



## Digital marketing in the tennis ecosystem: a systematic review

### Marketing digital en el ecosistema del tenis: una revisión sistemática

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#### Abstract

**Introduction:** the use of digital marketing plans is a common business operation implemented by sports organizations and individuals to increase visibility and market their products and services to their stakeholders. in the case of tennis, this has been a sustained trend since the beginning of the game as a global phenomenon.

**Objective:** this systematic review aimed to provide an overview of the current state of research in digital marketing in tennis up to April 2025. the review focused on identifying the main areas and themes related to digital marketing plans in tennis, as well as the specific digital marketing tools examined in these studies.

**Methodology:** the leading sport and science research databases, Web of Science, Scopus, and PubMed, were comprehensively searched using the guidelines set by PRISMA. studies were included if they were written in English and focused on marketing, digital, and tennis as the main keywords. the search initially yielded 665 articles, with 19 meeting all inclusion criteria.

**Results:** the thematic analysis identified four main themes: (a) tennis tournaments and organizations, (b) tennis populations, (c) tennis products or trends, and (d) platforms, tools, or devices. the review found a scarcity of studies in this area, with only 19 articles fulfilling all criteria.

**Discussion:** the results revealed that the most studied themes focused on tennis tournaments, populations, and products. however, the limited number of studies suggests a gap in research concerning digital marketing strategies in tennis.

**Conclusions:** the review highlighted the need for further research on digital marketing in tennis and offered practical applications for both researchers and practitioners, emphasizing the importance of future research directions for the promotion of tennis.

#### Keywords

Business; digital marketing; internet; racket sports; social media; strategy.

#### Resumen

**Introducción:** El uso de planes de marketing digital es una práctica común en organizaciones deportivas e individuos para aumentar la visibilidad y comercializar productos y servicios. En tenis, esta tendencia ha sido constante desde que el deporte se globalizó.

**Objetivo:** Esta revisión sistemática buscó ofrecer una visión general de la investigación sobre marketing digital en el tenis hasta abril de 2025, enfocándose en las áreas, temas y herramientas de marketing digital más estudiados en los estudios.

**Metodología:** Se realizaron búsquedas en Web of Science, Scopus y PubMed siguiendo las directrices de PRISMA. Los estudios incluidos debían estar en inglés y centrarse en marketing, digital y tenis. Se encontraron 665 artículos, pero solo 19 cumplieron con los criterios de inclusión.

**Resultados:** El análisis temático identificó cuatro temas principales: (a) torneos y organizaciones de tenis, (b) poblaciones de tenis, (c) productos o tendencias de tenis y (d) plataformas, herramientas o dispositivos.

**Discusión:** Los resultados indicaron que los temas más estudiados son los torneos, poblaciones y productos. Sin embargo, el número limitado de estudios muestra una brecha en la investigación sobre estrategias de marketing digital en el tenis.

**Conclusiones:** Se destacó la necesidad de más investigaciones sobre marketing digital en tenis y se ofrecieron aplicaciones prácticas para investigadores y profesionales, con énfasis en futuras direcciones de investigación para promover el tenis.

#### Palabras clave

Deportes de raqueta; estrategia; internet; marketing digital; negocios; redes sociales.

## Introduction

Played by close to 100 million players in around half a million tennis courts in more than 200 countries worldwide, tennis is one of the most popular individual racket sports (ITF, 2024). From a fan perspective, the game is followed by 1 billion people globally as its benefits and attractiveness gather both players and followers (Poole, 2021). The participation of people in local tennis activities, its global diffusion, and its popularity have positioned the game as an emblematic sporting activity (Barget, 2006), which provides, among others, health (Pluim et al., 2018), psycho-social (Legg et al., 2017), and economic (Bayle & Maltese, 2008) benefits.

From a general perspective, and according to some authors (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019) digital marketing is the use of technologies to support the implementation of marketing initiatives that increase consumer awareness by satisfying consumer demands. This strategy is carried out using online marketing, e-commerce, social media, and other such techniques (Cano Tenorio et al., 2025). Digital marketing has clear benefits since it provides businesses with instant, inexpensive access to a bigger pool of potential customers. Additionally, it gives both parties a chance to communicate, allowing the seller to gain additional insight into the buyer's preferences, desires, and behaviours (Fathoni et al., 2024; Sadewa et al., 2024).

In this scenario, new communication technologies and, most notably, the internet, are having such an enormous influence on all areas of the business world, that authors (Yuce, 2017) have suggested that businesses are facing a new era mainly characterized by the evolution from traditional to digital marketing. This progress, also labeled as postmodern marketing (Brown, 2008), no longer assumes the existence of a clear order or comprehensive global vision but prioritizes emotion, creativity, and spontaneity. This approach aligns more closely with the sensibilities of the postmodern era.

Digital marketing is understood as the application of digitally based technologies which form online multi-channels such as email, web, digital TV, mobiles, etc., that market products and services to acquire and retain customers. It has been defined as direct marketing using new media (Holder, 2008).

The use of digital tools has made personalized one-to-one communication possible in real time. In the specific case of tennis, as happens with other activities, it allows the collection and management of higher volumes and different types of data than traditional marketing (Monegro, 2021). It also facilitates a global reach with low transaction costs and provides the opportunity to openly communicate with many customers 24/7. In the tennis ecosystem, through a planned approach of the use of digital marketing, organizations have improved their knowledge of the customer behavior, profile, and values. It has been suggested that this process has allowed them to deliver online targeted communications which are multi-channel and integrated to satisfy the customer demands (Thompson et al., 2014).

Digital marketing strategies, plans and actions have been identified as essential to sport businesses in this era of engagement marketing, in which organizations and individuals must promote their services, products and brands using the digital tools available (Raghavendra & Sudhakara, 2017). The dynamic relationships between the different tennis organizations and their consumers demand a flexible and comprehensive adoption of different digital marketing tools by using cross-channel plans to deliver the most impactful programs that will effectively fulfill the consumer needs.

In this context, it has been already noted that tennis stakeholders are continuously trying to adopt measures intended to increase interest and retention among the population at the different levels of the game aimed at maximizing their profits while maintaining economic rationality (Barget, 2006). The fast-growing weight of the tennis industry as a business, not only as an activity that adds value to the economic fabric of society (i.e., by creating jobs), but mainly as a way of engaging people from all over the world (Banciu et al., 2023).

The operating environment of the game, which is affected by the ongoing dynamics of the market in a continuing disrupted scenario, demands from the tennis industry an accelerated drive for changes in their marketing strategies and plans which have the digital channels as performance enhancement tools. As suggested by organizations such as the Tennis Industry Association (Tennis Industry Association, 2023), some indicators predict improvements in market size and tennis participants in a challenging macroeconomic environment for the game. In this context, the tennis industry as a global business

should keep the strategic transformation with the aim of providing consumers with the benefits associated with the game.

Despite the considerable relevance of this topic for the tennis ecosystem and the future of the game, digital marketing in tennis has received limited attention from research. Therefore, this study is the first one that will analyze in a comprehensive manner the research conducted on digital marketing plans as applied by the tennis industry.

### **Research objective**

This systematic review aims to identify the current state of research related to digital marketing plans as applied in the tennis ecosystem. This is a seminal study that, to the knowledge of the authors, is the first one that reviews the use of these specific marketing plans in the tennis ecosystem. The research questions followed in this systematic review were: (1) What are the main areas and themes of research related to digital marketing plans in tennis? and (2) What are the specific digital marketing tools analyzed in these studies?.

## **Method**

### **Study design**

The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) recommendations were used to conduct this systematic literature review (Page et al., 2021). The first author conducted the systematic search on the following databases: Web of Science-WOS (all databases), Scopus, and PubMed, as these are the most relevant in sport and sport science research. Keywords used were: "tennis" AND "marketing" AND "digital" OR "tennis" AND "internet" OR "tennis" AND "social" AND "media" OR "tennis" AND "web" OR "tennis" AND "email" OR "tennis" AND "Facebook" OR "tennis" AND "Instagram". The timeline of the research included publications up to the 6th of April 2025. Additional records were also identified from other websites such as Google Scholar.

### **Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

Articles considered in this systematic review were selected according to the following inclusion criteria: (1) original study, (2) published in a scientific journal article (JCR impact index, Scimago SJR or similar), (3) written in English language, and (4) sample of a tennis organization. This systematic review excluded: (1) book or book chapter, (2) conference paper or abstract, and (3) doctoral dissertation.

### **Identification and selection of studies**

The search strategy included the combined work of all authors and an academic librarian, which was applied to all databases. Table 1 shows an example of this search strategy used in one database (WOS). As per the PRISMA guidelines, the process consisted of six phases: (1) database search for original studies, (2) identification and removal of duplicate studies, (3) title and abstract screening (first phase), (4) full-text article screening (second phase), (5) forward search (references cited in the included studies), and (6) backward search (citations of the included studies) to match them with the inclusion criteria (Page et al., 2021). The final inclusion of an article had to be agreed upon by all authors.

Table 1. Full electronic key word terms example for one database.

Database	Key words
WOS	( ( TITLE-ABS-KEY ( tennis AND marketing AND digital ) ) OR (TITLE-ABS-KEY ( tennis AND internet) ) OR ( TITLE-ABS-KEY ( tennis AND social AND media ) ) OR ( TITLE-ABS-KEY ( tennis AND web ) ) ) OR ( ( TITLE-ABS-KEY ( tennis AND email) ) OR ( TITLE-ABS-KEY ( tennis AND facebook ) ) OR ( TITLE-ABS-KEY ( tennis AND instagram ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE , "English" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE , "ar" ) )

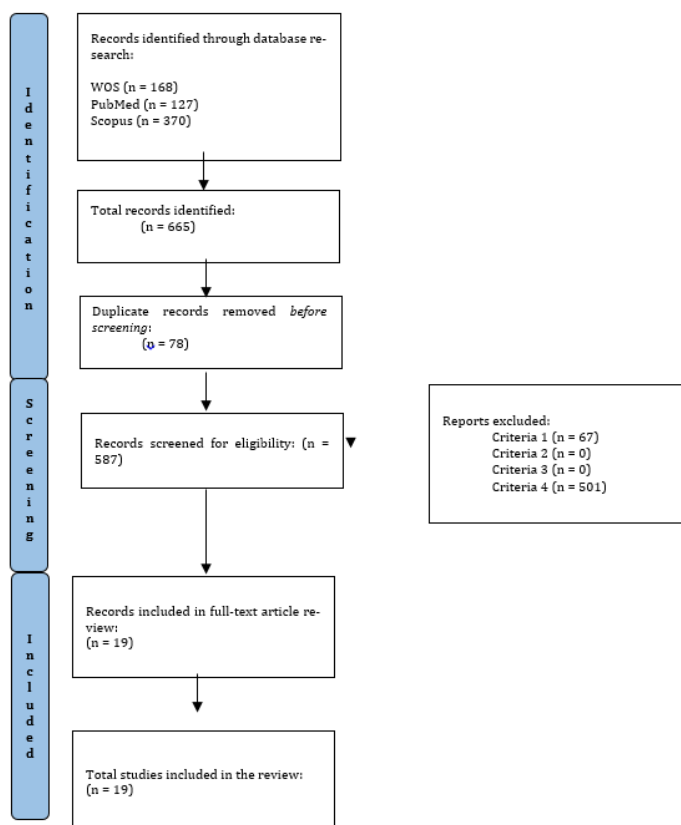
The relevant data from each one of the selected articles were extracted in a customized Excel sheet (Microsoft, version 16.53) by the first author. Variables considered were adapted from previous systematic reviews on sports marketing (Stegmann et al., 2023), and included the following: (1) year, (2) authors, (3) research goals/aims, (4) sample, (5) design/methods, (6) results/findings, and (7) conclusions/implications.



The rest of the authors reviewed the full data extracted from the final included studies. A series of themes drawn as relevant from the research objectives were categorized. A narrative summary included the main details of the themes identified which included studies on: (1) individuals (i.e., players, fans), (2) events (i.e., tournaments), and (3) organizations (i.e., clubs, federations, etc.).

The research methodology is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Diagram of the PRISMA study identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion process.



## Results

In the initial search, 665 articles were identified for analysis and inclusion in the review. After removing the duplicates, 587 articles were identified. This was followed by the first screening phase in which the title and abstract of each article were fully read. Furthermore, the second screening phase was conducted where the authors scanned the full texts of the 587 articles. This second screening rejected a considerable number of articles that were related to non-tennis racket sports (i.e., table tennis, padel, etc.), covered non-marketing topics (i.e., gambling, education, addictions, abuse, etc.), and non-digital marketing topics or tools (i.e., traditional marketing, TV audiences and commercials, gender representation, identity construction, attendance motives, etc.). Finally, it was found that 19 articles matched the relevant criteria and were included for analysis in this systematic review. The main characteristics of these selected articles are included in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of included studies on digital marketing plans in tennis.

Authors	Goals/Aims	Sample	Design/Methods	Results/Findings
Qian et al. (2023)	Create a demand model specifically for a women's professional tennis tournament, focusing on how gender influences individuals' intentions to attend.	The Wuhan Open.	The Importance Performance Map Analysis (IPMA).	The most influential core components of market demand were identified as player skill level and financial aspects. While women prioritized match schedules, men placed greater importance on venue quality and amenities.
Farrag & Althawadi (2023)	Explore and assess the key factors that drive attendance at tennis events, along with how social media moderates their effect on spectators' attendance intentions.	The ATP Exxon Mobil 250 and WTA Total 250. 250 spectators from 10 different countries.	Conduct detailed interviews with tennis professionals and fan organization leaders to develop a conceptual framework outlining the main motivations and barriers influencing event attendance.	Entertainment value, passion for the sport, desire to break routine, and admiration for players were the strongest positive predictors of attendance intent. Ticket prices and event timing were the primary constraints. Spectators fell into four categories: Pragmatists, Diehard Fans, Entertainers, and Socializers.
Ferrari et al. (2023)	To investigate the phenomena of tennis coaching on social media platforms in China.	30 Chinese coaches offering online tennis coaching on social media.	Quantitative and qualitative data were collected including channels of tennis vloggers, job search websites and in-depth interviews.	Coaches support this new process as it is more flexible and accessible as it allows for the implementation of self-promotion and marketing strategies.
Kaushik et al. (2022)	To study the components of a sponsor's social networking site (SNS).	131 sponsors of Grand Slam events across the 2016-17.	Utilize Twitter data to test the proposed relationships, applying seemingly unrelated regression for analysis.	The alignment between sponsor and event moderated the effects of event-focused messaging on perceived sponsorship and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), as well as the impact of interactivity on e-WOM.
Schut & Glebova (2022)	To test interrelations between variables related to the use of a smartphone on tennis events.	1000 spectators at Roland Garros (RG) 2018.	A questionnaire to explore how and why RG visitors use the 2018 RG Mobile App (RGMA).	Digital tools influence consumer behavior in tennis events.
Eisenhauer et al. (2022)	Analyze the promotional tactics employed by food and beverage companies on Instagram as part of their overall sponsorship campaigns.	31 Instagram accounts of food and beverage companies at the 2021 Australian Open.	Qualitative content analysis.	Of the 152 Instagram posts analyzed, 92% were made by official food and beverage partners of the Australian Open, predominantly promoting discretionary foods and alcoholic beverages. The most common strategies used were 'Engagement' (89%) and 'Branding' (80%), with nearly half (45%) of the alcohol-related posts encouraging direct consumption.
Bredikhina et al. (2022)	Investigate how newly established brand alliances impact the growth of player followers during a team-based tennis competition.	The Laver Cup.	Use longitudinal data on player behavior, including their social media activity and tagging habits, to construct a sociogram that illustrates brand interactions among players and the event.	Growth in follower count was largely influenced by the existing size of a player's audience and their connections with other players and event-related brands via user tagging features.
Trendafilova et al. (2021)	To analyze the environmental sustainability of the four Grand Slams via their websites.	Grand Slam events.	Qualitative content analysis of each tournament and venue website.	Key priorities included conserving energy and water, promoting sustainable food options, and raising attendees' awareness of environmental sustainability.
Chmait et al. (2020)	To understand the interest of fans in professional tennis.	2019 Australian Open Grand Slam.	2 million posts and comments mentioning tennis players on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, over the event period.	The impact of professional tennis players on user engagement across social media goes beyond their athletic performance. Certain players notably boosted online activity. This engagement appears to be linked to variations in ticket demand influenced by individual player presence.
Subramanian et al. (2020)	To study the current tennis scenario and the ubiquity of social media.	Grand Slams.	Qualitative and quantitative methods.	Tennis has embraced the era of social media and technologically mediated sport.
Antonovica & De Esteban (2019)	To explore the use of digital marketing by a top tennis player.	Exposure of Rafael Nadal in web marketing ads.	Content analysis of the advertisement messages of the player on the different webs of his sponsors.	People like to purchase services and products endorsed by Rafael Nadal no matter if they are or not related to sports.
Thompson et al. (2018)	To explore the use of Twitter and Facebook by the Grand Slam tournaments to achieve branding and relationship marketing goals.	Grand Slams.	Content analysis to examine Twitter and Facebook posts from the official accounts during, and post-, each event.	Online platforms contributed to building enduring fan connections and brand loyalty, rather than focusing solely on short-lived promotional efforts. Brand references were more commonly observed following the event's conclusion.



Kiefer & Scharfenkamp (2018)	To study the impact of physical attractiveness on the popularity of top professional tennis players.	Top 100 WTA ranked players on one calendar week in 2011 and 2012.	Estimating OLS and Tobit regressions tested if the physical attractiveness of professional female tennis players affected their popularity in online media.	Physical attractiveness was found to notably enhance a player's online popularity on platforms such as Facebook, SI.com, and Google, particularly affecting changes in visibility on Facebook and WTA news portals.
Thompson et al. (2017)	To understand how tennis fans perceive the social media presence of events.	Sport fans (n = 105) of Grand Slams.	An online qualitative survey.	Fans tend to evaluate social media experiences based on three elements: the level of interaction, the insights provided, and the human-like qualities associated with brands. Facebook is the leading platform for general engagement, while Twitter is most favored for keeping up with event-specific updates. There was a mild positive correlation between how well a sponsor aligned with the event and favorable perceptions of the sponsor, as well as a slight positive link between the sponsor's presence on social media and increased online buzz related to the event.
Delia & Armstrong (2015)	To gauge sponsorship effectiveness via social networking sites.	2013 French Open.	Twitter users' discussion of event sponsors during the tournament.	The team mapped and supported the customer journey by creating visitor personas and delivering real-time tennis analytics data to engage fans.
Stockwell (2015)	To examine the use of live data and social amplification for fan engagement in a professional tennis event.	2014 Wimbledon event.	This case study examined the work of a group of marketers, sales agency and staff during the event.	TNZ applied a "one-size-fits-all" approach despite the uniqueness of the tennis organization.
Thompson et al. (2014)	To analyze the social media strategy by the National Tennis Federation in New Zealand (TNZ).	Initiative implemented by TNZ in 2010.	A qualitative analysis using fieldwork, data collection, analysis and evaluation of social media metrics.	The tournament concluded with notable digital growth: a 62% rise in website visits, the addition of over 5,600 Facebook followers, a 59% jump in Twitter followers, more than 29,000 retweets, 92,000 views on YouTube, and a 4% boost in ticket sales.
Schoenstedt & Reau (2013)	To analyze the use of social media marketing of a tennis tournament.	Western & Southern Financial Group Masters Tennis Open.	Analysis of each social media platform such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.	Consumers' intent to purchase was significantly influenced by the availability and clarity of product-related information.
Wang & Lin (2011)	To examine the impact of endorsement and product information on consumers' purchase intentions.	A tennis racquet.	A 3 × 2 factorial design manipulating three product-communication forms was employed.	

### Methodological quality assessment of included studies

A methodological quality assessment of the 19 studies included in this review was conducted. An adapted version of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2018), that evaluates social sciences studies, was used. The evaluation criteria were: 1. Clarity of goals, 2. Appropriateness of design, 3. Justification of sampling, 4. Rigorousness in data, 5. Analysis depth and transparency, 6. Ethical issues, 7. Results transparency, 8. Relevance of conclusions, 9. Overall contribution. A 0–2 scale (0 = not, 1 = partially, 2 = fully addressed), was used to score each criterion, with a maximum score of 18 per study. The final ratings were: high (15–18), medium (12–14), and low (below 12). The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Methodological quality assessment.

Authors	Year	Design	Total Score (max = 18)	Quality Level
Qian et al.	2023	Quantitative	16	High
Farrag & Althawadi	2023	Mixed methods	17	High
Ferrari et al.	2023	Mixed methods	15	High
Kaushik et al.	2022	Quantitative	16	High
Schut & Glebova	2022	Quantitative	15	High
Eisenhauer et al.	2022	Qualitative	16	High
Bredikhina et al.	2022	Quantitative	14	Medium
Trendafilova et al.	2021	Qualitative	15	High
Chmait et al.	2020	Quantitative	14	Medium
Subramanian et al.	2020	Mixed methods	13	Medium
Antonovica & de Esteban	2019	Qualitative	14	Medium
Thompson et al.	2018	Qualitative	15	High
Kiefer & Scharfenkamp	2018	Quantitative	16	High
Thompson et al.	2017	Qualitative	14	Medium
Delia & Armstrong	2015	Quantitative	15	High
Stockwell	2015	Case study	13	Medium



Thompson et al.	2014	Qualitative	15	High
Schoenstedt & Reau	2013	Qualitative	14	Medium
Wang & Lin	2011	Experimental	17	High

The average quality score across studies was 15/18 with 12 studies were rated as high quality, and 7 as medium quality. The findings showed that the methodological quality of the selected studies was satisfactory, which supports the reliability of the themes identified in this systematic review.

## Discussion

The objective of this study was to conduct a systematic review of existing research on digital marketing strategies in the tennis ecosystem. Following the above-described search methodology, 19 studies were selected for analysis. This section will be structured according to the two research questions stated for this systematic review. In addition, sections on knowledge gaps, future research directions, limitations, and practical applications will also be included at the end of this discussion.

### *Main areas and themes of research related to digital marketing plans in tennis*

Three main areas and themes of research related to digital marketing in tennis have been identified: (a) research on tennis tournaments and organizations; (b) research on tennis populations; and (c) research on tennis products or trends.

#### a) Digital marketing research on tennis tournaments and organizations

A considerable amount of research has studied the application of digital marketing plans and tools to some of the most important professional tennis tournaments. It has been shown that events such as the Grand Slams in general (Kaushik et al., 2022; Subramanian et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2017, 2018; Trendafilova et al., 2021), Roland Garros (Delia & Armstrong, 2015; Schut & Glebova, 2022), US Open (Shani et al., 1992), Australian Open (Chmait et al., 2020; Eisenhauer et al., 2022), Wimbledon (Stockwell, 2015), WTA major events (Qian et al., 2023; Schoenstedt & Reau, 2013), ATP Tour events (Farrag & Althawadi, 2022), and the Laver Cup (Bredikhina et al., 2023) have attracted most of the attention of researchers.

In general, these studies have emphasized the relevance of the use of digital tools such as live data and social amplification for tournament fan engagement (Stockwell, 2015), the role of social networking sites in increasing sponsorship effectiveness (Delia & Armstrong, 2015), the need for social media to overcome barriers that influence fans' motives (Thompson et al., 2017), and to use creative strategies to overcome limitations of their platforms (Thompson et al., 2018).

This research has also concluded that social media has a crucial influence on the relationships generated within the game between events, players, and fans (Subramanian et al., 2020).

Just one study has been conducted on the digital marketing strategy of a tennis organization such as a national tennis federation. The authors analyzed the development of a social media strategy of Tennis New Zealand and its first online social media presence and concluded that these organizations should implement creative and engaging social media initiatives to meet the expectations of their stakeholders (Thompson et al., 2014).

No research was found on digital marketing plans used by other tennis organizations such as clubs, regional federations, player associations (ATP or WTA), the ITF, or members of the industry (i.e., manufacturers, etc.).

#### b) Digital marketing research on tennis populations

Most of the studies conducted around tennis events have focused on the fans in general (Stockwell, 2015; Subramanian et al., 2020). Research has also targeted specific populations such as female fans (Shani et al., 1992), and topics such as spectator motives to attend events (Farrag & Althawadi, 2022), fans' perceptions of event social media presence (Thompson et al., 2017), brand and fan relationships (Thompson et al., 2018), or marketing demand in the case of women tennis events (Qian et al., 2023).

Tennis players have also received some attention from digital marketing studies on the relationships between social media, physical attractiveness, and popularity of top female professional players (Kiefer & Scharfenkamp, 2018). The marketing messages on sponsors' websites of a professional player such as Rafael Nadal and their impact on consumer purchase intention have also been analyzed (Antonovica & de Esteban Curiel, 2016). In a study on the influence of social media exposure on players and its impact on fans' ticket purchases, tournament scheduling, appearance fees, and tennis participation, it was concluded that some top players have an impact that exceeds their performance level (Chmait et al., 2020). A related paper studied the impact of players' exposure to social media during a tournament and the importance of creating a brand-building strategy for players using brand networking (Bredikhina et al., 2023).

In the only research found on coaches and digital marketing plans, the authors studied the provision of tennis coaching through social media offered by tennis coaches in China and concluded that these tools helped coaches keep their engagement with their players during COVID times (Ferrari et al., 2023).

#### c) Digital marketing research on tennis products or trends

This area has received less attention from researchers compared to the one related to tennis events and tournaments. The analysis of the impact of the insertion of an endorsement together with relevant product information relevancy, on consumers' purchase intentions of a tennis racket, concluded that product information is extremely relevant and pertinent in the online environment (Wang & Lin, 2011). In another interesting research, the marketing strategies used by food and beverage brands during a tennis event were analyzed, and the authors concluded that these strategies need to be controlled to promote the consumption of healthy products (Eisenhauer et al., 2022).

When exploring the use of social media to promote tennis coaching lessons it was concluded that coaches using these tools can utilize marketing and self-promotion strategies more effectively (Ferrari et al., 2023).

When analyzing the use of the event and venue websites to promote sustainability initiatives by the Grand Slam tournaments it was concluded that these organizations should progress from communication to tangible actions in this relevant process (Trendafilova et al., 2021). In this context, the study of the sponsors' effectiveness via Twitter has found a variety of relationships between sponsors, events, and social media use (Delia & Armstrong, 2015). In the analysis of the use of social media in a professional tennis tournament, it was emphasized that a team approach for the development and delivery of content and ideas is crucial to provide a consistent message to support the overall event strategy (Schoenstedt & Reau, 2013).

### ***Digital marketing research on platforms, tools, or devices***

In terms of specific marketing digital tools and platforms studied in this research, three main areas and themes of research have been identified: (a) social media platforms in general and the web; (b) specific social media platforms; and (c) use of devices and data sharing have been analyzed.

#### d) Social media platforms in general and the web

Studies have focused on the use of social media platforms in general to understand the interest of fans in professional tennis (Chmait et al., 2020) or to investigate the phenomena of tennis coaching on social media platforms (Ferrari et al., 2023). Other research has analyzed the combination of these social media platforms by exploring the use of Twitter and Facebook by the Grand Slam tournaments to achieve branding and relationship marketing goals (Thompson et al., 2018), or by analyzing the use of Twitter, Facebook, and Youtube as social media marketing tools of a tennis tournament (Schoenstedt & Reau, 2013). When studying the use of websites, it was concluded that advertisers should manage relevant endorsements on the websites of their tournaments (Wang & Lin, 2011), and the use of the tournament website for sustainability purposes has also been explored (Trendafilova et al., 2021). In another interesting study, the authors explored the social networking sites (SNS) of tennis events and concluded that for maximum impact, the SNS message articulation and interactivity should be contingent on the sponsor's functional fit with the event (Kaushik et al., 2022).



#### e) Specific social media platforms

Research has also analyzed the use of specific social media platforms. One study compared the different tools and concluded that they influenced the willingness of spectators to attend tennis matches, with Facebook being the most influential social media platform (Farrag & Althawadi, 2022). In another research, the goal was to specifically study the use of Instagram in a Grand Slam event and found that interactions and relationships with consumers are built by brands using a combination of tennis and social media (Eisenhauer et al., 2022). Furthermore, authors have also explored the use of Twitter users' discussion of event sponsors during a tournament (Delia & Armstrong, 2015), while another study compared the use of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube on how they contributed to support the mission of the tennis event (Schoenstedt & Reau, 2013).

#### f) Use of devices and data sharing

Studies have also investigated the use of devices such as smartphones (Schut & Glebova, 2022), which concluded that these digital tools influence consumer behavior in tennis events, and the importance of sharing event data through social amplification to drive fan engagement (Stockwell, 2015).

### Knowledge gaps and future research directions

This systematic review of the research conducted on the topic of digital marketing applied to the tennis ecosystem has allowed us to identify a series of gaps in the knowledge available on this topic. On the one hand, it has been observed that a considerable amount of the research interest focuses on the application of digital marketing strategies or plans in mass events such as Grand Slam events and tournaments on the ATP and WTA circuits. Other investigations also refer to the impact of social networks on fans attending tournaments of different prize money categories.

On the other hand, there are few investigations that study the use of digital marketing plans or instruments of this type of marketing in tennis organizations, whether from the base such as clubs or public facilities, or also local, regional, or national federations, the professional circuits, entry-level professional events, juniors, masters or amateur tournaments, industry members, or even the International Tennis Federation. Deepening the study of the use of digital marketing plans in these organizations and events would allow us to know more in-depth about the activities they carry out and their impact on fans and players.

Likewise, there are very few studies that analyze this topic from the perspective of some important individuals who are tennis stakeholders, such as tournament organizers, leaders, managers, administrators or even what would seem more important, tennis coaches, who are those who deliver the sport at all levels.

Therefore, it can be stated that the results of our research allow us to identify a series of gaps in knowledge that at the same time serve as a guide and provide direction toward future research that will allow us to increase our knowledge on this very relevant topic.

### Limitations

As is the case in most research, in which a systematic review of the literature on a specific topic is carried out, there are several limitations that can be pointed out in this study. Firstly, regarding the databases used, more general and less scientific databases could have been utilized. On the other hand, some different keywords related to the topic of the study such as "ecommerce", "branding", "digital platforms" or "fan engagement", could also have been used. Other languages, such as Spanish or French could also have been used for the study. Finally, it is obvious that the search process is framed in a specific time frame, and it is possible that since the search was completed, other articles have been published that could have been included in this review.

## Practical applications

This is the first systematic review, to the knowledge of the authors, that analyses the current scientific literature on digital marketing applied to the tennis ecosystem. The practical applications of our study can be presented in relation to the different sets of stakeholders that make up the tennis ecosystem.

The tennis industry can use digital marketing plans and tools to expand and develop the game in the specific contexts in which it operates to increase its capacity for business growth (Crespo Dualde, 2021). From a venue perspective, tennis clubs and local facilities (whether private or public) or academies can use the insight acquired from this research to implement digital marketing plans that will assist them in facing some of the many challenges the changing tennis scenario creates. As they are the first level in the reception of fans and members, their role is crucial to achieving the intended objectives, which is why the use of appropriate digital marketing instruments for this goal is essential. Tennis organizations can implement integrated digital communication strategies to strengthen their relationships with members and users, promote events, launch loyalty campaigns, and assess the impact of their programmes.

As it relates to events such as tournaments, championships, festivals, open days, etc., its organizers can consult the results of our study to learn more about the best practices that have been carried out in other case studies and what are the trends in the use of digital marketing plans in these events in order to adopt or adapt those that might be more convenient to their interests. For event organisers, the strategic use of platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and sport-specific applications can significantly enhance participant engagement, user experience, and audience loyalty (Schut & Glebova, 2022; Stockwell, 2015). It is advisable to integrate personalised content, real-time engagement tools, and cross-promotional strategies involving sponsors.

In the case of the tennis coaches, they are the main and key deliverers of different types of tennis programs that are extremely important to the sustainability of the game, the improvement of players and the generation of healthier communities (Crespo et al., 2021). They are encouraged to take specific actions to enhance their professional presence and engagement with current and prospective players. Such as developing basic self-promotion strategies and structured content plans for social media platforms to improve their outreach, build trust, and strengthen their digital identity within increasingly competitive markets.

The next phases following this study should aim at addressing the gaps identified in this review. Priority should be given to digital marketing analyses of local and regional clubs and academies, and studies on the use of digital tools by federations. Applied investigations into the practices of coaches and managers are essential to understanding and enhancing user engagement. Further practical applications should study the actual impact of digital campaigns on user acquisition, retention, and satisfaction. Finally, the development of tennis-specific digital marketing guidelines and best practice models seem to be a valuable contribution to the industry's ongoing professionalisation and innovation.

It can be concluded that tennis as a business needs to accelerate its transformation processes in a permanent context of change by using the relevant means at their disposal. With the view of ensuring long-term attraction, retention, and sustainability, the tennis industry can implement the adequate digital marketing plans to ensure the achievement of these ambitious goals.

## Conclusions

The results of this study emphasize the trend observed over the past few decades, in which new information and communication technologies based around the use of digital channels have changed how tennis organizations interact with their clients and uphold customer connections. To take full advantage of these emerging trends in digital marketing, as indicated by researchers, it is crucial to further investigate the use and application of tools like email marketing, websites, social media usage, user-generated content, and even AI-based marketing by the tennis industry (Ratten & Thompson, 2021).

Following the literature review carried out, it can be observed that the fundamental objective of the study of many research papers conducted on digital marketing plans in the tennis ecosystem is aimed at the understanding of the use of this marketing approach by both professional tournaments and elite



players. Stakeholders such as clubs, federations, industry members, or coaches have received very limited or no attention at all by researchers.

Furthermore, digital marketing instruments most studied in these investigations have been found to be Twitter, Facebook, and other Social Media platforms, while to a lesser extent the use of other digital marketing tools such as emails, for example, has been studied.

The tennis industry and the different tennis organizations should try to design and implement program and product changes following consultation and planning with all those involved, which may include players, sponsors, manufacturers, coaches, parents, clubs and event organizers across the world. Digital marketing tools have a crucial role in shaping services and products that offer greater choice and flexibility while focusing on providing fun and engagement at every ability, age and stage (Konjer et al., 2017).

This article has sought to provide an overview of the current state of research in the field of digital marketing plans in the tennis ecosystem. It is hoped that this contribution will alleviate the shortage of theoretical and practical knowledge in this field by providing an understanding of the main studies conducted and identifying the new lines of research. This study explores this emerging area from the perspective of the game of tennis and points out future directions in the examination of topics and issues related to the development of digital marketing and its theoretical and practical implications.

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