

# **Mobile app - Can sports clubs now use it effectively?**

## **Case study of the Falco-Vulcano Energia KC Szombathely basketball team**

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*Abstract: A clear trend today is that screen time is increasing as smartphones continue to proliferate. Sports clubs are, therefore, also a worthwhile presence in phone apps. Why? The trend also shows that although screen time is increasing, time spent on social media is stagnating. Moreover, mobile apps are a direct way for companies, including sports companies, to reach consumers and fans. Another positive aspect of the app is that, as long as the social media platforms are in the hands of others (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok), the mobile app is fully owned by the developing sports club. We already see many examples of clubs abroad using this tool. Is there a case for it in Hungary? We looked for the answer to this question at the Szombathely basketball team. We looked at the mobile app of the Falco-Vulcano Energia KC team, its access, and possibilities.*

*Keywords: marketing, sports marketing, mobile applications, digital engagement*

## **1 Introduction**

The study of digital habits is of increasing importance, as we are spending more and more time with our phones in our hands [13]; [14]; [15]; [18]; [20]. The use of smart devices is accessible to all age groups, and their impact should be studied, because we use our smart devices and the different applications on them a lot, which can be used for development, recreation, and entertainment [2]; [6]; [18]; [21]. Both national and international trends show that time spent on mobile apps will overtake time spent on

social media [2]; [3]; [16]; [17]; [18]. The above phenomenon is more likely to be observed in the older age group, specifically 13-16 years old, before social media became widespread, as illustrated in Figure 1.

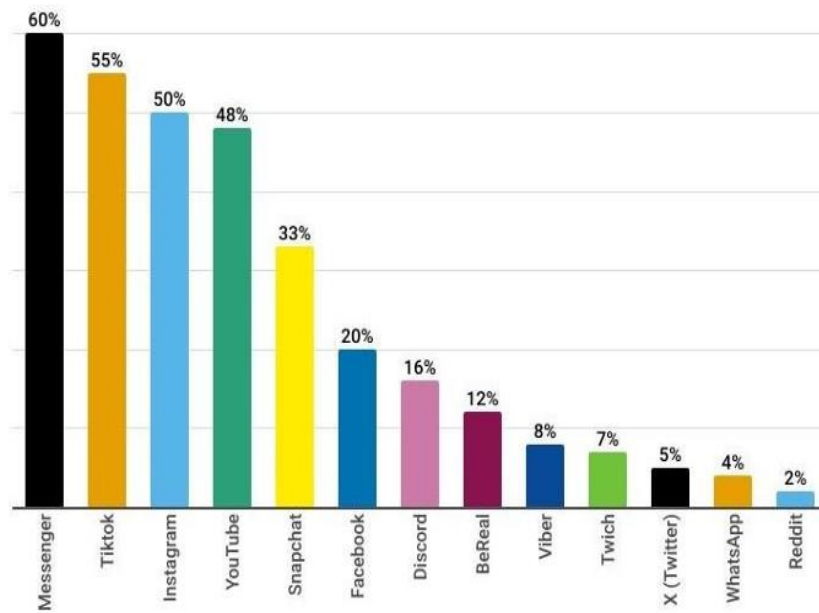


Figure 1  
Most commonly used apps among 13-16 year olds (in Hungary) [23]

The research, conducted in spring 2024, examined the 13-16 age group and found that Messengers and TikTok are the most commonly used apps in this age group, which is typical for this demographic. It was found that the two most important motivations in this age group are communication/connectivity and wordplay [6]; [8]; [9]; [13]; [20]; [21]; [22]. Messenger satisfies the former motivation, while TikTok satisfies the latter [23]. Technological developments in sport, and communication in particular, have brought changes. Due to the development of digitalisation and the increase of time spent on the phone, there is a growing emphasis on the development and maintenance of mobile applications [7]; [9]; [12]; [14]; [17]; [18] [19]; [21]; [22]. The following are ways to help sports clubs communicate with and engage with their fans:

- consumers receive information in real time,
- provide a personalised user experience,
- Build strong relationships between companies and users [9]; [14]; [16].

Professional clubs abroad are no strangers to sports business mobile apps, as they have seen the benefits of using the app to help drive fan engagement. Building engagement is important because a stronger brand love can be identified in engaged fans, which also means a greater willingness to spend [4]; [15]; [17]; [22]. After all, the team has become part of the fan's identity [5]; [8]; [10]. Social media, and even more so mobile apps, go hand in hand with fan engagement, as highly engaged fans are more interested in team news and want to receive information in real time [5]; [8]; [11]; [14]; [15]; [20]; [22]. To succeed, a conscious, planned framework has been created, and communication through mobile apps is playing an increasing role [5]; [11]; [15]; [16]; [17]; [19]; [21]. Despite this, the development of mobile apps in the domestic sports scene is still in its infancy, with few sports teams claiming to have their mobile app [3]; [4]; [12]. In our country, social media is still the most used and used by sports clubs, with few activation activities [2]; [4]; [12]; [17]; [20]. It should also be pointed out that, in contrast to social media, the application is in the hands of the clubs, so there is no need to fear that they will report their Facebook or Instagram pages, or that the platform will be withdrawn from Europe, thus eliminating the social media page of the team. Several researchers agree, there are three types of media for a business, including a sports club [1]; [7]:

- Owned Media
  - Owned media refers to the channels owned by a company to communicate directly with its target audiences and to control and use their content, which is managed by the company [1]; [3]; [7]:
    - Webpage
    - Blog/Vlog
    - **Mobile app**
  - Paid Media
  - Paid media is content that a company pays for to reach its target audience [1]; [3]; [7].
- Earned Media

- In marketing, earned media is content that is created by third parties about a company or product.
  - Shares and likes on social media
  - PR-articles
  - etc... [1].

## 2 Research question/Hypotheses:

The main question of our research is: How effectively does a Hungarian sports club, Falco-Vulcano Energia KC Szombathely, use its mobile app?

**Q1:** Which news topics are the most interesting for the fans?

**H1:** The opening rate of news about the team posted from Falco's mobile app is higher than the opening rate of the match result.

**Q2:** Does the opening rate vary depending on whether the club is playing a home or away match?

**H2:** The opening rate of match result news posted from Falco's mobile app is higher for away matches than for home matches.

## 3 Method

From the research questions, it is clear that our main objective is to provide statistical data and literature to support how a mobile application developed by a sports club can be integrated and monetized in the life of Hungarian sports clubs. The examples from abroad show that the development of mobile applications is of great importance. We want to show how an app can be used to build a dedicated fan base for a sports team, which can help to increase business-based revenues in the short and long term.

Our research was structured in two parts. In the first period, we carried out a document analysis, the keywords of which were:

- mobile app,
- digitalisation,
- digital engagement
- sports marketing,
- fan engagement
- notifications.

In the second phase of the research, the primary data collection started at the six-time Hungarian basketball champion Falco-Vulcano Energia KC Szombathely. In the

course of the joint work, we started to analyse the data of the notifications after receiving the permission from the company Pressenger (developer of the Falco-Vulcano Energia KC Szombathely mobile app) and the club of Szombathely. The developer provided insight into the software they use, from which we obtained the statistical data. The data collection period was from 7 October 2024 to 26 March 2025, so we could measure the performance of the notifications sent during this period. The system allowed us to categorise the notifications sent out:

- Game Days notifications
  - GameDay!
  - The results of the quarters
    - We only measured the notifications of the final results
- Non-Game Days notifications
  - Opta Facts
    - More interesting statistics on the next opponent
    - Day before the match (1 or 2 times a week)
  - Weekly Schedule
    - The team shared news about the weekly schedule of the team (practices, travels, games, off-court events)
  - The start of the online ticket purchase
  - Big news
    - Injury report(s), new player signing (we could not plan it, that's why we did not measure it.)

## 4 Results

The app was available in both the Google Play Store and the App Store during the period under review. The Szombathely club's app was downloaded by a total of 1708 people. - Thanks to the Google Play Store's rating option, 24 people gave their opinion, giving the club's app an average rating of 4.4 stars. On the Apple App Store, 6 people gave their opinion with a rating of 4.7. The above results show that fans value the club's activities.

A total of 345 notifications were sent out during the period under review (07/10/2024 - 26/03/2025). Focusing on the 6 months, we can observe the 1-2 notifications per day from the club mentioned above. There were days when the club did not send sales notices due to holidays or league breaks. In terms of data, fans opened the "Weekly round" most often for information about the club, with an average of 15.18%, which is outstanding because an average opening rate (taking into account all industries and notifications) is 2.7%, compared to the 15% opening rate for the notifications sent out by the club. The reason is simple: the fans are curious about the team's weekly schedule, and the Szombathely club is communicating this information promptly. The other permanent notification above the 10% opening rate is the "Interesting Facts"

section, which was opened 10.39% of the time. It is also clear that fans use the app not only to get information. The club app is used to buy tickets and products, to get information, and, importantly for the club, to reinforce the club's identity through its visual design.

Looking at our hypothesis, it is clear that match-related news is not the most-read notification. **Our hypothesis 1:** *The opening rate of team-related news posted from Falco's mobile app is higher than the opening rate of match results.* - Confirmed. Figure 2 shows the difference.

Name	Android notifications	iPhone notifications	Openings on Android	Openings on iPhone	Opening Rate
Yes	130085	79959	7866	6519	<b>6,85%</b>
No	64008	45331	7406	5349	<b>11,66%</b>
<b>Total amount</b>	<b>194093</b>	<b>125290</b>	<b>15272</b>	<b>11868</b>	

Figure 2

Comparison of statistics on matchday and non-matchday notifications in Falco's mobile app

It can be seen that the opening rate of non-matchday understandings is almost double. This does not mean that the fans of the club in Szombathely are not interested in the result, but thanks to the graphical presentation, they received the necessary information (final result) without opening the notification, as illustrated in Figure 3.



Figure 3

The notification of the Final Result

The opening rate of matchday result notifications was 6.85% in the period under review, while the opening rate of non-matchday notifications was 11.66%. The difference can also be explained by the fact that the fans in Szombathely followed the matches live (on the spot or streamed), so for them, the mobile app did not add any value. In contrast, the non-matchday notifications provided fans with news and information that they would not have been able to find out at home, so the higher opening rate is understandable. It can be observed that nowadays it is important for

fans to feel as close to the club as possible and to have as much information as possible from the club outside match days. This result also shows that the notifications and news about the club to the supporters can be decisive. The club also facilitated this through the so-called Call To Action method. In the non-matchday notifications, Sombathely used asking or prompting phrases to increase the opening rate, as illustrated in Figure 4.



Figure 4  
The use of the Call To Action

**Our hypothesis 2**, that the opening rate of match results posted from Falco's mobile app is higher for away matches than for home matches, **was confirmed**. The data is presented in Figure 5.

Name	Android notifications	iPhone notifications	Openings on Android	Openings on iPhone	Opening Rate
Home Games	76455	45756	4145	3564	<b>6,31%</b>
Away Games	53630	34203	3721	2955	<b>7,60%</b>
<b>Total amount</b>	<b>130085</b>	<b>79959</b>	<b>7866</b>	<b>6519</b>	

Figure 5  
Comparison of the opening rate of match result notifications posted in Falco's mobile app for home and away matches.

Figure 5 clearly shows that away matches are viewed more often (7.60%) than home matches (6.31%). What could be the reason for this? Fewer fans can accompany the team on away trips, so fewer people see the live events compared to home matches. The team also publishes the results on social media, but fans can "only" see the quarterly results, not the full picture or who scored the points. The team can also deduce from the results here the size of the fan base that, if they cannot travel with the team, is interested in all the statistics. With this information, the club can also calculate the number of "so-called hardcore fans", which in the long run will help them to communicate with sponsors in a data-driven and conscious way.

## Conclusion

The data and the trend shows that the time spent on screen time has already exceeded and will far exceed the time spent on social media. What does this mean for sports clubs? We need to move forward with digitalisation, but also keep an eye on trends and be aware that although social media is free, the platform does not belong to the teams, so they are exposed to the algorithms of Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and their decisions. By contrast, developing and maintaining a mobile app is a business-based activity in the long term. What does it take to make a successful app?

One of the most important pillars for the success of the mobile app is to share information that is of interest to fans. It's also important to remember that, unlike social media, it's not worth fighting for 5-6 notifications a day here because it will be counterproductive. Experience at the Saturday club tells us that 1 or 2 a day is ideal (match days being the exception). Working together with the club and Pressenger, the goal is to increase the open rate of notifications by adding pictures and even interesting text to make them more exciting, with the aim being nothing less than to get more people to read the article.

The research also provided answers to the question of when and at what time of day it is worth sending the notification (it is important to note that this can only be taken for the measured period and those using the Falco app). We did not specify hours, but times of the day, and the result was that the opening rate of notifications sent in the afternoon was higher than the opening rate of notifications sent in the morning. This may be related to the measurement of the distribution of total daily screen time, and the result was that we use our smart devices most in the afternoon. Many people work in the morning and may therefore be less interested in the information in question, while in the afternoon, after work or when a little tired, people are more likely to pick up their phones during work.

With the help of the data obtained here and the graphical display of the notifications, it is a good opportunity for teams to market this interface to their sponsors.

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