

## The relationship between sports communication strategies and sports image creation with sports communication performance in Thailand

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**Abstract:** This research aimed to develop a model of the relationship between sports communication strategies and sports image building with sports communication performance in Thailand. This research was mixed-methods research between quantitative and qualitative research, quantitative methodology was used to test the cause-and-effect relationship between sports communication strategies and sports image factors with sports communication performance in Thailand. Data were collected using questionnaires with 151 mass media organizations that conduct sports communication activities in Thailand. And qualitative methodology was conducted using phenomenological methods from in-depth interviews and the results of in-depth interviews were confirmed by holding focus groups with 3 members of the Thai Journalists Association who supervise sports mass media members and 2 sports communication scholars. Data was analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling. The results of research hypotheses founded that 1) sports communication strategies have a direct effect on the sports communication performance in Thailand and have an indirect effect on the sports communication performance in Thailand through sports image creation, 2) sports communication strategies have a direct effect on sports image creation, and 3) sports image creation has a direct effect on sports communication performance in Thailand. The analysis founded that the hypothesized model was consistent with the empirical data and passed the criteria with a  $\chi^2$  value of 13.78, p-value of 0.79,  $\chi^2/df$  value of 0.72, GFI value of 0.98, AGFI value of 0.95, and RMSEA value of 0.00. The benefits of this research can explain the causal relationship between sports communication strategies and sports image creation and the effectiveness of sports communication in Thailand. The results of the study can be used to manage sports communication in Thailand, leading to sustainable performance for the sports industry.

**Keywords:** *Sports communication strategies, Sports image, Sports communication performance.*

### 1. Introduction

According to [1], the overall sports communication business at a macro level has experienced an average growth rate of 40%. In Thailand, the growth rate for sports communication businesses is approximately 27% on average. In Thailand, sports communication is particularly significant not only for driving the economic sector of the sports industry itself but also for advancing other industries. Sports communication in Thailand plays a key role in continuously promoting and developing the sports sector, covering various aspects such as domestic sports news reporting, the use of social media [2], sports public relations and marketing, educational and developmental communication, and public support and engagement. Sports communication in Thailand encourages public involvement in supporting and participating in sports activities, such as joining local sports competitions, being a fan of sports teams, or participating in marathons and other events. Additionally, sports communication promotes sports tourism by hosting international sports competitions, which attracts tourists and generates income for the country. The rapid growth of the sports communication business in Thailand is attributed to reduced complexity in modern communication and the increased speed and convenience of accessing various communication channels.



To achieve effective sports communication, it requires the use of sports communication strategies, including marketing tools, partnership collaboration, and engagement content creation. These factors are crucial in enhancing communication performance, leading to improved sports image and economic value. The implementation of sports communication strategies is a continuously evolving process, aiming to consistently improve communication efficiency [3].

Based on the background and significance of issues surrounding sports communication strategies, this research aims to study the impact and relationship of sports communication strategies on sports image creation and sports communication performance. It reflects on understanding, validity, and dissemination of public information.

## 2. Objectives

1. To study the direct and indirect influence of sports communication strategies on sports communication performance in Thailand.
2. To study the direct influence of sports communication strategies on sports image creation in Thailand.
3. To study the direct influence of sports image creation on sports communication performance in Thailand.
4. To develop a model of the relationship between sports communication strategies and sports image creation with sports communication performance in Thailand.

### 2.1. Hypotheses

*H<sub>1</sub>: Sports communication strategies have a direct influence on sports communication performance and an indirect influence on sports communication performance through sports image creation in Thailand.*

*H<sub>2</sub>: Sports communication strategies have a direct influence on sports image creation in Thailand.*

*H<sub>3</sub>: Sports image creation has a direct influence on sports communication performance in Thailand.*

## 3. Review of Literature

### 3.1. Concepts Related to Communication Strategies in Thailand

Sports communication strategies have been described by scholars from various perspectives. [4] discussed sports marketing communication that reflects the focus on achieving marketing goals as an outcome of sports communication. [5] emphasize the perspective of increasing audience numbers or sports fan clubs to enhance the value of sports through a growing audience base. [3] explain the creation of engaging content that emphasizes communication through content that conveys emotions to viewers or sports fans. This type of sports communication content captures viewers' attention and encourages them to interact with it, whether by commenting, sharing, or expressing emotions. Such content fosters a deeper sense of involvement and connection between the audience and the sports brand or team. [6] viewed sports communication as also reflecting crisis management, utilizing management processes in sports communication to mitigate communication-related risks. [7] discussed the current use of storytelling techniques and the creation of interesting, high-quality content, communicated through various media channels to facilitate two-way communication. This approach is used to measure the outcomes of each instance of sports communication.

It can be observed that sports communication strategies place importance on sports marketing communication as a process used to build an image for athletes, sports clubs, or sports organizations to attract attention and establish relationships with target audiences. This is achieved through social media communication, the use of influencers, and organizing events and sponsorships [3]. Establishing partnerships emphasizes stakeholder support to create strength [8], [9]. Additionally, creating engaging content reflects emotional engagement with media content communicated to audiences [7], [10]. These approaches are supported by current research and remain relevant.

### 3.2. Concepts Related to Sports Image Creation

Sports image creation in Thailand can be described as achievements in sports competitions, reflected through the number of awards received at national and international levels. This success stems from the



ability to host sports events at various levels, requiring support from both the public and private sectors, along with investments and budgets for sports development. Private sector support includes sponsorship or investment in sports development projects. Sports image creation is thus a process that significantly impacts public perception, building awareness, understanding, and a sense of belonging toward that particular sport [11].

[12] described sports image creation as the public's perception and attitude towards sports, recognizing athletes' achievements and images. It also encompasses public relations and media coverage, including sports news presentations in domestic and international media, and the use of social media for image building and promoting sports activities. [13] added to this definition by emphasizing the professionalism of sports personnel, including athletes, sports managers, or coaches. [14] note that community involvement also reflects sports image, with community participation in sports and exercise activities seen through community-focused sports projects, such as marathons and local sports competitions. Sports image creation also involves the corporate social responsibility of sports organizations, fostering awareness of their role within the community through sports as a medium for corporate social responsibility. This includes fostering positive relationships between sports organizations, athletes, and communities, which not only builds a favorable image but also provides a means of giving back to and assisting the community that engages with sports media. Utilizing these indicators to assess and improve sports development in Thailand reflects the sports image creation efforts in the country.

In summary, sports image creation in Thailand can be characterized by professionalism, helping athletes and clubs achieve success and maintain a positive image over the long term. Professionalism covers aspects of communication, representation, adaptability, continuous development, and exemplary conduct. Corporate social responsibility serves to strengthen relationships between sports organizations, athletes, and communities, fostering a positive image and contributing to the well-being of society engaged with sports media. Community engagement builds positive relationships with the community and enhances the credibility of athletes, sports clubs, or sports organizations. Community involvement through creating valuable content, raising awareness, and educating about sports is used as an indicator of suitable sports image creation in this research.

### *3.3. Concepts Related to Sports Communication Performance*

Scholars have described sports communication performance in various aspects, including building relationships between sports organizations and sports audiences, emphasizing the importance of creating trends driven by sports communication mechanisms. It further emphasizes establishing a positive image with the community and stakeholders involved with sports organizations, ensuring that communication is accurate and unbiased. According to [15], sports communication should also effectively transmit sports knowledge that is accurately filtered and understood by the media. [16] highlight that sports communication must convey information swiftly and be responsive to changes in current circumstances.

The concept of sports communication performance in Thailand emphasizes the importance of creating knowledge and understanding in information dissemination. This approach involves conveying information that is generated with a deep understanding of mass communication, ensuring it is filtered accurately and clearly [17]. The data must be precise to reflect effective, reliable communication performance and to demonstrate credible sources [18]. Furthermore, public dissemination must be considered, with an emphasis on reaching audiences effectively, delivering timely and relevant information to the public that responds swiftly to current events [17].

## **4. Methodology**

This research utilized a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. Primarily, quantitative methods are used, with qualitative methods added to further clarify and validate the quantitative findings [19]. The study is descriptive research and focuses on mass communication organizations engaged in sports communication activities in Thailand as units of analysis, employing specific research methodologies to conduct the study.



This research follows a four-step process, which includes the following stages:

Step 1: Study concepts and theories to establish the research framework by summarizing relevant concepts, theories, and related research, aiming to define the conceptual framework and variables for this study.

Step 2: Conduct quantitative research, starting with the development of research instruments. A questionnaire was created and refined based on concepts, theories, and literature related to sports communication strategies, sports image creation, and sports communication performance. Relevant data and variables were compiled to construct the questionnaire according to the research framework. The instrument was then assessed for content validity, and the Item of Objective Congruence (IOC) index was calculated to ensure alignment, followed by adjustments based on feedback. The tool was piloted with 30 individuals outside the sample group. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient [20], requiring a value of 0.770 or higher to be considered reliable and acceptable. When the instrument passed quality assurance, data collection commenced. Upon receiving completed questionnaires, the researcher checked for completeness and proceeded with quantitative data analysis.

Step 3: Conduct qualitative research using a phenomenological approach with in-depth interviews involving the executive committee of the Thai Journalists Association, who supervise sports media members. The selection criteria included their roles within the association, experience in the sports communication industry, and academic expertise in sports communication. Criteria for selection also considered experience in sports communication and scholarly contributions in the field to ensure accuracy and diversity of information. The process involved creating a semi-structured interview format, validating the interview's quality, conducting in-depth interviews, and analyzing qualitative results. After the in-depth interviews concluded, the researcher validated the data by organizing a focus group discussion. This step compiled data from quantitative research and in-depth interviews for review by key informants, allowing the group to discuss and confirm the findings. The validated data was then analyzed to reach the research conclusions, using qualitative insights to support and clarify quantitative results.

Step 4: Summarize the research results, integrating both quantitative and qualitative findings, discussing the results, and providing research recommendations.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1. Results of the Quantitative Data Analysis

The results of the analysis of the correlation between observable variables showed nine observable variables. It was found that there were relationships among all 36 pairs of variables, indicating that all observable variables were related, and the relationships of all variable pairs had the same direction, with the correlation coefficients between the variables showing a positive relationship. The strength of the relationship or the correlation coefficients ranged from 0.219 to 0.516, with a statistical significance level of 0.01, as seen in Table 1.



**Table 1.**  
Correlation coefficients of observable variables.

	SPC1	SPC2	SPC3	SPIM1	SPIM2	SPIM3	SCP1	SCP2	SCP3
MEAN	4.17	3.98	4.26	4.21	4.12	4.07	4.21	4.32	4.11
SD	.68	.69	.53	.61	.64	.63	.66	.71	.59
SPC1	1								
SPC2	.272**	1							
SPC3	.361**	.294**	1						
SPIM1	.347**	.343**	.516**	1					
SPIM2	.285**	.360**	.421**	.420**	1				
SPIM3	.219**	.384**	.378**	.401**	.416**	1			
SCP1	.321**	.401**	.453**	.397**	.324**	.384**	1		
SCP2	.345**	.398**	.403**	.359**	.321**	.356**	.333**	1	
SCP3	.411**	.321**	.419**	.373**	.367**	.386**	.391**	.332**	1

Bartlett's test of sphericity = 9318.413, df = 102, p = 0.000, KMO = 0.956

When the correlation coefficients between the observable variables were considered, it was found that all pairs of observable variables had a positive relationship with a statistical significance level of 0.01. There were no observable variables with high correlation levels ( $0.6 < r < 0.8$ ). There were 10 pairs of observable variables with moderate correlation ( $0.4 < r < 0.6$ ) and 26 pairs with low correlation ( $r < 0.4$ ). The pair of observable variables with the highest correlation was engagement content creation (SPC3) and professionalism (SPIM1) ( $r = 0.516$ ). The pair with the lowest correlation was understanding of information (SCP1) and community engagement (SPIM3) ( $r = 0.219$ ). However, when considering the correlation coefficients among all observable variable pairs overall, it was found that the correlation coefficients among most pairs were not exceeding 0.80. This relationship indicates that the observable variables have a moderate level of correlation, with no issues of multicollinearity, and all observable variables are on a common component. Therefore, it is suitable for further analysis of the relationship model.

When considering the Bartlett's test of Sphericity Chi-Square statistic, it was found to be 9318.413,  $df = 102$  ( $p = 0.000$ ), indicating that the correlation coefficient matrix was not an identity matrix with statistical significance at the 0.01 level. The variables were sufficiently related to allow for factor analysis. This is consistent with the Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin (KMO) analysis, which had a value close to 1 (0.956), indicating that the observable variables were highly correlated and suitable for testing the harmony with the research model and the empirical data. Since the index value is above 0.80, it shows that the data are very suitable for factor analysis [21].

The results of the analysis of the influence of causal variables and the outcomes of the relationship between sports communication strategies and sports image creation with sports communication performance in Thailand, developed to explain the research hypotheses, are detailed in Table 2.



**Table 2.**  
Influence of variables based on research hypotheses.

Causal Variables	SPC			SPIM			R <sup>2</sup>
	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE	
SPC	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
SPIM	0.21*	-	0.21*	-	-	-	0.73
SCP	0.15*	0.18*	0.33*	0.85*	-	0.85*	0.38

Chi-Square = 13.78, df = 19, P-value = 0.79, RMSEA = 0.00, AGFI = 0.95, GFI=0.98

**Note:** \*p<0.05; DE is a direct effect; IE is an indirect effect; TE is a total effect.

From Table 2, it can be seen that the variables, which are components of the causal variables and outcomes of the relationship between sports communication strategies and sports image creation with sports communication performance in Thailand, show direct influence, indirect influence, and total influence, categorized according to the research hypotheses. The details are as follows:

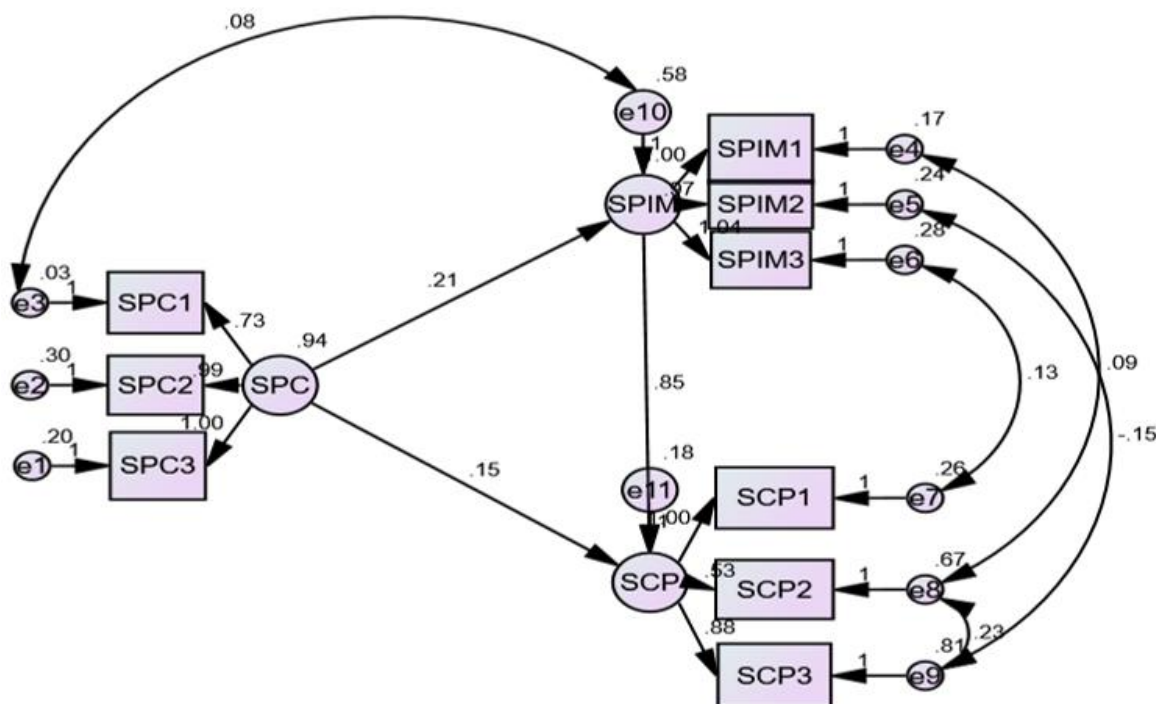
Hypothesis 1: Sports communication strategies under the components of marketing communication, partnership collaboration, and engagement content creation have a direct influence on sports communication performance and an indirect influence on sports communication performance through sports image creation in Thailand. It was found that sports communication strategies (SPC) had a positive direct influence on sports communication performance (SCP) in Thailand with a direct influence value of 0.15, an indirect influence value through sports image creation (SPIM) of 0.18, and a total influence value of 0.33 with a statistical significance level of 0.05. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: Sports communication strategies under the components of marketing communication, partnership collaboration, and engagement content creation have a direct influence on sports image creation in Thailand. It was found that sports communication strategies (SPC) had a positive direct influence on sports image creation (SPIM), with a direct influence value of 0.21 and a total influence value of 0.21, with a statistical significance level of 0.05. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Hypothesis 3: Sports image creation under the components of professionalism, corporate social responsibility, and community engagement has a direct influence on sports communication performance in Thailand. It was found that sports image creation (SPIM) had a positive direct influence on sports communication performance in Thailand (SCP), with a direct influence value of 0.85 and a total influence value of 0.85 with a statistical significance level of 0.05. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is accepted.

The researcher has summarized the results of the hypothesis testing regarding the relationship between sports communication strategies and sports image creation with sports communication performance in Thailand, as shown in Figure 1.





Chi-square = 13.783, Chi-square/df = .725, df = 19, p = .796, GFI = .980  
CFI = 1.000, RMR = .042, RMSEA = .000, AGFI = .953

**Figure 1.**

Results of the analysis of the causal relationships and the relationship between sports communication strategies and sports image creation with sports communication performance in Thailand.

## 5.2. Results of the Qualitative Data Analysis

### 5.2.1. Situation of Sports Communication in Thailand

Sports communication in Thailand is one of the activities within the sports industry, specifically in the category of mass media, advertising marketing, and public relations. It is driven by various sectors supported by the government, under the primary support of the National Reform Council, and promotes the Thai sports industry to enhance its competitiveness at the international level, with the Ministry of Tourism and Sports providing support. As a result, sports communication in Thailand has been continuously growing. This expansion is a result of support for organizing competitions and developing readiness for both organizing competitions and supporting sports events in Thailand. Additionally, the public has shown increasing interest in following sports news, feeling a sense of belonging to sports through effective communication strategies in the current era.

### 5.2.2. Sports Communication Strategies in Thailand

The sports industry is currently highly competitive, with the emergence of new competitors both domestically and internationally investing and operating businesses in Thailand's sports industry. When considering the overall situation of sports communication organizations, there is ongoing competition to develop sports communication strategies. This demonstrates efforts to attract audiences to become part of those communication channels, reflecting the strength of being a leader in sports communication.



When explaining the characteristics of sports communication strategies, organizations are developing communication processes to be more effective and modern to compete for sports viewership. Communication is considered an essential tool for creating favorability and acceptance in sports through marketing communication processes to attract interest and build relationships between audiences and sports organizations. Moreover, collaboration with partners is necessary to increase opportunities to reach target groups and create engaging content that fosters a deeper connection with sports teams.

### *5.2.3. Sports Image Creation in Thailand*

Sports image creation in Thailand is highly significant, as it is evident that both the image of sports organizations and athletes play a crucial role in terms of acceptance and credibility. This image is a sports factor that arises from the development of effective communication, focusing on establishing a distinctive and recognized image.

It can be observed that, in the current situation, sports organizations such as sports associations, the Department of Physical Education, and even the National Sports University must be credible through recognition of the organization, achieved by continuously creating and developing an image through effective communication processes that establish the unique characteristics of that sports organization. Furthermore, it reflects the corporate social responsibility of athletes and sports organizations through their involvement with the community. As can be seen, the image of an organization represents the value of that sports organization. Additionally, for the athletes themselves, their image is a key factor that attracts fans, reflected in athletes being credible, approachable, connected to the community, socially responsible, and accessible, which in turn generates popularity for both the athletes and sports associations.

### *5.2.4. Results of Sports Communication Strategies and Sports Image Creation with Sports Communication Performance in Thailand*

Sports communication strategies are characterized by marketing communication that engages audiences with sports organizations, as well as between audiences and athletes. They also foster collaboration with sports partners, leading to the creation of a widely recognized sports image reflecting both the professionalism of athletes and sports organizations. Additionally, corporate social responsibility and community involvement contribute to the effectiveness of sports communication, enhancing understanding of sports information and the accuracy and dissemination of public information in Thailand.

It can be explained that sports organizations in Thailand need to plan communication strategies that can be measured concretely, focusing on effective marketing communication. This process is used to create an image for athletes, sports clubs, or various sports organizations to attract interest and build relationships with target groups. Communication occurs through social media, the use of influencers, event organization, and sponsorships. Moreover, it is essential to strengthen and increase opportunities for effectively reaching target groups by identifying and selecting appropriate partners, coordinating and collaborating on activities, conducting joint campaigns, and building sustainable relationships.

Additionally, it involves creating compelling sports communication content that captures audience interest and encourages interaction, whether through comments, shares, or expressions of sentiment. This type of content makes audiences feel involved and connected to the brand or sports team on a deeper level, positively impacting the effectiveness of sports communication through professionalism in sports communication, corporate social responsibility, and community engagement using sports as a medium.

## **6. Validation of Research Findings from Focus Group Discussions**

The results from the focus group discussions with five key informants were conducted to validate the research findings on the relationship between sports communication strategies and sports image creation with sports communication performance in Thailand. It was found that the research results developed from both quantitative and qualitative data are consistent with the research hypotheses.



## 7. Discussion

[8] described sports marketing communication as a process of creating understanding among media recipients. This understanding should stimulate interest in the sport being communicated, fostering a sense of participation and access to accurate information. [9] stated that this information should be publicly accessible to everyone. It is evident that broad communication requires collaboration with partners, which results in the effective dissemination of information from these partners, whether they are in the sports communication sector or various sports organizations. This collaboration ensures that the information can be transmitted efficiently to the target audience. Furthermore, [6] noted that effective communication relies on creating engaging content, allowing recipients to feel part of the communication process. In sports, this sense of belonging fosters attachment and closeness. [15] found that creating audience-participatory content can be expressed through visual communication, where recipients engage in sports or various competitions. Additionally, involving sports spectators in a two-way communication process enhances their sense of belonging and reflects increased communication effectiveness.

[9] further studied the impact of communication strategies through mediating variables that reflect the creation of a positive and socially accepted image, highlighting the professionalism exhibited by athletes during competitions, their sportsmanship, and the corporate social responsibility of athletes, sports personnel, and organizations. This includes fostering community engagement and exchanges with stakeholders. This is consistent with the findings of [7], which stated that image creation is a crucial mechanism for enhancing communication effectiveness in sports. This process leads to acceptance and openness to accurate information and widespread communication. Moreover, [9] argued that creating content that involves stakeholders provides opportunities for society to become part of the sports community and fosters an image of corporate social responsibility in sports. This aligns with research findings that demonstrate the relationship between sports communication strategies and sports image creation with sports communication performance in Thailand [22].

[17] showed the relationship between sports communication strategies and the effective creation of athletes' images, which requires promoting participation in the communication process through content that effectively resonates emotionally. [18] also emphasized the need for partners in disseminating information to reflect the professionalism of athletes, sports clubs, and sports personnel, fostering community engagement and leading to a genuine following and fandom for the sport, thus creating long-term relationships. From this research, it can be explained that sports communication strategies, including marketing communication, partnership collaboration, and engagement content creation positively affected sports image creation in Thailand.

[17] studied the professionalism of sports personnel, including coaches and team managers. The professionalism of sports personnel differs from that of athletes, reflecting the management skills and leadership of coaches and team managers. [23] explained that the relationship between professionalism and sports communication effectiveness was significantly positive, where professionalism was demonstrated through competition results, leading to pride among spectators, fans, and the general public. Additionally, [24] studied sports image creation through the demonstration of corporate social responsibility by athletes and sports personnel in terms of their accountability to fans and the general public. This includes promoting the image of athletes by participating in community activities, reflecting a non-exploitative attitude and giving back to society. This approach builds understanding through activities and communication processes, allowing the public to recognize and accept accurate information, thereby creating awareness that reflects long-term communication effectiveness. Thus, it can be explained that sports image creation, under the components of professionalism, corporate social responsibility, and community engagement, had a direct influence on the increasing sports communication performance in Thailand.

## 8. Limitations and Recommendations

### 8.1. Limitations

In this study, several limitations were identified for future research applications. The limitations of this research are as follows:



Data collection through interviews required communication via online meeting systems, which caused connection issues. Consequently, the interviews could not clearly capture the body language of the key informants.

### 8.2. Recommendations for Future Research

1. This research focused on sports communication strategies and sports image creation concerning sports communication performance in Thailand, primarily emphasizing the analysis at the managerial and policy levels. Future studies should explore individual-level perspectives, such as conducting additional research with practitioners at various levels of the communication industry and interviewing groups of sports communication practitioners and others related to sports to gain insights from different groups.

2. This research utilized a cross-sectional study design, which limited data collection to a single point in time. Given that the communication environment in sports may change continually. Future studies should adopt a longitudinal study approach to observe the long-term effects of sports communication strategies and sports image creation on sports communication performance in Thailand.

From the conclusion, discussions, and recommendations above, it is evident that the results of this research will benefit both the sports industry and businesses related to sports communication, as well as other industries and organizations responsible for sports communication, to create added value in the sports industry through effective communication. The outcomes mentioned above could lead to macro-level benefits for the overall industrial sector of Thailand.

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