Exploring Constructive Communication in Community Sport:
A Systematic Review of the Literature

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the role of constructive communication in driving community sports through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. A total of 218 peer-reviewed articles published between 2017 and 2025 in the Scopus database were thematically analysed to examine how communication contributes to building inclusive, resilient, and empowered sports communities. The findings revealed five major themes: participation and social inclusion, digital transformation and community media, interpersonal skills and leadership, crisis communication strategies, and communication as a tool for social justice. The study highlights that open, empathetic, and collaborative communication not only enhances community engagement but also strengthens inclusive leadership and social resilience. Digital technology plays a significant role in expanding communication channels, although it requires adequate literacy and social sensitivity. The study recommends strengthening interpersonal communication capacities among coaches and facilitators, promoting inclusive use of digital technologies, and implementing continuous evaluation mechanisms to ensure the success of community sports programs.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

A. Conception and design of the study;
B. Acquisition of data;
C. Analysis and interpretation of data;
D. Manuscript preparation;
E. Obtaining funding

INTRODUCTION

Community sport has become an integral part of our social lives. More than just a physical activity, it serves as a space for people to interact, build solidarity, and pursue a healthier lifestyle together. In recent years, an increasing number of communities have recognised sport in strengthening social bonds and improving overall quality of life. However, the success of this movement depends not only on the number of participants involved but also on the quality of communication among those within it. Communication plays a vital role in keeping the dynamics of community sport alive and well. It connects coaches, participants, volunteers, and organisers. Recent studies suggest that well-directed and open communication can enhance the effectiveness of health promotion campaigns through sport and strengthen the impact of investments in this sector

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(Leonov et al., 2025). This highlights that it is not only the content of the message that matters, but also how the message is delivered and received.

Technological development has also brought major changes to how sports communities communicate. Today, digital applications are not just supporting tools but serve as central hubs of community activity, ranging from event planning and information sharing to relationship-building among members. A study by Sharma et al. (2024) illustrates how community management applications help reinforce social ties among sport enthusiasts while simultaneously increasing participation and coordination. In other words, technology has created new spaces where constructive communication can thrive. Waters (2013) also notes that sport communication has expanded to encompass cultural, political, and economic negotiations.

However, effective communication is not solely determined by the tools or media used. Interpersonal skills remain fundamental. Ghasemi and Norris (2024) emphasise the importance of active listening, clear and confident speaking, and understanding non-verbal cues in fostering a respectful and productive environment in sport communities. Ishak (2021) adds that communication also clarifies roles, builds motivation, and reinforces team cohesion and culture throughout the life cycle of a team. In more challenging situations, such as conflict or crisis, constructive communication acts as a buffer that can prevent issues from escalating. According to Koerber and Zabara (2017), sport communities with a culture of open and trusting communication are more resilient in the face of reputational pressures or crisis. This view aligns with Pöppel and Strauss (2024), who stress the importance of pre-crisis communication planning in sport organisations.

Moreover, strong communication impacts motivation and engagement among community members. Zheng and Wang (2025) found that coaches who foster positive communication within their teams can strengthen emotional and psychological engagement among athletes. Although their study was conducted at the athletic level, the findings are highly relevant for community sport, where shared purpose and a sense of belonging are essential. Furthermore, Jackson et al. (2020) argue that equitable and reflective communication in sport also creates space for social justice and amplifies the voices of marginalised groups. In this context, constructive communication is not merely a technical tool, but part of a democratic practice that promotes inclusivity and equity. Higgins (2024) also points out that communication in sport should be understood as behaviour that shapes team dynamics and athletic performance, particularly in high-pressure environments.

Through this review, the author seeks to reassert the importance of constructive communication in the mobilisation of community sport, not only as a theoretical concept but as a practical approach that can foster social change at the grassroots level. This study aims to explore how communication can serve as a solid foundation for sport communities to grow, adapt, and continue moving forward in the face of contemporary challenges.

METHODS

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to comprehensively examine scholarly articles that discuss constructive communication in the

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context of community sport. This method was chosen for its ability to provide a strong analytical foundation through a structured and transparent selection of literature. The primary source of data was the Scopus database, selected due to its extensive coverage and credibility as one of the most recognised international scientific indexing services.

The search strategy utilised a combination of keywords: "effective communication," "supportive communication," "collaborative communication," and "sport community." Boolean operators were used to link these terms and expand the scope of results. The publication range was limited to 2017–2025 to ensure that the reviewed literature reflects contemporary developments in communication practices within community sport.

All retrieved articles underwent a selection process guided by PRISMA standards, considering inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria encompassed articles published in peer-reviewed journals or conference proceedings indexed in Scopus, written in English, available in full text, and directly addressing communication issues within community sport activities. These included interactions involving coaches, participants, volunteers, and community-based sport organisation managers. Articles were excluded if they were duplicates, not peer-reviewed, or misaligned with the study's focus on constructive communication.

From the initial search, 314 articles were identified. After removing 27 duplicates and excluding 69 articles based on eligibility criteria, a total of 218 articles were deemed suitable for further analysis. The selected articles were then analysed using qualitative thematic analysis to identify key themes, such as the use of technology in community communication, interpersonal skills among coaches and participants, communication strategies in leadership, crisis communication management, and the role of communication in promoting social equity and inclusion. The synthesised findings were used to develop a conceptual narrative and propose future directions for the application of constructive communication in community sport practice.
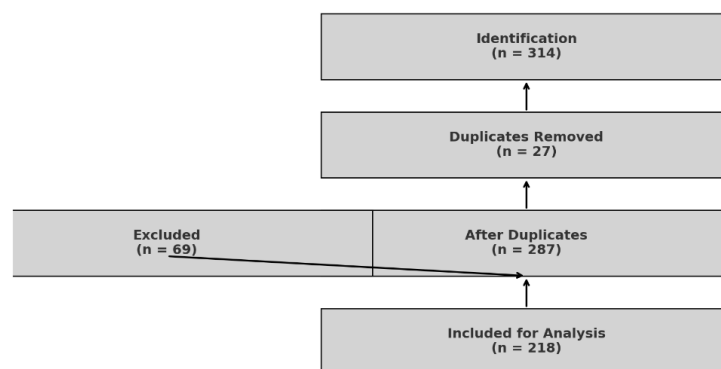

Figure 1.
Article Identification Flow (PRISMA overview)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the systematic analysis of 218 articles, five major themes emerged that illustrate the landscape of constructive communication within the context of community

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sport. These themes reveal how communication serves as a social foundation, a leadership tool, a medium for technological adaptation, a mechanism for crisis response, and a platform for advocating justice. Each theme does not stand alone; rather, they reinforce one another in shaping community sport as an inclusive, resilient, and reflective social space.

Table 1.
Themes of constructive communication in the context of community sport

No.	Major Themes	Total
1	Communication and Social Engagement	58
2	The Role of Technology in Community Communication	47
3	Communicative Leadership and Interpersonal Skills	52
4	Communication Strategies in Crisis Situations	31
5	Social Justice and Community Transformation	30
	Total	**218**

Communication and Social Engagement

Communication serves as the heart of public participation in community sport. When coaches or facilitators foster open and empathetic dialogue, community members feel heard and valued. Duncan et al. (2022) found that coaches who maintain two-way communication with parents and young participants are more successful in building trust in training programs. Shields and Synnot (2014) add that for individuals with disabilities, communication is not merely a channel but a prerequisite for participation. Adaptive communication creates safe spaces where people can contribute and thrive. Hermens et al. (2017) also emphasise the importance of inter-sectoral communication coordination to ensure that social services and sport activities complement one another effectively.

The Role of Technology in Community Communication

Digital transformation has not only changed how sports communities disseminate information but also how they shape collective identity. Sharma et al. (2024) found that community management applications have become a central hub for member interaction, particularly during times when physical spaces are limited. In Germany, Schallhorn et al. (2022) observed how sport organisations adapted through "mediatization," maintaining communal rituals digitally during the pandemic. However, digitalisation also presents challenges—not all participants have sufficient access or literacy. This underscores the need for communication that is sensitive to both social and technological contexts. Laumer and Maier (2024) emphasise that ICT-based volunteer training is only effective when accompanied by supportive and reflective communication. Without it, technology training may widen the gap. Digital communities must be built on the same foundations as physical ones: trust, clarity, and mutual understanding.

Communicative Leadership and Interpersonal Skills

Successful coaches and community organisers are not only technically skilled but also excel in fostering healthy interpersonal communication. Ishak (2021) argues that communication before and after sporting activities is just as important as during

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performance. Edwards et al. (2012) found that coaches who underwent imagery-based training became more psychologically attuned to athletes and adopted a more supportive communication style. Ghasemi and Norris (2024) identified five core skills in sport communication: active listening, assertive expression, non-verbal communication, empathy, and conflict negotiation. These are foundational for creating a supportive and nurturing community environment. Yeh et al. (2025) also noted that collaborative communication is a stronger predictor of effective community coordination than top-down instructional approaches.

Communication Strategies in Crisis Situations

In both internal and external crises—such as interpersonal conflict or public emergencies—communication is central to social resilience. Koerber and Zabara (2017) introduced the concept of crisis buffers: established communication structures that help communities remain calm and responsive under pressure. Schallhorn et al. (2022) documented how sport organisations that transitioned to digital communication without losing social warmth demonstrated remarkable structural and emotional resilience. At the volunteer level, Harman et al. (2021) highlighted that volunteer coaches often struggle with communication due to limited formal training. Poor communication increases turnover, while supportive communication improves retention. This underscores the importance of crisis communication training even at the grassroots level.

Social Justice and Community Transformation

Communication also plays a vital role in opening space for social justice within community sport. Jackson et al. (2020) stressed that communication must be deliberately inclusive, especially in amplifying marginalised voices. French and Cardinal (2021) found that many sport organisations formally adopt inclusive policies but fail to implement them meaningfully in daily communication practices. Mwaanga and Prince (2016) proposed a liberatory pedagogy in sport communication—an approach that fosters critical, reflective, and transformative dialogue within community sport settings.

Taken together, these themes demonstrate that constructive communication in community sport is not merely about message delivery strategies. It is rooted in relationships, social awareness, and the willingness to listen. Effective communication does not stem solely from technical expertise, but from the intention to build togetherness. The reviewed literature invites us to see that strong sport communities are built on communication that is sincere, participatory, and deeply respectful of diversity.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that constructive communication plays a crucial role in driving community sport initiatives. Based on a review of 218 articles, it is evident that open, empathetic, and collaborative communication can enhance community participation,

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support inclusive leadership, and strengthen social resilience. The rise of digital technology has expanded communication opportunities, although it also demands readiness and social competence from its users. Therefore, coaches and facilitators should be equipped with strong interpersonal communication skills and adaptive strategies. In the context of community sport, communication should not merely function as a tool for delivering messages but as a bridge for building relationships, promoting equitable participation, and advancing social justice. To that end, reinforcing communication values, ensuring equitable access to technology, and implementing continuous evaluation mechanisms should be prioritised in the development of future community sport programs.

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