examples of sporting events whose reputation skyrocketed after 2010: The Athens Authentic Marathon and the historic Alexandrian route from Pella to Thessaloniki, symbols of Greek sport since ancient times. Both in the classical marathon and in the rest of the races organized throughout the country, one participation record is broken after another with remarkable results for all participants, Greek and foreign. The marathon constitutes now the basic axis for the development of sport tourism in our country.

Water sports also have tremendous growth prospects and a powerful appeal to high-quality tourists. Sailing, windsurfing, kitesurfing, Aegean Regatta are some of them you can do out in the open sea, and we also have whitewater sports like canoeing, kayaking and rafting (Sfakianakis, 2000).

In Greece we have some of the best climbing slopes in the world that give the possibility of mountain sport tourism, providing enormous opportunities for sports such as mountain biking, great cycling tours, long-distance running races, horseback riding, Rappel, canyoning, caving and off-road motor racing (Sfakianakis, 2000).

Lastly, a major part of sports tourism was held by motor sport in the past, with the Acropolis Rally being the chief event, which is slowly upgrading again, while
motocross and car racing at major circuits in Greece are top of the bill, or classic car shows attract a large number of owners and tourists to admire the exceptional antiques that once crossed the streets.

Greece is an ideal destination as it is sunny and windy 8 months a year and it has got 12 ideal destinations for all of the sports mentioned above (Rhodes, Samos, Lemnos, Kalymnos, Lefkada, Naxos, Paros, Karpathos, Crete, Mykonos, Leros, Xanthi, Serres, Lamia and Ioannina) however targeted promotion is required to attract more visitors, as 15,000,000 potential "sports tourists" are estimated to be in the whole world. (Gkoutzioupas, 2008).

In Greece, although there are no accurate data, it is estimated that athletic tourism attracts 10% of all arrivals. The classic marathon of Athens attracted 7500 visitors from abroad, while Alexander the Great Marathon, about 700. The average tourist overnight stay in our country is 5 days where they are expected to spend 1000-1200 € each (Kasimati, 2017). In Europe, active sports tourism is very important as 5% of all holiday packages are winter sports related, 1% are summer sports related, 6% are recreational in the mountains and 10% are recreational in the countryside (Koustelios, 2015). A total of 26% of package holidays are related to sport participation. (Theodrakis, 2013).

B.1.4 | The Running Movement

Participation in marathon runs has been characterized as one of the most dynamically developing trends in the field of mass sports (Galloway, 2001). The running movement is basically treated positively by the people, making them feel absolutely beautiful (Petridis & Batrakoulis, 2013) and amateur running has rightly been experiencing a tremendous rise both in Greece and abroad for many years and is ranked on the list of most popular forms of exercise.

(Appendix, Figures 13 and 14)

Amateur running is defined as the activity that takes place outside organizational and institutional frameworks of sports federations, it is a voluntary action, with free participation and is carried out without external supervision (Petridis & Batrakoulis, 2013).
The unforced opinions mentioned above which were expressed in relation to the running movement may be the reason why so many researches have been done about the motive for someone to get involved in amateur running. Long distance travel is perceived as "serious leisure" (Shipway, 2010).

Ogles and Masters (1998) have formulated four different categories of reasons for taking part in the marathon. More particularly, the reasons include physical benefits, recognition and opportunities for socialising, achieving goals and, lastly, mental release and increased self-esteem. There are five different types of runners, the enthusiastic runner, the conscious lifestyle management type, the goal achieving type, the self-verification type, and the competitive formula. Leedy (2000) sums up the reasons for one to get involved in running in three main categories: health / physical condition, running activity as a challenge to compete and overcome, and finally, the pursuit of solitude away from social contacts (Petridis & Batrakoulis, 2013).

Concerning the running movement and the motivation of the amateur runner, Pertidis and Batrakoulis (2013) end up to the conclusion that all these explanations create an ideology on the running movement which runners themselves pursue to identify with one another. And so by identifying with the role of the runner, they encourage themselves to participate in races, achieve a record or motivate new runners (Strachan, Shields, Glassford, & Beatty, 2012).

**B.2 | Strategic sport communication**

The phrase “sport communication strategy” needs further clarification, with the term strategy, as we saw before, pointing to the planning, the approach or the method of communication tactics. Researching Pedersen’s et al. (2017) “Strategic Sport Communication Model” (SSCM) includes several theories by other scientists. Generally, it is based on the kind, the content and the process of communication. Regarding the kind of communication, they are referred to groups of theories that focus on social and linguistic theories, systems of organising societies, theories of behaviourism and so on.

The content of communication depends on three ingredients and every strategic sport communication model that is invented should to some extent include one of them. The most important ingredients contain: **a) intrapersonal, interpersonal,**
small-group, intraorganizational and interorganizational communication in sport, b) mediated sport communication, c) sport communication services and support (Pedersen et al. (2017)).

Finally, the process of sport communication is approached differently by researchers every time, according to what conclusions they want to draw using the right tools and scientific methods. Lassell’s communication model is quite typical, as Pedersen mentions (2017), who uses the three elements: Who (the broadcaster) says what (the content) on which channel (medium) to whom (audience) and with what result. This can be used during a broadcast of an athletic event as following: The images of the camera, the words of the TV presenters, the transmission through some TV channel to viewers. All these communicate a meaning with sport content.

The effective use of strategic planning to sport and to the field of communication created the top sporting events on the planet, as it has been proven in the case of the Olympic Games and the World Cup of football, which have a great appeal to the people.

Parameters of strategic communication according to Fola (2010) are:

1. The geographical and historical position of the host city.
2. The type of sport and the size of the event.
3. Participation incentives and lures to users.
4. The organizers and sponsors of an event.
5. Target audience a sporting event aims at.
6. Mass Media and public relations.

B.2.1 | Strategic sport communication and organizing area

It should be understood from the outset that being entrusted to organise a sporting event of any size is directly related to building up the image of an area. Therefore, the field of communication is inextricably linked to the image that the host city wants to present to society before, during and after the races. Corporate identity, corporate communication, the region and the sporting event will have to develop a
unified communication strategy for the whole procedure to be of significant dimensions (Vasileiadis, 2011)

According to Herstein and Berger (2013), a large amount of money is spent worldwide on rebranding and rebuilding the image of a city, which will consequently help the country that endeavours to succeed this. Sports events and organising them give a strong point of reference to managing a region rebrand, giving it a competitive advantage over other cities whose image is blurry or unclear. This makes it easier to claim a share from the global tourism market, to attract businesses that would invest money.

Following the footsteps of successful Olympic marketing, the areas that want to project and promote their image through sport should choose an athletic event to organise having in mind specific strategic goals. Fola, (p.103, 2010), observes that:

"Countries and cities that have treated the Games as a platform for implementing a specific communication strategy with specific goals and aspirations have gained significant benefits for their international image and, and in cases such as Barcelona and Sydney, they have managed to change their strategic placement in the context of its international function ".

**B.2.2 | Strategic sport communication and scale of event**

According to the literature, the scale size of a sporting event is an important factor in strategic planning and individual communication policy making. The geographical area has little influence on communication and planning, according to examples of small countries and cities that have organized mega events, but a small-scale and a large-scale event are not planned the same way, nor are they promoted to the public using the same methodology.

The following is a reference to two different models of strategic communication where, in the design of mega-events, ‘the top-down’ method is used where the dependence on the organizer and the power is strong and obvious by cutting off the community from the participatory process and offer to the event, creating indifference, regardless of positive effects. On the contrary, in smaller-scale events, ‘the bottom-up’ approach is applied, the basis of the social fabric rallies, reinforces the sense of social responsibility and creates solid foundations between the citizens
and the sporting event, with the benefits returning to the society that supported it (Hover, Dijk, Breedveld, Van Eekeren & Slender, 2016).

Polatidou (2015) and other researchers classify sports events: a) Mega Events, such as the Olympic Games and the World Cups of various sports, with significant economic repercussions for the countries hosting them, high rates of tourism, Global media coverage, high prestige, but they may also have an impact on the community which is not always positive, (b) "hallmark events" are events which are synonymous with the host city, gaining recognition, publicity and competitive advantage like the Athens Classic Marathon c) "Large events", which attract significant numbers of visitors, coverage of the media, while also having a significant financial impact (Tennis open events, Formula One Grand Prix Etc.), d) "International Athletic Competitions" and "Sport events of a more competitive nature", which are not held regularly or are in the annual national calendar, attracting contestants and spectators) e) "Small-scale sporting events" that aim primarily at local communities, strengthen the sense of unity, encourage participation in sports, but they can also be of international dimensions, benefiting local societies by conferring prestige (Olympus Marathon, Komorun, Sirris Challenge 22.7 klm, etc.).

Communication strategy belongs to all the components of strategic planning of an event but it is a separate and distinct part of it. After all, as we will see below in today's digital world revolution through web 2.0, the proper use of information can be an amazing tool in communicating a sports event, surpassing the sizes and coordinates of the map.

**B.2.3 | Strategic sport communication and participation motives**

The presence of people in a sporting event depends on various factors, most notably the choice of viewing or participating in the event. For the motivation of attending or participating actively in an event, several researches have been carried out explaining through the research frameworks the reasons for continuing presence in an event. Some of them are the following (Tachis, Tzetis & Laios, 2013):

1. Socialization as a key factor in motivation represents the desire for interaction.
2. Performance is referred to as the area where individuals believe that sporting events offer superiority.

3. Excitement as another dimension of motivation represents the desire for spiritual stimulation.

4. Self-esteem when watching a sporting event also represents a strong sense of self-appreciation derived from the feeling of achievement when their beloved team wins.

5. Finally, diversion reflects the opportunity of a person to escape from the routine of his everyday life (Tachis, Tzetjis & Laios, 2013).

Incentives to participate in a sporting event are linked to communication strategy because they are the best advertising of the sporting product to the target audience. The most important communication tool for the promotion of sport participation motives is oral communication, because it has a direct impact on the behavior of the audience comparing it to other marketing methods. The credibility that appears to emerge within the participants themselves (Swanson, Gwinner, Larson, & Janda, 2003), advertising the organisation by word of mouth analogically or digitally seems to be the best way of communication, creating a positive or negative trend (Nassis, Theodorakis, Afthinos & Kolybalis, 2014).

B.2.4 | Strategic sport communication and organisers

Planning and implementing a coordinated plan of several forces in an operational program to make it strategic should be dealt with by the appropriate factors. As we have seen so far in the literature, sport is directly interwoven with our society, so we can see that sporting events are used fairly often by public bodies in the context of social policy, a state, or local government organizations (Koustelios & Zournatzi, 2010). Other organizations that try to organize or participate in sports activities are Non Profit Organizations (NPO) and, of course, private initiative.

Examples of strategic planning of the Olympic Games and World Cups are the most appropriate tools to support any authority that wishes to organize a sporting event of any scale (Fola, 2010). In the preparation of these major events, public and private bodies, who prepare methodically and strategically for the prosecution of the games, are involved. Proportionally, many local and regional authorities both
in Greece and abroad (Jones & Munday, 2001) support organizationally and financially athletic events with a local, regional, national or even international character, enhancing their economic development on the one hand, stimulating the domestic tourism industry on the other. (Higham, 1999).

In Greece during the last years of the economic crisis, the General Secretariat for Sport, responsible for the strategic planning of sports in our country, has created operational programs (Athletic Programs for All -http://www.athlisigialous.gr/) and depending on the size and character of each sporting event the ministry participates in its organization financially, in logistic infrastructure and in human resources, always in collaboration with the Local Authorities (http://www.gss.gov.gr/gga/skopos-ths-ypiresias).

As Kriemadis & Theakou (2007) points out, the strategic planning of an organization by public sector organizations or NGOs can not be implemented as it could be implemented by a private company due to a limitation on executive positions and freedom of movement from the organisation statute (Duncan, 1990). There is, of course, an adaptation of strategic models for future exploitation and it evolves the regulators themselves. The use of such models, on the one hand, helps to better coordination and smooth execution of the event, on the other hand because it is a non-profit event it is attempted to significantly reduce costs or to respect the economic plan.

"Commercial sponsorship serves commercial purposes (indirect or direct advertising goals), and social sponsorship has social content with only compensation for the sponsors the honourable credit they get from society and the state for their welfare service. The publicity should be at such quantitative and qualitative levels as to pass the message firmly but discreetly and without its quantity or aesthetics harming the character and / or the image of the producer of the cultural object, the event and / or the Sponsor”’ (Koutoupis, 2005).

B.2.5 | Strategic sport communication and common target

Sport is above nations, races and class distinctions, and is an integral part of societies all over the world. People from around the globe gather in different countries to compete in big sports events or to attend as spectators, giving international
character to the events. All sporting events are trying to attract, tourism and especially athletic tourism or to have a great impact in the digital world. For this reason, in communication strategy and athletic marketing, particular attention is paid to the diverse cultural environment in order to satisfy all different consumer habits (Cleveland, Laroche, Pons, & Kasto, 2009).

Today, globalization, with the development of technology, the flexibility of transport and the growth of ethnic minorities, has managed to turn even small-scale sporting events into "international". The multiculturalism of nations due to immigration or the refugee issue, combined with the global economic downturn, has created inequalities in societies, which only sport can bridge. Encouraging people to follow and participate in sporting events, people who are not fully integrated into society should be done methodically and purposefully, creating more effective campaigns to attract the general public (Wann, Grieve, Zapalac & Pease, 2008).

If we look at the attitudes and culture of ethnic minorities, vulnerable groups, the unemployed or the needy, we can better understand their cultural backgrounds and thus correctly shape the communication policy of a sporting event (Franke, 2017). In the present time, with the rapid spread of information over the internet, this approach seems easier, creating appropriate sports conditions in familiar and accessible sports for these particular teams, gradually interacting with the general public (Ha J.P., Ha J.H. & Han K. 2013).

### B.2.6 | Media and Public Relations in strategic sport communication

The establishment of a press office, consisting of highly trained communication professionals as well as experienced journalists, should be a priority in any sporting event that wants to succeed in the field of promotion and communication. This section is the main axis of creating a positive image for the sporting event, highlighting all the above factors in order to attract and resonate athletic tourism. However, in order for the communication strategy to be complete, the press office of an organization should perform a series of functions, most importantly, good cooperation with the media and proper information of the organizing body of the sporting event. (Filolia, Papageorgiou & Stefanatos, 2005).
Public Relations in Sport aim to build and maintain the best possible image for the sport organisation or athlete, by preventing and solving problems, creating and exploiting opportunities. This picture, however, will be based on the reality, the truth and the integrity of the organization, or of the athlete, and it will use honest and sincere speech (Koutoupis, 2005).

**B.3 | Strategic sport communication in the digital world**

In the digital world, we can encounter a variety of choices for developing a communication strategy of a sports event, a team or an athlete. The digital environment provides innumerable application options for the two main tools, websites and social media. With the appropriate methodology and targeting of the audience through both of them, websites and social media can be transformed into communication and marketing super tools.

(Appendix, Figure 15)

Now, depending on the content, sport officials draw up a similar online sport communication strategy using the platform of social networking respectively. Interactive communication with the audience has changed level and the social media provide all digital forms of sport content publishing as a whole or specifically aiming at a certain audience, providing well-targeted incentives for consumption.

**B.3.1 | New sport media**

Since 2000, the evolution of digital technology and its joining sport is tremendous. The internet with its passage to Web 2.0 era gives interactive updates and information between sport industry officials and fans, influencing both ways from every part of the world, 24/7, via portable devices and their apps. New sport media, as it was mentioned in this paragraph, engulf two major aspects of sport and journalism: sport communication and new mass media of communication. The development of Strategic Sport Communication Model (SSCM) is the model for online sport communication (MOSC), (Pedersen et al, 2017)

(Appendix, Figure 16)

In the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, the use of the internet in sport made its first steps, considering the level of a mega-event, the use of the official websites of
the Games though was considered very satisfactory from website visits and interaction of the public before and during the games. (Fola 2010) In the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, the first smart devices started to appear channelling online statistics to fans about the games and fortifying the position of new sport media (Bauder 2014). From the London Summer Olympics 2012 to the Sochi winter Olympics 2014 and the 2016 Rio Summer Olympics the connectivity between fans and sport events has been consolidated (Galily & Tamir, 2014).

(Appendix, Figure 17)

Sports editors are constantly recording the interaction between athletes and sport enthusiasts. Specifically, Kortier (2016), analyzing in an article Synergy researches for Loughborough University in England, states that "millenials" prefer a wide choice of authentic content directly from teams or athletes, as opposed to indirect content from commercial sponsors (brands) who are not their direct source of information and can use the information for promotional purposes because they are interested simply in “the game” even when they do not participate in it.

Lefever (2012) in her book-tool on sports and the digital environment raises some particular concerns about the identification of sports with the internet and the evolution of this particular relationship. More importantly, with the interaction between sports and fans offered by the social media, the role of the media is sidelined, since it is not so necessary for teams, athletes and sporting events to be dependent on Mass Media for their communication. Now all those involved with sport can communicate their own content directly from a website or social media account.

In addition, having the exclusive news, video and video content, they can share their own new media, sports content and interact with their fans. Similarly, fans have set up their own forum discussions as well as their own channels on social networks to share sports material without mediation of traditional media.

Social media provide so much to sport. They provide up-to-date statistics, communication between players and fans, the views of other players, and, above all, allow people to gain more education about sports (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010). Anderson (2016) points out that social media has helped all sports people in recent years and has created powerful enthusiasm among the masses.
B.3.2 | Digital sport communication and websites

Creating a sport website for sport officials is the first step to extroversion, the digital environment and the public online life of sport. The website on the digital sport community is the reference point of a club, an organisation or an event. Enthusiasts can get official information from a variety of options of their favourite team, their favourite championship and the next important sport event.

Also, with the option of on line forum the community that watches the website develops and gets more connected through discussions and questioning over issues of their concern (Rowe 2004). More specifically, since the possibility of choosing videos and photos is offered, this creates conditions of more connectivity, operation of online channel, thus, more sponsorship and income.

In summary, the five basic principles of bidirectional relation between websites and the public so that there is constant contact of the user with the sport content and sport communication is not interrupted are:

1. Learnability
2. Efficiency
3. Memorability
4. Error Management
5. Satisfaction

The first element is about users’ ability to succeed in their initial goal for which they visited the site, the dimension of efficiency has to do with the quick execution of tasks as soon as they find website designing. The dimension of memory has to do with users’ ability to act fast and effectively in a website when they have the time to use it, managing errors has to do with mistakes users make and how fast they correct them while using a website, while the sector of entertainment has to do with how well designed a website is so that the public feels disposed to use it often . (Nielsen 2012a), according to Pedersen et al. (2017).

In the strategy of digital sport communication of a website, the seven more crucial factors according to Pedersen et al, (2017) are the following:

1. Individuals level of involvement with respective sport entity.
2. Individuals motives for internet use
3. Content of the sport entity’s website
4. Design of the sport entity’s website
5. Performance of the sport entity’s website
6. Usability of the sport entity’s website
7. Commerce of the sport entity’s website

(Appendix, Figure 18)

The first two elements in the list above are very important because they are about the desires, the needs and the aspirations of everyone who is looking for sport content on a website and wants to find it fast, easily and simply without much trouble. It is particularly important for sport communication to offer its services in this way so that it encourages the user to come back to the website (Pedersen et al, 2017).

The next five elements are equally important because on the one hand the sport content provided must be addressed to ordinary people that visit the page and on the other hand it must not only focus on that but also give necessary information about the site’s organisation. The design is also valuable for the influence on the interaction with the user. A website’s performance should not be underestimated because a page with powerful technological features, which gives for instance the possibility to quickly download an element, excites the user who wishes to come back. Exactly the same happens with the ingredient of utility. Finally, it is important to realise that the internet is not just a useful tool for sport communication only, but for the commercial use of sport too, so a website with possibility to promote sport products doubles its profit. (Pedersen et al., 2017).

All the elements above that comprise the model of digital communication for websites (Pedersen et al., 2017), are inextricably connected with each other and if they are used methodologically, then they can provide the digital environment with high quality communication.

**B.3.3 | Digital sport communication and social media**

Social Media is effective in delivering resonance, popularity, connectivity and interaction among many interested people in a short period of time (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011).
The peculiarity of social media is that they move quickly for the benefit of the user by making continuous improvements, taking advantage of the evolution of technology. According to a research by Jessica Smith, (2017), the annual communication strategy in the digital world seems utopian over a quarterly one, which seems to be more reasonable.

The framework that defines platforms of social networking consists of seven operational constructive elements (Keitzmann et al., 2011):

1. Identity
2. Discussions
3. Common use
4. Presence
5. Relations
6. Fame
7. Groups

Social media, according to Kaplan and Haenlin (2010), fall into six different categories

1. Collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia)
2. Blogs
3. Community Content (e.g. YouTube)
4. Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook)
5. Virtual Social worlds (e.g. Second Life)
6. Virtual Game Worlds (e.g. World of War)

This classification contributes to a better understanding of the uses of a given social media platform. As compared with Copperman’s (2016) research, who studied successful tactics on the new media of communication by American colleges on various sports, the following features for a successful social media strategy arise:

1. Share pre-season training
2. Post pre-game excitement and remind people of the important details.
3. Post highlights throughout the game.
4. Highlight a member of your organization.
5. Create visual recaps of games.
6. Let star athletes shine
7. Create polls to get feedback
8. Let the cheer be part of the story
9. Post positive game attitudes
10. Take fans to the game.
11. Show players off the field.
12. Recall the past.
13. Showcase contributions to the community.
15. Inform fans of injuries and roster moves
16. Get behind the scenes.
17. Exploit the rivalry.
18. Use private photos and videos to make it personal.
19. Bridge the connection between fashion and sports.
20. Let athletes and their families do the tweeting.
21. Let players say goodbye.

Rothschild (2011) found out that a strategic approach of communication media becomes more important in sport and leisure. The study shows the rise of social media, while more traditional methods become less effective because of the cost, the variety of products and consumers’ resistance to advertising (Rothschild (2011). Facebook, Twitter and YouTube appeared as the most important platforms, while sport organisations use various platforms of social networking like Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare, Youtube, Instagram, Pinterest, Google +, Blogs etc

(Appendix, Figure 19)

B.3.4 | Digital sport communication and sport marketing

The emergence of the digital world has given a new perspective to both the sporting content and the e-commerce associated with it. In all the major sporting events since 2002, like the Olympic Games and the World Cups (Rheem, 2010, Finlay, 2011, Theodoraki, 2011), there has been a growing trend of using the internet, exploiting smart portable devices in stadiums and greatly helping businesses
to promote sport services and products to fans (Volkmer, 2009, Hutchins & Mikosza, 2010, Rheem, 2010, Finlay, 2009)

In addition to sports communication strategies in the digital environment, modern sport marketing introduces innovative online practices in order for the consumer-friend to appreciate sports but at the same time to also make commercial use of the sporting content. There is a correlative action between communication and marketing on websites and new communication media, capitalising the most on new technology electronic devices.

(Appendix, Figures 20 and 21)

All of the above are almost necessary to happen according to Pedersen et al (2017) in the model of digital sport communication. The user-friendly design of websites that urges consumers-users to buy sport products, sales promotion through emails, applications on portable devices for getting a ticket fast and athletes prodding fans to use services and buy products of a certain brand on social media are some of the modern practices of e-commerce which are part of digital sport communication.

(Appendix, Figures 22 and 23)

**B.3.5 | Digital Sports communication and sports tourism**

The way in which sports tourism is displayed is combined, as is by its very nature, this particular category of tourism, which relates to sporting events. With digital means, the ability to communicate is expanding considerably, and athletic tourism is overwhelming in prominence, compared to the past, when the print media, while putting forward sporting events alone, place tourist information separately.

(Appendix, Figure 24)

Every sporting event, as we have seen above, can acquire its own website, either autonomously or in the form of a blog embedded in other websites and of course promoted with pages on social networking platforms, thus sharing information to a large audience of the internet. Now with interactive information, every tourist can be informed immediately and in a variety of ways (texts, videos, pictures) about what they will encounter in the destination they will visit and where to get all the necessary information, and filter a series of reviews, from tourists who have visited the venue or
sporting event displayed. The digital word-of-mouth social media experience shows, according to surveys, that it has greater validity for the public (Michail, 2010).

(Appendix, Figure 25)

Internet sports tourism, apart from autonomous projection of a sports event or a destination from the new media, also receives a lot of help from traditional media that evolve along with technology. The creation of promotional material, containing elements of sports and travel reports, is a phenomenon that gives extra promotional elements on both sides. Reports related to sports tourism include news, background information and briefings from the side of the teams, athletes and the organization, while from the side of the tourists they include information about the place, the food, the accommodation, the way to get there. In the digital world, all this is recorded and shared with a multitude of people, who post stories of pleasant or unpleasant moments that have lived there, to simple, useful information or mistakes and omissions (Michail, 2010).

(Appendix, Figure 26)

Gkoutzioupas (2006), in his studies of sports and tourism a decade ago, and Igoumenakis (1991) according to Gkoutzioupas, about 20 years ago, without the explosion of the internet at that time, put a special emphasis on large tourist organizations for the sale of tourist Packets, categorizing them in 4 types:

1. Mass market operators
2. Specialized operators
3. Domestic operators
4. Incoming operators.

Talking about today, we notice that these tourism organizations have grown up on the internet (not in Greece where some of the categories have never become autonomous and remain as subcategories of EOT or SETE), having in recent years an important place in the global economy, upgrading this special category of trips for sports events. Typical examples are Thomas Cook Sport and the all-powerful Tui which are tremendously popular on social media travel for all sorts of sporting activities around the globe.
Yfantidou (2009) points out that although in Greece have great potential for the development of sports tourism (natural diversity, good climate, seasonal sports), there are no specialized sports tourism agencies, and we generally do not have high rates of organized trips. The SETE studies show that sports tourism preoccupies our country, but for trips to other parts of the world, where sports are combined with enjoyment and entertainment. On the websites of the two major institutions of the street movement, the marathons in Athens and Thessaloniki, some progress has been made and one can come up with suggestions from agencies that will be of great use to them in joining or watching these running races.

As we have seen from our literature, small-scale sporting events, theoretically, having a local character, are those that have a greater impact on local communities and the locals are embracing them more because they feel that what is happening concerns themselves and the neighboring regions, even with a sense of antagonism. Studying the suggestions made by Gkoutzioupas (2008) and analyzing the comments of the interviewees of the present paper about the Greek sports product and the attraction of sports tourism, the above are proposed as an ideal solution for achieving this goal; that is, enabling local government to improve the quality of life of residents by doing more sporting activities and attracting more tourists to the beginning of a new way of life.

The development of a tourism promotion strategy and the targeted communication of sporting events by the new media aiming at sport tourism is determined by many factors. The Hellenic Tourism Organization, the Ministry of Tourism, the Association of Greek Tourist Enterprises, the Tourism Development Agencies of Local Government Organizations, tourism agencies, sports events organizers, sponsors, Mass Media are many of the forces that are jointly responsible for the organization and the creation of a set of functions and options, in favor of sports, tourism and sports tourism in our country. Individually and separately, there is no strategic planning and any prospect of significant growth, not only in the running movement but in any other sport.

The "industry" of Greek tourism, which is the only branch that has a positive sign and significantly boosts the Greek economy (SETE, 2017) in the years of the crisis, is mainly represented by government agencies, the Ministry of Tourism. EOT
plans promotional actions for tourism and for the past few years investments primarily have been in the internet with its tools and applications. Television has taken a back seat due to high cost and low penetration into households, as opposed to new media. First power in promotion are now the online means of influence and the popular booking machines for the online promotion of our country's tourism (EOT Strategy, 2014-16).

Ultimately, strengthening Greece as a communication entity, as a tourist destination may have been achieved in the world wide web (EOT Strategy, 2014-16) and it will increase year after year, but in the field of sports tourism, no matter how you looking for, you will not find organized and targeted actions, but only individual references, future goals without a targeted communication strategy.

B.3.6 | Digital sport communication and the running movement

The running movement according to the new millennium surveys is ranked among the most popular forms of sport in the world, while the positive effects of running, are driving more and more people to become sporty. The good qualities of race running are not just physical but extend to mental and social benefits, according to Shipway (2010). The triptych of wellness-tranquility-sociability is what has promoted the running movement abroad and Greece since the 1960s, culminating in the rise of mass-participation routes or marathons from 2001 onwards.

Studying sport communication strategy in the digital environment and the widespread use of new media by sport could not be missing from the digital promotion of the running movement. Besides, the increasing trend in participation and popularity of one more sport coincides with the technological development of the Internet, electronic devices and social networks.

From 2009 to 2014, Marathon entries for all countries increased by 13.25% in total. European athletes’ participation increased by 10.3%, Americans’ by 13.92, while the Asians broke all records with an increase in participation of 92.43%. Of all the countries in the world, the highest increase was in Russia with 300%, China 259, and the Philippines 211%. Greece is in number 4 with an increase of 183, 69%, which confirms the enormous rise of the country's movement (runrepeat.com, 2015).
The philosophy of the running movement and its races, claiming that you do not have to be an athlete or a champion to take part in a running event, has opened up access to the general public and made it possible. More than double participations in the Athens and Thessaloniki routes, as well as multiple running races across the country from 2006 to 2016 are not by chance. (Petridis & Batrakoulis, 2013). It is the result of specific private-sector business strategies that are sponsoring the Running Movement, so areas of races, special clothing and accessories, healthy food products, communication among runners on social media have all become a “trend”

(Appendix, Figures 27 and 28)

While a total of 63 running events were held in 2006, their number grew to 204 in 2012, marking an overall increase of over 223%, while participants in those races during the same period increased by 400% (from 13,576 to 68,699) (Runningnews.gr, 2012). A driving lever, but also a traditional reference point in amateur running all over the world, was and is the marathon.

In Greece the most important races of the running movement are the Authentic or Classical Marathon of Athens and the Alexander the Great Marathon of Thessaloniki. Both routes are of a historical nature, with the case of Athens, of course, being a special one, because thanks to it we run, either as amateurs or professionals. So it also has a great communicative advantage over all marathons in the world. The first route is more historic and everyone wants to tell a story by participating in it.

Overseas people everywhere are continually running and the highlights are the six most renowned and best organized marathons in the world, according to the high standards set by AIMS (Association of International Marathons and Distance Races), it is also the union of marathons that cooperates and is accountable to the IAAF (International Association of Athletics Federations), which is the organization that has the rights and the initial framework rules for long distance running. The World Marathons Majors includes 6 tracks, in Boston, New York, Chicago, London, Berlin and only recently Tokyo and has created a closed informal championship. The finalists in the 6 races have surpassed one thousand, while among them there are two Greeks.
The promotion of both Greek and foreign races is almost exclusively on the internet, due to television’s high cost and low popularity for a regular projection. The new media and the pages of all social networking activity are constantly channelling material to keep fans online and events high in popularity.

The 6 major international marathons are under the auspices of the big sponsor Abbott and have their own websites showing races, participation, areas and sponsors. They also have 7 accounts in the big 3 of social media. One is maintained by the big sponsor and one by every event separately. Almost all accounts account for half a million people. The same is true in our country, in the CSR and MA profiles, with the popularity reaching 25,000, nearly all participants.

(Appendix, Figure 29)

An important role in the digital promotion of the running movement in Greece is played by sponsors who either integrate their own groups of people who communicate with existing organizers and thus dynamically promote the competitions either acting independently and in collaboration, depending on their dynamics. This has been the case for many years in foreign competitions, where sponsors bear the burden of communication and marketing.
Chapter C | Research methodology

C.1 | Data collection

Methodologically, it was attempted to answer all the research questions and parameters and verify them using a main scientific method. In particular, the method of analysis of the qualitative data was used. A qualitative approach was made on the one hand by the bibliographic review and on the other hand by conducting semi-structured interviews by a group of people who have important roles in sporting events, such as race organizers, communication officers, state actors, athletes and journalists. Actually, given the very nature of the subject of this paper, which is to investigate a subject that is changing due to specific factors and parameters, the method of personal interviews has proved to be particularly important.

C.1.1 | Qualitative analysis

Qualitative analysis was used for an in-depth investigation of the parameters set between communication strategy of sporting events, their promotion in the digital environment and its connection with sport tourism using the study of the running movement. The limited scientific bibliography has highlighted qualitative analysis through personal testimonies of individuals from various fields, who contribute to the conduct of athletic events of the running movement, as particularly useful in this work. The comparative qualitative data, resulting from the observations of three different competition organizers, in three different Greek cities with different competition characteristics contributed significantly to highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of the communication strategy of the events through the digital environment.

Ten personal interviews, appointed to runners with experience in running events both in Greece and abroad, took place as well as to scientists of various fields like communication, sport management and organisation, Mass Media and politicians related to sport and tourism.

The selection of respondents / interviewees was based on their profession, their work, the content of their subject matter, their availability and their willingness to cooperate. More specifically, the present work displays interviews with
organisation representatives of the three marathons we studied, communication strategy representatives of the running movement, representatives of organizations participating in the event and contributing to communication and tourist promotion, journalists with experience in the running movement and organisation of this kind of races as well as athletes who have pointed out the pros and cons of running races on the course of their promotion to the new media.

Most of the interviews were held face to face in Thessaloniki and Serres or by telephone (or teleconference), in Athens, Komotini and Seoul, and lasted for about 60 minutes. For ethical reasons, the interviewees were asked whether they would allow to quote specific reports from their interviews and were informed about the text to which these reports refer. All interviewees accepted the above. Personal interviews were conducted in this paper, based on the following thematic axes / semi-structured questions.

Thematic axes of conducting semi-structured personal interviews:

Finally, during the quantitative analysis, the web pages and the social media were elaborated on each of the three running events, which we studied comparatively in the present work.

1. Sports events of the running movement in urban centres and regional cities. Marathon races and mass participation racing events.
2. Use of tools and applications in digital communication sport strategy. Promotion through web pages and social media strategy, applying on running events.
3. The importance of sports tourism in the communication strategy of a sporting event. Sports organisations and people who build tourist campaigns linking them to the sporting event.
4. Involvement, public and private, in the organization. Subjects of Budget, of services and support areas.
C.2 | Data collection process

Prior to the data collection, a number of parameters were defined, discussed in the thematic axes of unstructured interviews, and the process of collecting quality data proceeded.

Therefore, the parameters of this work that were studied were as follows:

1. Sports communication strategy bibliography and communication strategy of sporting events of the running movement through research in real life conditions of running events in our country.
2. Web Sites and Social Media in relation to their use for communication strategy of sporting events. Page hits, digital subscription of participants in a marathon and the races of mass participation, quantity and frequency of publications, web pages and social media accounts of sports events studied, popularity on the social networking sites (likes, followers).
3. Event organizers (Private, Public or combination of agencies). In relation to the provision of services they can provide for promotion. What kinds of benefits are available for logistics and human resources) as well as duration of use or employment.
4. The size of the sporting event (Olympic Games or a simple athletic event), in relation to the communication strategy of sporting events, using the same or different communication policy, quantitative and qualitative features.
5. The area of the event, in relation to the different approach of communication strategy, due to population commerciality, or background, differences in the target audience, quantitatively, if it is a small or large area, qualitatively if it is a known or unknown area and if the area is historically connected with a sporting event or at the beginning of something new.
C.2.1 | Process of collecting quality data

Personal interviews have contributed to the collection of quality data, while helping in further understanding and interpreting assumptions and questions, but also in evaluating the results of the research in a more general context.

The individual interviews used in this paper were extensive discussions that differed substantially from free dialogues or journalistic interviews for specific reasons. More specifically, in this scientific research they served to focus on making conclusions about the research questions and the parameters we set where the interviewees responded, depending on the depth of knowledge they held in each field.

Interviewees living in the cities of Thessaloniki and Serres gave their answers in person, 6 out of 10 respondents, in a process that lasted about an hour with each one of them. The other four people from Athens, Komotini and Seoul participated in the process, either by telephone or by videoconference. Most interviewees were given a list of thematic axes of the interview a few days earlier by e-mail in order to prepare themselves adequately and have at their disposal additional data to facilitate the research. The interviewees who did not have the list of thematic axes earlier were asked respectively on the spot.

The list of the interviewees:

1. **Inter.1** (Urban Center running event organizer)
2. **Inter.2** (Carrier in local authority, Tourism sector)
3. **Inter.3** (Communications officer in local authority – Tourism Sector)
4. **Inter.4** (Social media manager in urban center running event)
5. **Inter.5** (Press Officer, in urban center running event)
6. **Inter.6** (Regional area running event organizer, Runner, )
7. **Inter.7** (Runner)
8. **Inter.8** (Sports editor, presenter of running event)
9. **Inter.9** (Regional area running event organizer)
10. **Inter.10** (Runner)
C.3 | Analysis of quality data

The first research question was related to the criteria by which communication strategy is first drawn up at sporting events and then at events of the running movement. The analysis of qualitative data has shown that the criteria are to define communication objectives, target audiences and their grouping, measures and method of information and structure of communication on a per-phase basis, based on a timetable.

In sport, various parameters are taken in designing communication strategy, because it differs, depending on geographical location, size of scale, lures and incentives to participate for athletic tourism. It was found that the organizers, together with the sponsors (commercial and social) play an important role in the last parameter while the role of Mass Media (traditional and new) is not excluded either as well as public relations divided into organisers and society.

In practice, through the interviews, it was found that the design of the communication strategy of a race aims at emerging concepts such as participation, safety, athletic status, athletic tourism, and is largely based on the assistance of factors public or private and digital promotion. The more players are found to be successful, the greater the success of the promotion strategy of an event is.

One of the criteria of the communication strategy, according to the respondents' answers, seems to be the field of public participation. This concerns either the physical presence of the people that take part in a long-distance race or attend events, or follow them from a social networking platform.
Extract of interview 1:

"The organization year after year is very popular with the public. In 2006, we started with 800 runners in the marathon and 10km of health course, and this year we reached 21,228 participants in all four running events, which are held in parallel (42.2km marathon road, 10km and 5km paths of health and walking, 1km of elementary school pupils) [...] The biggest increase has been observed over the last 5 years, with 5,870 runners in 2012, reaching 21,228 in 2017. 54% of the participants are men, while 46% are women and the average age of the runners is about 32 years old [...] Most of the runners come from Thessaloniki, while the participants from the rest of Greece reach 2-2.500. Approximately 700 people come from abroad and we consider them few, a great effort is being made to open up access to the public outside Greece [...]. In the end, we are credited as success, the increased participation, we, the organizers. However, participation is not always a basic measure of success"

Extract of interview 8:

"Naturally, an increasingly important role in the growth of Thessaloniki’s tourism is the growing participation in the marathon. You see it around you, you perceive it when walking about town before and after the races on the street and in the shops. My role requires my physical presence at the starting line and at the finish line of the marathon and at mass participation races, so I understand very well what is happening in the movement of the people. If I compare all this with earlier, the participants were much fewer ... easily understand the difference."

Extract of interview 7:

"I choose to run in races that have several entries, from my experience this shows that the race is more organized and the region is right for tourism."

Extract of interview 9:

"It is important to have a vision, a plan for the organization, something similar has been attempted quite a lot of times before, but it did not have the same appeal to the people and did not have the same organization. It is Komorun’s second
year of "running", and the participation is much bigger, which means that our people liked last year’s event and are supporting us more actively this year.”

Another criterion of the communication strategy, according to the answers given to us by the participants, seems to be the safety of the runners. This aspect is particularly projected by the organizers and they consider it extremely important even though the development of communication is neglected. Runners, run under their responsibility, same as spectators, but if we consider the bad impact the Boston marathon terrorist attack or the news of a runner who suddenly died of heart attack still have today, we see how important this sector is.

Extract of interview 1:

"First of all, I'm interested in having no security failure. The safety of athletes is at stake. If we have a failure in this area, then the whole event is going down the drain. In the nightly half-marathon, athletes pass through 192 narrow alleys. The responsibility for security is great. There should be a smooth start, rescue stations must work perfectly, everyone should cross the finish line, there should be no commotion when marathon runners converge with 5000 metre or 10000 metre runners."

The domain of athletic prestige is related to participating athletes and why they choose specific races to enter. The more athletes a running race has the more recognized it is in the international calendar of organizers. The records, the prizes and the reputation of a race attract famous runners, and at the same time it is the starting point for the presentation of others who want to stand out and participate in more prestigious athletic events such as in the Olympic Games and World Championships.

Extract of interview 1:

"There is the participation of athletes of SEGAS, which is the association of official athletic clubs, with the local Association of Sports Clubs (EAS), as well as athletes who love sport and have a passion for running without belonging somewhere [...]The participation of well-known champions that run for the record and lend glamour to the event. If an athlete wants to meet the qualifying standards to participate in World or European championships, as well as the Olympic Games, he
can do so through the Thessaloniki marathon. In recent years, we have not spent money on athletes that are considered to be the big attraction, the status of the institution has now been upgraded, and it is difficult to keep up with the demands of very big races."

**Extract of interview 9:**

"The athletic prestige of our organization can be slowly built up although we have not entered the formal calendar of SEGAS running races and therefore we do not have an international character or official measurements, but we try, with the means we possess, to organize a good race that will build the infrastructure in order to acquire the formality of an important running event in Thrace and in general."

**Extract of interview 6:**

"Our city has unfortunately lost weight to pure sport activities, both from EAS-SEGAS and the municipality, so the participation of athletes on a route that is not popular and visually impaired. He's left behind, amateur sport, and the upgrading of the prestige of Sirris Challenge."

**Extract of interview 8:**

"The prestige of a race does not grow only from athletes or only from amateur runners, it takes a combination. The prestige of the race in Thessaloniki has been upgraded since the organizing committee changed and it was decided to change the philosophy of the event. Previously, there was a great deal of money to attract great athletes with distinctions and records but the attendance was minimal. The event seemed to be dedicated only to the closed club of professional runners and less to amateur runners who simply love running and are more. Nowadays we may be lagging behind in recognized athletes but the product has been upgraded."

**Extract of interview 6:**

"In the past few years we have also received some help from sports ambassadors, such as the famous Olympic champion Tasoula Kelesidou, who came to give some emphasis to the fight."
Based on the bibliography and the interviews, it has come up that the organizers of an event play an important role in both the successful promotion of a race and its overall success. Whether private, public or a combination of sectors, race organizers have a great responsibility for the smooth operation of all factors who strategically plan and implement a sporting event.

**Extract of interview 1:**

"The organization of such sporting events almost everywhere, starts from the private initiative and ends up with the state. The order of things, we could say, should be this: clubs, enterprises, federations, municipalities-regions, state. This has not been the case in our country, but after the financial crisis, the situation has changed [...] For the smooth execution and development of the races, a central strategy is needed. If the state is responsible for this, with frequent changes in power, it can not function properly, it needs stability. This kind of events must come from private initiatives because the state mechanism is usually slow-moving [...] Clubs are more flexible in their planning and decisions, as private companies are more useful for these demanding events”.

"All money is covered by sponsors [...] The municipality does not assist us financially, nor does the state subsidize the event, it only helps significantly with human resources or by providing a logistical infrastructure. Also in the last two years, there is no assistance from the GGA or the State Secretary of Sports. As organizers, alongside mass sports, we have an increased sense of social responsibility, and we want to offer state factors, who in this difficult economic period do not even have the basics. [...] If time changes and things are looking up again for Greece, we would like its support in order to widen the participation of the people.

**Extract of interview 9:**

"I believe that organized planning and help from many sectors strengthens a sporting event. Komorun is organized by the Komotini School of Physical Education and Sport, but its worthy supporters are the Municipality of Komotini, the Public Society of Education Culture and Sports of Komotini and the Sports Club of Disabled People IRODIKOS. Of course, we also receive great help from the sponsors of the events whose presence grew this year and made our work easier in many areas."
Extract of interview 6:

"Four years ago we created the Sirris 22.7km race with a lot of love and support coming from the marathon runners club in Serres. As a running sporting event, it had the character of Challenge, which was missing from the city of Serres. Unfortunately, we do not have the appeal we want because there is no real help from anywhere. If we want an event to be successful, many factors in different roles should contribute, and of course there should be sponsors to support it. Organizational planning has been improving year after year but there is no mechanism to implement the organisation that will untie our hands so that the conditions of the race improve and give the motive of pleasure to the people and they will reward us with their participation in return."

Extract of interview 8:

"[...]Also purely private initiative taking on the organisation and donors' participation were equally important. Yes, factors play a part in the communication policy of a sporting event, we experience it. Opening up the base, corporate social responsibility, awareness of the city we are in give extra incentives for promotion."

According to the analysis of our data, it has emerged that the frightening development of technology through portable smart devices and the evolution of the internet through interaction in the new environment of web pages and social networks have made the digital communication strategy play the leading role promoting a sports event.

Everything is connected to the internet and from there they are promoted with various tactics that are used methodically and strategically by the sports organizations. If you do not "exist" on the internet and social networks in particular then it is very difficult to develop as sports content, service or product, according to bibliography and statistical surveys since 2001.

The more significant participation increase in a sporting event is, the more important its impact and virtual participation on the Internet are. The criterion of pleasure not only passes through the competition entry, if we refer to the running movement and the marathon, but also through the "likes”, “tweets” and the insta-
story", where these distinctive digital actions of each social networking platform will bring in return, the "share" and therefore the much desired appeal and consequently attendance and sport tourism.

Through the abundance of interviews, it was determined that in the running movement, the new media play the most important role in promoting the race, and particularly in the province, communication strategy built there is often a monopoly. If the tactics to be applied in races held in the provinces of Greece are correct, then the events will be proven to be successful, if not, maybe they will cease to exist. In urban centers all around the world, the digital environment has led to a steep increase in participation in events and has informed the world about the running movement in less than a decade when amateur runners have been running for half a century.

**Extract of interview 1:**

"There is a need for improvement and development in Marathon communication. We are working on communication through the basis we have created, with about 40,000 people registered and, above all, the new media, such as websites and social media. We address ourselves as an institution to organized sectors that can mass-participate, to large groups of people who love the running movement or want to get to know it and enter our community. Our goal, apart from the public sector and the associations, is individuals and businesses. Several business executives come down to run either as a team representing or promoting corporate social responsibility of each business. All these invitations are sent digitally."

"Our" flagship "is the company 24MEDIA with the top sports site sport24.gr. The base of communication sponsors are 705 Mass Media all over Greece, there is a TV show on state and local channels such as ERT3 and TV100. Unfortunately, I will stress again that there is no economic potential for anything more on TV due to cost or communication strategy by professionals all year round. The cost of communication and marketing is linked to sponsorship. The more money is raised from sponsorships, the more it will be spent on promoting the event. Five communication professionals in general and two digital communication experts are especially active for about 6 months every year three months before the beginning of
each race. In the remaining months, the management on the social media and the website of the institution is handled by volunteers."

"The so-called word of mouth, which is now being promoted by social media, also plays a major role. A great event, which will be loved, will bring new athletes to run with us by word of mouth. A typical example of a successful EWOM are the records. When the new generation browses the social media and sees the scores, the prizes and records in this beautiful environment then our popularity is growing. Also, in order to further strengthen the field of communication, we are in the process of attaching a memorandum, with the Department of Journalism and Mass Media of AUTH."

**Extract of interview 9:**

"The word-of-mouth communication between the internet and local media is the best way to promote Komorun and the means available. We have certainly assigned this piece to professionals. When it comes to communication strategy, all the focus has been put on the digital world. Now everyone is holding a mobile handset and they are constantly connected to the internet and social media, we are also addressing to young people, so it is reasonable for us to rely heavily on this factor. It also saves us effort and money, because we need extra advertising in the media while we do not employ extra staff for the paperwork, except on the day of the race.

We chose to create a web site for Komorun, which has all the basic information about the semi-marathon and the online registration form of the race. Co-organizers, some historical data, race tracks and sponsors are also included. We have assigned communication to professionals because the company that made us the website provided promotional and communication services, so we trusted the experts. In addition to this, there is a Facebook page which is managed by someone from school, who knows the social networks well and from there the whole promotion of the race gets done.

Of course, there is some extra help from websites of the local running movement and from local sites. The duration of the promotion starts about 4-5 months before Komorun, before that time there is no activity on the pages. The appeal of the race on FB is huge, fun photos and informative uploads are posted before, during
and after the race, as the people have responded very positively and easily to the entry form on the website. We want to enrich it with some more elements but this will be done gradually. Social media show volunteer action, social assistance and donations to the club we help. This year there have been sponsors who came and found us themselves, without us trying to reach them, that means something. Something goes well in the operation and on the internet. ”

Extract of interview 6:

"We know the Internet plays a very important role and we tried to communicate the race via two of our own websites and a Facebook page. The Marathon Racing Association website and the Sirris22.7 website had quite a lot of activity with useful information about the route, and statistics from previous races is also available. Also on the Facebook page we shared some details but we had only one person doing everything so it was very difficult to have a great impact. At our last race, we used YouTube too where we broadcast the start and the finish live through a TV production company. At our next one, the 5th, things may be better due to the Internet because we are now also holding a 5km race and there have been some sponsors who were eager to help promote the race. "

Extract of interview 4:

"Promotion is divided into two parts: the two sports editors who deal with press releases and are aware of all the players involved in the marathon, they are in charge of public relations and sponsors, commercial and communication, and the other are the social media. We are doing social media campaigns, such as "Wednesday’s motivation" that brought out a picture of the running movement and a “run” caption which showed up on Facebook and Instagram, respectively on Twitter it ran with some information or the appropriate pictures. We use all three depending on the modes of operation of each platform.

As a professional, I have a little ambiguous opinion about the use of press releases on the internet because the people you send them to will sometimes share them and some others will see it at first but then they may not upload something again because they will consider it similar. Only pages whose theme is the running movement will be constantly interested. I have tried to think of ways to connect such
common people who have an ordinary life but want to join races of mass participation. Besides, fun routes are fun, it's health, it's party time, a selfie, a happening. I was impressed by how many people want to come down and run.

We create and upload or share videos but not so much on YouTube despite the fact that we have our own channel there but with very few views. The people in Greece, as well as everywhere else around the world, get up in the morning and the first thing to do is log on Facebook, so I want to have everything there and not have to send it to other social media. I prefer the videos which are directly posted on FB because by the time they start playing, we draw your attention to get involved. For example, a video uploaded on FB can be seen by 50,000 users while the same on YouTube by 500, there is a tremendous difference.

We did some live streaming videos of the start and finish of the races as well as of the medals ceremony for the first three winners. We also did something similar with Wind, which was related to selfies, and we urged the participants to take pictures when they went to workout and post them on our pages, which was a good thing because it fits like a glove with the Wind campaign that said "show who you are". Thanks to sponsorship the campaign changed level and ran a lot because hashtag was used, gifts were given based on the likes and through marketing the communication grew as well as with the participation of stoiximan.gr that invested in communication and promotion which obviously showed the difference. Sponsors of this type, telecommunications, get your idea and enlarge it for the benefit of the organization because they have the know-how.

I define success as follows: I want the participation in the social media of anyone who knows nothing about the marathon and is suddenly interested in it because they have seen something nice that has caught their attention. That’s because the new media serve some purposes I do not get from conventional communication. Our goal in the field of communication is to make this fact known to as many people as possible, on the other hand, to have as many entries as possible through the sums and establish a good name for the marathon to raise its prestige, thinking that we have no other means to use."

Extract of interview 10:
"The runner's journey either at the time of the race or when looking for his next target is lonely. Therefore, digital search is inevitable and the searching for matches is made on the internet and social media. The rise of the running movement both in Greece and abroad is also due to the rise of new media, not only them. From the websites of the running institutions and the media that deal with the running movement I will be informed about the games and the results, but from the social media I will learn about the difficulties of the road, I will gain psychological strength and support, I will have fun and I will find my next goal through some hashtag.

WMM is highly communicative being promoted both by organisers and sponsors. Not only have they managed to inform and entertain people with information and photos but they have also been able to create a whole community of runners on the social media, giving us the feeling that we belong to this great team of each race. When you manage to create memories or share stories of running races on the social media then all this brings about the resonance and connectivity of the institution with runners and fans."

Extract of interview 5:

"We are preparing press releases and we have a specific list of email addresses of sport bodies, the media and communication sponsors. This is all promoted on the social networks mostly via Facebook organisation profiles which are very popular.

Our main goal is to constantly inform and to try to gather entries from running clubs all over the country. There we have built a large database and we consider it valuable for the participants in the race. We get significant help in promotion from communication sponsors, more specifically we are supported by the Metromedia group, which has a radio station and an online newspaper in Thessaloniki. Of course, we want some air time on TV but it costs a lot compared to other media.

The whole outcome is quite satisfactory, but I’m sorry that there is no active engagement in this area all year round. Targeted promotion starts a month ahead and in the last 10 days we have the final boost before the race. The contacts I have abroad tell me things there are not the same. There is planning, clear roles for the organizers
and professionalism in order for the public to evaluate the success of the organisation.

I notice that the new way of developing communication comes from big telecom companies that can spend money to promote the organization, having of course the means of dissemination at no extra cost, since this is what they provide. The promotion of the organisation is clearly shaped by marketing and communication professionals that work for such companies.

Of course, large corporations sponsoring such competitions abroad are counting on the so-called big city marathons to promote their products and services along the races. They want people to run in the city so that they can give more promotional stimuli. In this part, the two Greek marathons suffer because many of their kilometers of the race are run in a natural environment, unlike the roads of health and mass participation.

In Greece, we have a communicative advantage because the races we organize are of a historical nature. The Athens marathon is the authentic, the classic, the first one, if it had not been for this route, we would not have been running such long distances ... same with the Thessaloniki Marathon, the path from Pella is that of the great Macedonian military commander so no matter how commercially attractive the Big 6 races are, they will never be historic. ”

Extract of interview 7:

"I have been running races for the last four years and I must tell you that if there was no internet I would never have run. I was informed about the actions of the running movement clearly from the social media and Facebook, and from there I still get complete up-to-date information about the games that are held. Every running website has its own Facebook page, so this helps me to get informed about upcoming races to join.

Everything is done easily and digitally. I learn about the games, the area and some other information on the route, there are links there for the entry form, I pay via e-banking and I'm ready to run without any trouble. Also from social media I meet
people who run with me or I make friends with people who share the same passion as I, and of course there may also be professional cooperations with some of them.

The interaction that exists in the digital environment and the social media is terrible, we write about our experiences and share them, so everyone can spot the pros and cons of each route and go accordingly. I have to tell you that I have run in Arkalohori, Heraklion, where the half-marathon of Crete is held, because I saw two videos uploaded on Facebook and I was impressed. If there was no digital world, I would not go. Also from the internet I realized the importance of the running movement, which offers health. "

Extract of interview 8:

"I have been involved as the presenter of the Alexander the Great Marathon since its first year 2006, also I have presented the nightly marathon for the past few years. I have seen the average early years of the event, where the participation of the people was minimal and the philosophy of the race different, but I witnessed last time’s participation that was enormous. Joining something with 300 other people and suddenly reaching 22,000 is a long way. I attribute all this change to the Internet and the social networks; without them the running movement and the successful organization of the marathon and the half-marathon would not get well-known.

I have been a professional TV sports journalist for many years, and even in the early years of the marathon, the TV, which is the largest medium of communication, promoted the Thessaloniki marathon systematically on ET3 frequencies and later on NOVE cable TV with free access to the municipal TV channel TV 100. Well, not even TV has been able to increase the number of entries and give the huge appeal that the social media and the Internet have given. Now everybody else can switch on their mobile device and learn everything about the marathon, write, upload photos or videos of popular races and communicate in general their involvement in the race. Also, the cost of advertising spots on television costs too much money, which does not bring any profit, as it will be played for a limited time and without advertising all donors and co-organisers; the internet is quite the opposite, there is everyone, everywhere and all the time. "

Extract of interview 2:
"We highlight everything, through the website of the organization we display and communicate constantly the Greek sport events, through the internet. Publicity is also achieved in many other ways too, for instance with our physical presence at adjacent embassies while our own embassies in various countries advertise our tourist products. There is no recruitment policy, and there is no special team to deal with sport tourism exclusively. Instead of 5-6 people who should be involved with promotion and tourism altogether, this happens with only 2 people and not permanently. Luckily there are the students who do their apprenticeship. All that happens, progresses and evolves through the love and personal work of everyone involved ... almost voluntarily."

As for the third research question, it was studied and found it is a chain reaction, that the motivation for pleasure from participating in a race increases the popularity of it and consequently increases the participation, therefore it is part of the communication strategy of the organization and is used dynamically to stimulate its impact. In addition, increasing participation in a sporting event creates conditions for attracting additional sponsors that will support and promote an event even more, rewarding commercial and social benefits. This is translated as the goal of these events, which is athletic tourism.

**Extract of interview 1:**

"The region and the municipality included in their tourism campaigns abroad the organization of the marathon. This is the only promotional help from the state, but there is the issue that it will support all kinds of tourism in a region rather than sport in particular.

Regarding the field of attracting tourists, through the running movement and the two major events of our region, the burden falls upon the province and the municipality of Thessaloniki, through Voula Patoulidou, who is Regional Vice Governor and President of the Thessaloniki Tourism Organization, together with Spyros Pengas Deputy Mayor of Tourism, International Relations & Electronic Governance of the Municipality of Thessaloniki.

They are in contact with foreign agencies that cooperate with Greek. But unfortunately there is no proper infrastructure from the Greek agencies to promote
the product. No know-how. Overseas there are specialized sports tourism agencies that send tourists to countries with significant or well-advertised sporting event-products. For example, Thessaloniki Marathon and Moscow Marathon.

There should be sports travel packages or promotions of our own marathon & sporting event tours by the Greek agencies to attract sports tourism. We should have an active presence in many tourism fairs and participate actively in the marathon expo, where they are displayed. This of course requires a lot of money. We use the AIMS stand unofficially, which distributes our own brochures but is not as effective.

We should have our own kiosk with a physical presence there at one point. When we have 20 people staff, we can do it. And there must be formal contacts with foreign bodies attaching strategic partnerships. Two agencies in Greece, one in Thessaloniki and one in Athens, who love the marathon, are strong agencies and have contacts with foreign agents and sources of sports tourism."

Extract of interview 9:

"The goal of sports tourism is great, as this year twice as many runners as last year will participate, which is close to 1,000 people who love running and will take part either in the half-marathon or in the 5km mass participation race, which means that this will be a real shot in the arm for the city of Komotini. We have the same goal with ESFA, which, with the creation of Komorun, also gives an extra sporting motivation to those who attend the historic International Conference of Physical Education and Sports, organized by the Department of Physical Education and Sport Science of the School of Physical Education and Sport Science Democritus University of Thrace. The municipality wishes the promotion of tourism too, that is why it contributes to it as much as it can despite the economic crisis. Besides, it is a charity race as it helps people with disabilities."

Extract of interview 6:

"I participate in the two great marathons of the country, in Athens and Thessaloniki and have traveled everywhere for the past years. I have been to areas similar to ours, such as Kalambaka and Trikala or Katerini and Xanthi that have semi-marathons and mass participation running events and I am glad for
the people they gather. Just as I am an amateur athlete and a sports tourist, so too a lot of other people are in the regional cities that I travel to, so the goal of athletic tourism for every town should be a primary issue. Unfortunately, we do not get any support for this prospect in our municipality so that we can help our organization more properly."

Extract of interview 7:

"I have run in incredible places all over Greece and I have known areas that if I hadn’t participated actively in the running movement, I might never have visited them. Participation in sporting events, especially those of the running movement organized throughout the country, gives a tremendous boost to the development of tourism. Sport tourism of each region is greatly favored by all participating runners, whether they travel on a day trip or deciding to stay for some nights. For running competitions held 300km away from Athens, I choose to get there the previous night of the race because we usually start early. What I have found out is that with the running clubs the whole tourism mechanism is activated because we are organized and book bus or airplanes tickets and hotels rooms as a group through tourist agencies so we can travel more economically by combining our love for running and Tourism. This year I see the Aegean islands organizing many races for the exclusive purpose of tourism, on days just before and shortly after high season."

Extract of interview 8:

"In the old days, only athletes and locals came here, now even if it is for only half a day, when someone is coming from a neighbouring town, this is enough economic relief for the city. Proper communication, of course, got more participants for the running race and more tourists in the city. The same thing happens in the half-marathon, which is an evening event, runners are almost forced to stay ... so we understand how positively all this celebration affects us"

Extract of interview 2:

"As a local authority, we thought the marathon was an" exportable product ", and we support it through the tourism promotion agency. In total, 8 bodies are involved in the promotion: the Municipality, the Port, TIF, Chamber of commerce,
Hotelier Association, Metropolitan Region and Regional Development Fund. We went to an exhibition in London and "ran" pictures of the marathon to showcase a major city event. We are trying more broadly to show that we have 12 months of tourism and not just three. This organization is a key tool for the tourist development of Thessaloniki.

Through the Tourism Organization of Thessaloniki (TOT), we promote and support several considerable cases that are relevant to the region and can arouse tourist interest. We have a total of 15 tourist attractions, protected by UNESCO, in the Genti Koule area. A beautiful way to attract sports tourism that is being pursued there is a run through the monuments. I have heard that some people find it particularly interesting, which pleases us, but we aren’t complacent.

The main obstacle to the promotion of sporting events is poor organization. Last year we had three major sports events on the same weekend. They could have been on other dates, with at least a 10 day difference between them so that they do not coincide. There is no good coordination. There should be some respect shown towards dates that are established, such as those of the marathon, which is part of the international calendar and this alone requires the success of increased participation.”

Extract of interview 3:

"We are very interested in ambassadors, we want people who will promote the city and its eventseverywhere. The so-called local ambassadors, such as well-known people, Greek communities abroad or tourists who love Thessaloniki. There will also be an extra net, or an app that will unite the two sides. The one side that is interested in coming to the city generally or especially for a particular event that is organized and the other side that will record the specific interest and will inform about it. It's the so-called mouth to mouth electronics."

Extract of interview 10:

"The basic goal of choosing every race I run is the importance of the institution and the tourist challenge that it creates. I wish to run races in the 7 continents as I wish to see the whole world through the running movement, and every time I run in a city, I feel I conquer it, as a runner and as a visitor. "

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Chapter D | Discussion

D.1 | Discussion / Conclusions

This research was conducted to study communication strategy of sporting events in the digital world and more specifically the tactics and methods applied to promote running events in our country, examining three different cases in urban centres and in provincial towns. Also, this research has been developed to integrate into a single project elements such as communication, the internet, social networks, sports and sports tourism which are scattered and embedded in different sorts of researches or only in journalistic articles, in statistical surveys, and empirical knowledge.

The main conclusions are: (a) no matter how well communication strategy of a sporting event is, it will not achieve its goals if the event is not well organized. Its success will be brief and with no future (b) the use of digital tools for the promotion of sporting events is imperative and from anyone but promotional actions of an organization must be taken by communication professionals, (c) marketing and communication are interrelated elements and must be used together to increase the connection and appeal of a sporting event to the public, (d) in the running movement participants identify more with their role than in other sports because running is a simple skill and that broadens the scope of communication policy (e) in the light of new communication media, sport communication strategies have no differences whether they are drawn for urban centres or provincial towns as long as in both cases the same financial and organisational possibilities exist. There are differences in the quantity and quality of human resources in charge of organising communication policies, the length of time of sport communication, the targeted commercial, promotional and social campaigns as well as the ambassadors who advertise the events.

The initial assumption was illustrated: Any sporting event in any part of the world can be universally known if it is promoted correctly on the Internet. And the first research question was set: What criteria is communication strategy of an athletic organization developed with?
The topic was discussed with three event organisers, it was also studied in the bibliography and found that the basic criterion is organization. In order for a sporting event to become "viral", an organizational strategic planning of a sports event is required and then communication sport strategy must be followed. Without organizational structure, no matter how well communication strategy is designed, it will bring in maximum benefits neither in the short run nor in the long run (digital resonance or sports tourism). A lot of Greek events do not last because of poor organisation.

Communication professionals have mentioned that important criteria in sport communication planning is the very nature of the people who professionals are addressed to, the time of the promotion, the size and type of the running event (marathon or semi-marathon), organisers and sponsors. According to bibliographic review (Fola 2010 - Polatidou, 2015 - Vasileiadis 2011 - Gkoutzioupas 2008 - Koustelios n.d. etc) the criteria for sport communication of an event is good organisation, the role and the quality of local authorities, the public that has certain motives and choice criteria, in participation and everything else discussed with the interviewees.

Concerning the second research question: What is the role of the digital world in the communication strategy of sporting events as well as its contribution to the events of the running movement?

We have found that with the use of the Internet and new media, the running movement was widely disseminated to our country the past few years and at the same time it has become the first option of communication promotion for the events examined. According to the bibliography (Hutchins & Rowe 2012 - Gibbs 2013 - Lefever 2012 – Theodorakis 2011) it was recorded that without the use of the internet and the new media, no sporting event can be widely publicized in the global sport community. All organisers referred to the digital tools and social media applications used by athletes, teams, fans and organisations to achieve enough popularity at first and constant connectivity later. The same was recorded by all bibliographic review. (Kortier 2016 - Anderson 2017 - Volkmer 2009 etc.). Also, the feedback from the runners who contributed to the project was the notion that new media are the number one source of information and interaction of every kind related to sport and the
running movement, with which participants identify like no other athletes and create strong digital communities. The statistics of the running movement that both the social media accounts of those interviewed and the comparison of the Social Media accounts of the major marathons show the extensive use of the new means of communication (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube). There is an increasing tendency for users to participate year after year and constantly new tactics of communication strategy from the organizers of the events.

In addition founded by the interviewees that, in order for an online campaign to be successful, it must be designed and implemented by communication professionals, IT technicians, journalists, psychologists and tourism professionals. This was recorded by the bibliographic review too. (Pedersen et al, 2017 - Petridis & Batrakoulis 2013, etc.). Campaigns not designed by professionals, like the one in Serres, were noticed to have less appeal than the other two running events that were studied. In the case of Komotini where only a limited number of semi-professionals in communication was used and for a short period of time, the performance was better than in Serres but not better than the running event in Spetses. But in the case of Thessaloniki on the other hand, hiring communication professionals has increased both its participation and popularity, but the limited number of people

(Appendix, Figure 30)
and work groups as well as the lack of communication strategy on a daily basis does not allow this extra appeal of the marathon in comparison with events abroad.

In the digital environment, it is not impossible that small-scale running events, if there is an organised race and drawn digital communication policy, the basis of the impact will be expanded mainly through the use of e-WOM which social networks offer, attracting additional digital resonance, sports tourism and sponsors (commercial or social), thus increasing the scale of the sporting event of a small region.

For instance, the motto of the strategy of the mini-marathon in Spetses awarded by the Greek website socialmediaawards.gr is quoted below: Spetses Mini Marathon: Get Social with us Faster, Harder, Stronger

“To the successful completion of last year’s, fourth in a row, Spetses mini marathon, the social media contributed significantly with their wide appeal to the Greek people and to foreigners, with the organisation to have acquired over 26000 facebook fans and 6600 instagram followers recording a rise of 15,7% and 65% respectively for the two channels. The strategic management goals of the digital media included capitalising on a recognised institution, its communication with its users, the sponsorship projection in an innovative way, as well as the interaction of people to the activities of the event. Tactics like creating customised content and rewarding policy for users’ participation contributed to the holistic planning of content strategy, which revolves around axis like promoting SMM as “a race for all”, reinforcing sport profile with important sport people, advertising Spetses as a tourist destination, as well as synchronisation of new media (facebook and instagram)with current topics of cultural and sport content. The realisation of this strategy has led the facebook and instagram pages of SMM to maintain first place among equivalent sporting events in Greece”.

Third research question: To what extent does communication strategy of a sport event take into account maximisation of participation in sport and by extension promotion of sport tourism?

The relation of dependence of public participation in a sporting activity and, by extension, sports tourism, with the communication strategy of sport events is very powerful. Tourism is the country's number one "exported product" and has been the
most important source of revenues for many years. Therefore, any sporting activity aims at increasing participation (natural or digital now), which will bring sporting tourism with multiple benefits to the residents of the area. At this point there was a total agreement in the bibliography. (Goutzioupas 2006-Mihail 2010-Koustelios 2015-SETE 2017-EOT 2015)

As a result of our research in this field, it was found that, while all organizers and policy makers of the running movement crave for a rise in participation year after year, so that they can attract sports, there is a void in collaboration between organisers, who are mostly individuals, and officials who are involved in tourism either as OTA or as EOT and ministry of tourism. In the case of Serres, the mini marathon is not organised by the municipality, so it is not classified to the tourism sector and is barely promoted. In the case of Komotini, the mini marathon has taken the form of such an athletic event that it draw the attention of sport officials, tourism officials and the municipality and was advertised with better results. Finally in the case of Thessaloniki, it is only the past five years that the Thessaloniki Tourism Organisation included more dynamically the sporting events and mainly the marathon in their tourism promotional programme, deploying the popularity of sport tourism. In the end, from the qualitative data it is observed that sports tourism abroad is for ever being supported both financially and organisationally, so communication strategy of every sporting event has positive feedback whereas in Greece, apart from the Athens marathon, no other sport activity is given the attention or promotion it needs, creating a gap in a successful part of Greek entrepreneurship.

Last research question: Are there any differences between running races organised in big urban centres and provincial towns in comparison with communication strategy by the new means of communication?

From the organisers, communication professionals and runners that participated in the research it is derived that there are no great differentiations in communication strategies between running events in big cities and small towns. The most significant difference lies to the width of applications used in new communication means, in the number of people who manage the accounts of the events in platforms of social networking as well as the targeted audience of each running event. In the cases of Thessaloniki and Komotini where professionals and
semi-professionals devised the strategies, they used more platforms than in the case of Serres while the demands of the largest event like the one in Thessaloniki has led to the inspiration of more tactics of connectivity. As it was characteristically mentioned, displaying for instance the strategy of the New York Marathon on Facebook and Instagram and the its application, in case of a study, it does not necessarily mean the same success as the greatest marathon run in the world.

(Appendix, Figure 31)

Based on the interviews and the parameters set on the process of collecting data there is a differentiation in research questions too:

1. Event organisers (private, state or combination of both.) Service provision in promotion. What type of logistic infrastructure and human resources as well as the duration of use or employment.
2. The size of the sport event (Olympic games or simple sport event). Regarding the methodology in communication strategy of sport event. Use of the same or different communication policy in quantitative and qualitative features.
3. The area of the event. In relation to the different approach of communication strategy, because of population, commerciality or background. Differentiation of targeted audience, quantitatively, if it is a small or big territory, qualitatively, if it is a known or unknown area and if it is associated historically with an athletic event or it is the beginning of something new.

It was discovered that in the sector of organising forces of an athletic event, organisers naturally influence communication strategy, since they assess the budget of the event. The differentiation lies not only on the money that they will invest but on their dynamics too so that they affect all enterprises and organisations in order that they co-organise a sport event (Fola 2010-Koustelios 2010-Kriemadis and Theakou 2007 etc). The qualitative analysis of the interviews showed that there is collaboration between state and private forces in order to execute an impeccably planned operation that will then attract sponsors who will create conditions of a successful communication strategy. (digital appeal or sport tourism)
Also, considering the relationship between the size of a region and whether or not it affects the communication strategy of a sports event in the digital environment, it was found that this relationship plays a very small role and depends on the scale of the sporting event being held. This has been proven to us by the Olympic Games taking place in various parts of the world, and the social, commercial and athletic success of the Games is not dependent on the region. In contrast to a small-scale sports event, the importance of the area increases and sports tourism should be, if not in the foreground, then at the same level of communication strategy. The combination of both in the digital world can also highlight the region and the event, irrespective of sports and scale.

In conclusion, if we take into account the data mentioned by the interviewees who work in communication about social media strategy, like:

1. Social media or marketing plan
2. Competitive research and client account engagement profile
3. Budget and creation of work groups
4. Determined and precise goals
5. Increase in the fame of the event (brand awareness)
6. Increase in the number of users
7. Promotion to numerous platforms
8. Thorough end-of- campaign analysis and evaluation

Therefore, successful communication strategy of a professionally well-organised sporting event in the digital world is able to showcase the sunning movement in any part of the world, creating conditions for digital appeal, commercial connectivity and increased participation in sports tourism.

**D.2 | Originality of this research and contribution to the Bibliography**

For the first time:

- Sport communication strategy of events of the Greek running movement was studied.
- Contribution of new communication media and indicative ways to use them in sport communication of running events in Greece were recorded,
• Sport communication connection of running events with sport tourism communication strategy from local authorities were recorded and studied

D.3 | Proposals for future research

1. The Communication Strategy of the RunningMovement under the encouragement of the Ministry of Health aiming at informing citizens about the health benefits of running. If the state emphasises on the running movement, it will realise that countries with increased running actions spend less on health due to prevention and not repression.

2. Study of digital communication strategy of other amateur sports, especially street basketball (3on3) that has recently been added as an Olympic event as well as street football (5on5) with a lot of events like that of Brazilian top footballer who plays for Barcelona, Neymar Jr..

3. Study on commercial and communication promotion of esports, which develop dynamically under the protection of many professional sport clubs worldwide.

4. Study on successful models of sport tourism of organised sport events in Greece through federations like athletics with SEGAS.
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http://www.socialmediaawards.gr

http://spetsesmarathon.com
References of Appendix Figures

Figure 1.


Figure 2


Figure 3


Figure 4


Figure 5


Figure 6

Figure 7


Figure 8

Infographic, Sports and social media-Winners and Losers. Ανακτήθηκε από: [www.eventility.com](http://www.eventility.com)

Figure 9

Infographic, Sports and social media-Winners and Losers. Ανακτήθηκε από: [www.eventility.com](http://www.eventility.com)

Figure 10


Figure 11

[www.seter.gr](http://www.seter.gr) «12ο Συνέδριο Τουρισμός & Ανάπτυξης»

Figure 12

[www.seter.gr](http://www.seter.gr) «12ο Συνέδριο Τουρισμός & Ανάπτυξης»

Figure 13

**Note:** Figure created after a change and additional editing of article data


https://runnersclub.gr/agones/category/dromos/

Figure 14

http://www.segas.gr/index.php/el/calendar

http://www.arrs.net/

http://www.arrs.net/MaraList.htm

http://www.arrs.net/MaraList/ML_Fin2016.htm

Figure 15

www.Repucom.net

Figure 16

Selected global media and sporting events with the most Facebook interactions as of November 2016 (in million interactions) and World sports review 2016, Football’s biggest days online in 2016, the top 6. Ανακτήθηκε από: www.Statista.com and 2016

Figure 17


Figure 18


World Football From consumption to sponsorship: How fans are changing the commercial landscape of the beautiful game, A digital Perspective, Characteristics which make Brazil 2014 a ‘perfect storm’ for fan engagement (2014) Ανακτήθηκε από: www.Repucom.net / www.nielsensports.com

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Figure 26

Figure 27

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Figure 28

https://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CE%9A%CE%BB%CE%B1%CF%83%CE%B9%CE%BA%CF%8C%CF%82_%CE%9C%CE%B1%CF%81%CE%B1%CE%B8%CF%ECE%BD%CE%BD%CF%8E%CE%BD

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Figure 29

http://www.arrs.net/MaraList/ML_Stats2016.htm

Figure 30

https://www.facebook.com/KomoRun/?fref=ts

https://www.facebook.com/5%CE%BF-Voreja-Sirris-challenge-23klm-%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%B9-3%CE%BF-%CE%92%CE%9F%CE%9B%CE%A4%CE%91-RUN-5klm-605561779644636/?fref=ts

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www.Instagram.com
https://www.youtube.com/user/atgmarathon

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBssddsYPHVwkJ90r6L-FbA

Figure 31

https://sites.google.com/site/sirris227km/

https://www.komorun.gr/apotelesmata
Appendix

In the context of the present study, statistical data were collected from the tools used in the digital world for the promotion of sports content; they were data concerning the three activities we study comparatively (Marathons and semi-marathons in Thessaniki, Serres and Komotini) as well as statistics from the development of the running movement. They were based on researches conducted by big market research companies like Nielsen, Siatista or Hootsuite and so forth, while the length of time spent on this research reaches up to ten years, with a particular emphasis on 2012 onwards when one encounters the connectivity between new means of communication and sport. Finally, there was a count of all websites and media of social networking of each of the three running events studied in this project.

![Figure 1](Global data on population and digital penetration (Hootsuite.com))
Figure 2 | The use of social networks of active users worldwide (Hootsuite.com, 2017)

Figure 3 | Active users of the major social networking platforms (Hootsuite.com, 2017)
Figure 4 | Share of web elements per device (Hootsuite.com, 2017)
Figure 5 | Average time spent on social media per country (Hootsuite.com, 2017)

Figure 6 | Generally data connectivity fans in Social Media (a) (crowdynews.com, 2017)
Figure 7 | Generally data connectivity fans in Social Media (b) (crowdynews.com, 2017)

Figure 8 | Athletes, fans and social media (eventility.com, n.d.)
Figure 9 | Sports events and the fans’ response to social media (eventility.com, n.d.)

Figure 10 | Demographics and statistical digital imaging in Greece (Hootsuite.com, 2017)
Figure 11 | Estimates by SETE for Greek tourism by 2021 (Sete.gr, n.d.)

Figure 12 | At City Break the subcategory of Greek sports tourism (Sete.gr, n.d.)
The increase of the Running Movement in Greece

- Road Races
- Recognized Races from SEGAS

Figure 13 | The Running Movement increases in Greece (Runningnews.gr & Runnerclub.gr)

The increase of the Running Movement abroad

Figure 14 | The increase of the Running Movement abroad (Arrs.net, 2017 & Segas.gr, 2017)
Figure 15 | Facebook & digital references to great sporting events (Repucom.net, 2016)
Figure 16 | The sporting events with the greatest interaction on Facebook (statista.com, 2016)
Figure 18 | Social Media @ Olympics London 2012 & Rio 2016 (Stats.com & socialsamosa.com)

Figure 17 | Model for Online Sport Communication (Pedersen et al., 2017)
### Top 10 Social Network Platforms on Smartphones

<table>
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<th>PLATFORM</th>
<th>SEPTEMBER 2016 (UA)</th>
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<td>Instagram</td>
<td>93.9 M</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>69.6 M</td>
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<td>LinkedIn</td>
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<td>Snapchat</td>
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</table>

Source: Nielsen’s Mobile Measurement
Read as: In September 2016 Facebook had about 128.8 million unique users. This is inclusive of mobile web and app usage.

### The Top Social Media Platforms on PC’s (Desktop)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>PLATFORM</th>
<th>SEPTEMBER 2016 (UA)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>50.2 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>31.7 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>29.5 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Blogger</td>
<td>21.5 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>21.4 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>20.1 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Wordpress.com</td>
<td>16.6 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tumblr</td>
<td>11.8 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Google+</td>
<td>11.1 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Reddit.com</td>
<td>10.8 M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Read as: In September 2016 Facebook had over 50 million average unique users.

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**Figure 19** | Portable data sharing Internet traffic per year ([Nielsensports.com, 2016](#))
A DIGITAL PERSPECTIVE

Traditional broadcasters will show 80% more coverage of the 2014 FIFA World Cup compared to 2006. This, according to digital marketing consultancy Roadmap, is due to the growth of mobile sports viewing and the increasing use of social media.

In 2012, 1.5% of total viewing was via mobile platforms, 32% of fans use mobile devices to follow sport and live streaming of sports is regularly used by up to 16% of fans.

YouTube is now the second largest search engine and it also claims 53% of users who are on the site to watch sport. Video platforms have seen a 95% increase in engagement across the world. In the US, YouTube World Cup™ has reached 100 million fans.

Mobile devices will probably be the most competitive marketing opportunity during the 2014 World Cup™. As a result, one in five people now use social media to follow sport. Of those fans, 25% of fans follow Premier League teams on Twitter 50% of fans on Facebook.

The rise of multi-screen

Increasing sports information in the digital environment

As mobile and tablet usage grows generally, multi-screen activity will follow. Mobile usage has increased by 6% during the 2013-2014 season in the UK, with tablet usage growing by 25% over the same period.

Multi-screening provides an opportunity for marketers both in the commercial and broadcast environments. A survey of young people found that 70% of people who use digital media used a second screen while watching television matches.

Taking the Premier League as one example, multi-screen usage by football fans in the UK has surged by 20% this season. If they access another screen while watching a game, 40% of people use a mobile telephone, while 25% use a tablet. Social media is a common activity with 19% of fans using it on the second screen.

The established platforms are likely to new develop revenue models to share revenue with rights holders

PREVIOUSLY...

Only platforms received monetary benefit as a result of fan social activity.

NOW...

Shared revenue models and closer collaboration mean rights-holders, brands and platforms can all benefit.

Figure 20 | Sports on mobile devices @ 2014 World Cup (Repucom.net & nielsensports.com)

Figure 21 | Increasing sports information in the digital environment (Repucom.net, 2016)
THE GREATER FUSION OF SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Rights holders and venues across the world of sports are on a constant quest to enhance the spectator experience – at events and for those watching remotely – by adding entertainment elements, such as concerts, fan zones and enabling more access to star athletes. Taylor Swift’s pre-race concert at the 2016 United States Grand Prix, the theatre-style lighting deployed at the ATP World Tour Finals in London and, of course, the Super Bowl half-time show are all examples. Similarly, there are many examples of new entertainment events built around a sports element, including Andy Murray Live, an evening of music and exhibition tennis, and the Kellogg’s Tour of Gymnastic Champions, a 35-city tour of US Olympic gymnasts designed to capitalize on the team’s success at Rio 2016. The NFL and Cirque du Soleil, meanwhile, have partnered to create a major showcase installation in Times Square, due to open in 2017.

IP OWNERS TAKING CONTROL OF CONTENT AND THE CONVERSATION

From Presidents to the person on the street, this is an era when everyone has the ability to be a broadcaster. And content has never been more prized or valuable. Two major property acquisitions in 2016 underlined the point: WME-IMG’s acquisition of Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) and Liberty Media’s acquisition of Formula One were, ultimately, investments in content and intellectual property. Rights holders across the board, meanwhile, are looking to add value by developing their own content, often in partnership with brands or broadcasters but sometimes on their own. Athletes, too, are becoming their own media owners in various ways – from dedicated apps and YouTube channels to larger investments in digital publishing such as LeBron James’ Uninterrupted and Derek Jeter’s The Players’ Tribune. Both are allowing athletes to engage with fans directly, authentically and on their own terms.

INTEGRATION OF MUSIC AND SPORT

25% OF US POPULATION HAVE ATTENDED A MUSICAL EVENT AT OR CONNECTED TO A SPORTING EVENT.

16% attended a musical performance connected to a sporting event – of whom 40% did not even attend the sporting event.

Source: Nielsen Sports SponsorLink US

Figure 22 | Sports content on the internet, connectivity and profits (nielsen.com, 2017)
Thanks to technology, fans have come to expect content – live streaming, on-demand coverage and supporting statistics and analysis – to be available to them whenever, wherever. Over-the-top live content is coming to sport, with established broadcasters, newer digital publishers, rights holders, telecoms firms, social media platforms and technology giants all engaged in some form. Amazon, Google and Apple are all active in content creation and delivery, while rights holders are actively developing and experimenting with their own media models – PGA Tour Live, the Olympic Channel and Dugout, the collaboration between 30 major football clubs, are all examples. These rights holder-owned channels can also generate data, giving a richer, deeper picture of the audience and opening up new potential revenue streams around merchandise, tickets and content.

The introduction of features such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram Live has given all stakeholders opportunities to deliver live sport, or secondary content, directly to consumers, while at the same time opening up more options for user-generated fan content. Indeed, rights holders are using technology to connect with fans wherever they are – in a venue, at home or on the move. And mobile is increasingly the device of choice for fans to consume and share content. All stakeholders are innovating to connect with fans via smartphone, including broadcasters like NBC, who rolled out a dedicated app and launched a partnership with Buzzfeed for Snapchat content during Rio 2016. Different rights holders are at different stages of their digital journey: some are focused on fan acquisition, others on fan engagement and the most sophisticated on monetization – from digital Fan Stories, to virtual reality and 360 video.

**THE FUTURE SPORTS RIGHTS MODEL?**

- **OWNED PLATFORMS**
  - e.g. NFL Network
- **NON-OWNED PLATFORMS**
  - e.g. Twitter
- **TV RIGHTS**
  - e.g. ESPN, NBC, Fox etc.

Source: Nielsen Sports

Mobile has become the key device for rights holders, broadcasters and brands.

**POTENTIAL FUTURE OUTLOOK**

- Live sport on OTT is here but will only increase in viability, with more platforms and more options.
- All players – especially IP owners – are in a position to capitalize.
- The rights model will be reshaped as revenues grow around new direct distribution options.

**POTENTIAL FUTURE OUTLOOK**

- A mobile-first world with a host of platforms and channels offering great potential for new revenues.
- Multiple access points for greater connection and engagement with fans.
- Rights holders will continue to put new technologies and platforms on trial to seek out new revenue.

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Figure 23 | The future of sports @ screens & the evolution of social media (nielsen.com, 2017)
Figure 24 | The penetration of the web in tourism for information (Sete.gr, n.d)

Figure 25 | Web’s is 1st option in new tourists (World Travel Center, 2014)
| Πίνακες σημειωμάτων για τουρισμό Αθλητισμού & Ευεξίας | Πίνακας αγώνων για εξαχθένα Ευρωπαϊκό τουρισμό Αθλητισμού & Ευεξίας |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Γενικά | Ταξινόμηση | Νομισματικές | Πολιτικές Βασικές | Ρωσία |
| Επιστήμες σε χιλιάδες (μέσο αριθμός) | 2.005 (20%) | 974 (9%) | 926 (9%) | 918 (9%) | 604 (6%) |
| Διανυσματικές σε χιλιάδες (μέσο αριθμός) | 18.436 (23%) | 7.087 (9%) | 8.151 (10%) | 4.739 (6%) | 7.131 (9%) |
| Δαπάνες σε χιλιάδες € (μέσο αριθμός) | 1.952.540 (21%) | 999.324 (11%) | 1.279.712 (14%) | 644.436 (7%) | 812.984 (9%) |
| Δαπάνες ανά παζά / ημέρα | € 932 / € 106 | € 1.026 / € 141 | € 1.379 / € 157 | € 762 / € 136 | € 1.346 / € 114 |
| Κινητήρες ηλεκτρικών αμαξών | 35-44, 55-64 | 45-54, 25-34 | 35-44, 25-34 | 25-34, 35-44 | 45-54, 25-34/35-44 |
| Φύλο επισκεπτών | περισσότεροι γυναίκες | περισσότεροι άνδρες | περισσότεροι άνδρες | περισσότεροι γυναίκες |
| Οικονομικό κοινό (€) | 87% ανώτερο και μέσο ανώτερο | 85% ανώτερο και μέσο ανώτερο | 66% ανώτερο και μέσο ανώτερο | 76% ανώτερο και μέσο ανώτερο | 80% ανώτερο και μέσο ανώτερο |
| Επίπεδο εισπράξεως | 57% ανώτερο | 56% ανώτερο | 57% ανώτερο | 59% ανώτερο | 85% ανώτερο |
| Συγκεκριμένες διακρίσεις παζάδων (Διανυσματικές) | 43% 4-7 νύχτες | 72% 6-7 νύχτες | 66% 6-7 νύχτες | 82% 6-7 νύχτες | 48% 8-15 νύχτες |
| Τελετοποιημένο | Νησιωτικά και Καινούργια Ευρώπη | Νησιωτικά και Καινούργια Ευρώπη | Διπλές και Νησιωτικές Ευρώπες | Διπλές και Νησιωτικές Ευρώπες |
| Κινητήρες μέσα ενημέρωσης | Internet, τελετοποιημένο γραφείο | Internet, τελετοποιημένο γραφείο | Internet, τελετοποιημένο γραφείο | Internet, τελετοποιημένο γραφείο |
| Κρυφότερο τρόπο κράτησης | Internet, ενδιάμεσο ή άλλα καταστήματα | Internet, τελετοποιημένο πρακτορείο | Internet, τελετοποιημένο πρακτορείο | Internet, τελετοποιημένο πρακτορείο |
| Προγραμματισμός κράτησης | 45% έως και 1 μήνα πριν | 55% έως και 1 μήνα πριν | 49% έως και 1 μήνα πριν | 64% έως και 1 μήνα πριν | 79% έως και 1 μήνα πριν |

Πηγή: UK International, ετήσια δείκτης SETE Intelligence

Πίνακες σημειωμάτων για τουρισμό Αθλητισμού & Ευεξίας

Σελ. 1

Figure 26 | Runners finishers per year @ AAM and AGM (athensauthenticmarathon.gr & atgm.gr)

Figure 27 | Web's is 1st option in sports tournament preferences (Sete.gr, n.d)

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Figure 28 | Participants of runners per year @ AAM & AGM (athensauthenticmarathon.gr & atgm.gr)

Figure 29 | Social media and the world's top 6 marathons (WMM) (arrs.net, 2016)

*BMW Berlin-Marathon (YouTube Subscribers) Non Official channel
Figure 30 | The cases of research races & social media (social media pages of events.)

Figure 31 | Compare participations & sponsors @ Serres & Komotini (marathonserrres.gr & komorun.gr)