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## SPORT FANS AS CONSUMERS: AN APPROACH TO SPORT MARKETING

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**ABSTRACT:** *This theoretical paper arises as a purpose of discussing the role play of fans as sport consumers on the marketing strategies, in professional sport clubs. This study is part of a project which will provide some other empirical papers which will use the fan perspective as one axis for analysing sport clubs in the São Paulo city, Brazil. In order to understand the sport fans as consumers, five topics were developed for contextualise them: (i) sport fans overview for explaining what fan means; (ii) loyalty and attendance for sport experiences in which the idea is comprising games as entertainments; (iii) sport fans as consumers in order to discuss what they love to consume; (iv) 'new' interactions between fans and teams, what does have been changed related to promotions? (v) and sport fans as foundations for revenues, what instruments sport clubs have used to get money from their fans? Therefore, this paper aims to highlight the point of view approached by literature to comprise the sport fans as consumers in sport club's business.*

**KEYWORDS:** Sport Marketing, Sport Fans, Sport Consumers, Customer-Fans.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sport consumers may have varying interests, motivations and reasons to attend games. The fan can be studied based on their behaviour and based on their degree of attachment to a team. Sport consumers are typically highly involved. They often follow sport closely. Still their behaviour might be driven by different features in team sport products, which they especially regard interesting. The motives typically differ by gender, sport and preferences. Also the points of attachment show differences as spectators might be attached to different aspects like teams, clubs, athletes and other fans. Some enjoy a variety of aspects in game experiences and for some others

a particular club has a great importance (Yoshida & James, 2010). Sport teams bring together people with varying socioeconomic backgrounds, who share a bond – an attachment to the team. Many fans appreciate that sport provides them an escape from everyday life. Thus, sport fans are a heterogeneous group and their range varies from casual fans to committed season ticket holders. This consumer group can be regarded as the most essential in the business of sport club. Popularity of the product attracts other target audiences. In summary, without fans there would be no demand to show games on tv and pay for those rights. In fact, without game-attending fans clubs would have problems attracting sponsor. The initial driver for a sport club's growth is the development of a fan-base (The Future of Sports, 2015).

In the meantime, across the world, it is seeing ever closer convergence between the sport and entertainment, as both sectors continue to rise to the challenges of new digital technologies which shape the way individuals may spend their leisure time. At the same time sponsorships and media rights emerge as the main engines of growth, putting the traditional dominance of gate revenues under pressure. Sport clubs are accused of charging more for tickets than providing entertainment in quality level to fans and spectators who pay for it. The same ultimately applies to the cost of media rights, which can knock on to the pay TV subscriptions funded by fan's subscribers. The balance between price and value proposition is further complicated by the deep sense of ownership that many sports fans feel for their club or sport (Clark, 2011; Collignon & Sultan, 2014; KPMG Reports, 2014). In addition, Maltese & Danglade (2014) argument that it's reflecting trends in entertainment such as brand and product placement, sport sponsors want to be embedded within the product, rather than just being a name on a shirt. As for fans retain a strong desire to be part of the live experience of supporting their teams. Thereby, this paper aims to discuss the role play of a fan, as a sport consumer, on the marketing strategies, in professional sport clubs.

## **SPORT FANS OVERVIEW**

Fan is defined as the person who thinks, talks about and is oriented towards sports even when – the fan – is not actually observing, or reading, or listening to an account of a specific sport event (Norris, Wann & Zapalac (2014). However, fan has also been defined as an affiliation in which a great deal of emotional significance and value are derived from group membership. In addition, a sport fan as one who shows consistency, dedication and loyalty with the commitment coming in three forms (Stewart, Smith & Nicholson, 2003; Johnston, 2004): (i) cognitive, as the consumer builds up knowledge about the sport and team; (ii) attitudinal, as the consumer believes strongly in the team and the sport; (iii) and behaviourally, showing his/her commitment through tangible acts such ticket or merchandise purchasing. Thus, fan are individuals who are deeply committed to the club, ergo, this commitment manifests itself in long term affiliation with one team (or club), in significant time and money expenditure, and in loyalty despite results, that is, commitment persists even when clubs are not performing well. According to Leal & Moutinho (2008), under this circumstance, several terms arise in defining and describing a sports fan, for instance, fanatic, passionate partisan, highly committed fan, vested fan, diehard fan and varying definitions supplied, this sampling of conceptualisations shows the range of definitions as well as the similarities and overlap.

For this reason, it is advisable established a distinction between mere spectators and fans. Spectators are individuals will observe a sport and then forget about it, while fans will have more

intensity and will devote part of every day to the team or the sport itself. However, the difference between a fan and a spectator lies in differing levels of passion. But, the differences between a fan and a spectator as well as the differences between highly and lowly identified fans. Then, sport fans are identified as individuals who are interested in and follow a sport, team and/or athlete, instead spectators are identified as individuals who actively witness a sporting event in person or through some form of media, such as radio, television, internet, etc. Spectators remain passive in their interaction with the game, they watch, analyse and appreciate, and sport fans participate in a different way. Sports fans create and shape the experience of sports, consequently, they are not passive receptors, but active parts of the game itself. They influence action on the field of play, true fans participate in the sports. Fans desperately impart emotional energy, support and distraction, whenever they can (Stewart, Smith & Nicholson, 2003; Johnston, 2004).

Thereby, being a sports fan is an active and lived experience. Fans discussing about their role, because they are not just spectators, they take part in the game and believe that their presence, engagement and involvement impact on their team's performance (Yoshida & James, 2010). By the large, four characteristics define the fans' profile (Mahony, Madrigal, & Howard, 2000; Johnston, 2004; Piipponen, 2011): (i) emotion: the fan involvement and identification with teams may often reach levels where individuals mood and emotions are influenced by team results; (ii) intolerance: some fans are particularly intolerant to other supporters who are not as committed to the cause as they are. For some fans, ordinary supporters are intruders and they complain that British teams from Premier League are focusing on their strategies to attract the suburban middle-class kids and their parents, first they support teams whether winning or losing, and they produce more money; (iii) supportive social contexts: sport fanatics manifesting in how they choose their friends, in the media they consume and the things they collect; (iv) memorabilia: fans have the tendency to collect various team and match related important objects. These phenomenon and terms is known as "capital collecting". Capital can include just about anything that can be collected – or bought – that represents the team or the sport, for example, books, records, clothes, posters, articles, autographs, photos, video of old performances, newspaper clippings, match programs, etc. Fans conserve the precious relics of their attendance, witnesses to the presence next their idols.

Therefore, the term 'fan', often popularly used and derived from the word 'fanatic', to describe individuals who willingly invest resources – either emotional and financial – in supporting their favourite sport team or club. According to Giulianotti (2002) and Leal & Moutinho (2008), fans do not represent mere spectators, but rather a fraternity of people who diligently and over prolonged period of time display their allegiance to a specific sport team of which they are fervent supporters. These individuals often subscribe to the unique culture or ethos of a club, immerse themselves within a community of other fans who share their passion for the club and loyalty embark on various endeavours that promote club interests, such as attending live matches at the stadium or purchasing the branded merchandise of the club. Sport fans of a particular team form the essence of what can be described as such club's collective currency in society. Funk (2008) highlights which this community of people represents the club as ambassadors, generates awareness of the club in the vastness of their numbers and generally serves the club's commercial and social interests by consuming the properties of the club as a business entity. For Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer & Exler (2008), this is based on brand community, the loyalty that sport fans experience in relation to their club and which influences their interaction with that club. Then, when fans feel part of this community, they may experience empowerment, which motivates and

encourages them to engage in positive consumer behaviours of interactions with the brand of their favourite team. Sport fan engagement encapsulates the passion that sport fans have for their chosen club, which in turn drives their investment in such club and ultimately leads to the growth and expansion of the club's interests.

## LOYALTY AND ATTENDANCE FOR SPORT EXPERIENCES

Motivation scale for sport consumption has been shown to accurately and reliably measure the motives of sports consumers. There are four key drivers that influence loyalty across sporting clubs, which were developed considering all teams competing in the United States in four major professional sporting leagues, as: National Basketball Association (NBA), National Hockey League (NHL), Major League Baseball (MLB) and National Football League (NFL): (i) pure entertainment value: is linked with team success and as such is more likely to be influenced in the creation of short-term loyalty or fair-weather supporters, rather than committed long-term fans, although, this variable is also influenced by factors not directly related to success such as the team's style of play or the quality of pre-game and half time entertainment; (ii) authenticity: index looks at the fans' perceptions of the game as real and meaningful with outcomes a true result of team effort. In essence the authenticity factor looks at whether a team plays with pride regardless of their win or loss record, an issue sports fans frequently cite as holding the utmost importance; (iii) fan bonding: driver looks at the personal attachment between fans and a team or team's players. The driver also examines the degree to which fans feel their efforts impact on the team. The idea is making spectators feel that they had contributed to the team's success was so important as winning; (iv) history and traditions: this component looks at the team's previous record of achievement and richness of the club's culture (Burden & Li, 2009; KPMG Report, 2014).

Table 1: Classification of Fans

Type	Incentive	Loyalty
Aficionado	Quality Performance	Loyal to the Game
Theatre-goer	Entertainment, Excitement	Moderate Team Loyalty
Passionate Partisan	Identification with Team	Strong Team Loyalty
Champ Follower	Winning Team	Loyalty related to Success
Reclusive Partisan	Identification with Team	Strong Team Loyalty, but Moderate Attendance

Source: Smith & Westerbeek (2003).

The sport fan may be classified into five groups. The classifications of fans were based on incentive to attend game and on type of loyalty, see table 1. First, aficionado is a fan, who is loyal to the sport and not to a specific team. He/she wants to see games with good quality performances. Second, theatre-goer has only little loyalty to the team and is thrilled by the entertainment and enjoyment provided by the game event. These first two classes have in common that their behaviour is driven by attraction to the sport and not by attachment to team. In turn, the latter three classes are all attached to a team. Third, passionate partisan identifies him/herself strongly with the favourite team. He/she is faithful, attends games often and follows team through good and worse. Fourth, success excites the champ follower. Loyalty lasts as long as the team is successful. The reclusive partisan is loyal to the team, but attends games only occasionally.

He/she might follow team also through media channels, and others typically have influence to their behaviour (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003).

Thereby, fans are often remarkably loyal to the team, but instead of being attached to team some customers are rather attached to specific players or coaches. Still, it's questionable which types of fans are most preferred. If profits are only taken into consideration, fanatics may even be less valuable than casual spectators looking for good entertainment and enjoyment. On the whole, the nature of loyalty is quite unique in sport. In traditional businesses customers might quite easily switch the provider, if they are treated below expectations (Yoshida & James, 2010).. However, if a loyal fan is not satisfied with the experience, switching the favourite team is still very unlikely. For many fans there is actually only one supplier in the market as they particularly follow football played by their favourite team and not football in general. It is argued that the demand for game tickets is inelastic, so the increase in ticket prices is not likely to diminish revenues. There are only few any substitutes for team sport products. Also, only small correlation has been found between season ticket renewal and fan's income suggesting that spending on game-tickets is not dependent on fans income level. Perhaps more expensive purchases are cut first if less money is available (The Future of Sports, 2015). Actually spectator sport has been speculated to be an inferior good. Basically, when people become wealthier they might find classy consumption habits decreasing sport's share spending.

For Tsotsou (2012) as well as Stander & Beer (2016), understanding sport consumer behaviour as a consequence of product and/or service satisfactions, several attempts have been made to list the motives for sport event attendance. By the large, eight motives were observed: (i) escape refers to one's diversion from usual life; (ii) some customers may also be driven by economic features, gained for example by betting; (iii) eustress is the result of gaining excitement and stimulation in sport; (iv) sport events may also enhance one's self-esteem; (v) group affiliation refers to event's social nature; (vi) sport customers search often also entertainment; (vii) family relates to the spending time with family; (viii) and aesthetic beauty concerns one's desire to seen the artistic beauty and the grace in sport. However, Shilbury (2009) summarise five sport motives considering psychological benefits that sport consumers desire from a sport experience.

- Social interaction represents a desire for sociability as individuals are motivated to seek a sport event experience owing to opportunities for the enhancement of human relationships through external interaction with other spectators, participants, friends and family;
- Performance represents a desire for aesthetic and physical pleasure as individuals are motivated to seek a port event experience due to opportunities to enjoy the grace, skill and artistry of athletic movement and physiological movement;
- Excitement represents a desire for intellectual stimulation as individual are motivated to seek a sport event experience due to opportunities for mental actions and exploration from the atmospheric created by the uncertainty of participation and competition and the spectacle of associated activities;
- Esteem represents a desire for competency as individuals are motivated to seek a sport event experience due to opportunities for achievement and challenge that produce a sense of mastery and heighten a sense of personal and collective self-esteem;
- Diversion represents a desire for mental well-being as individuals are motivated to seek a sport event experience due to opportunities do escape and remove from daily work and life routines that create stress.

## **SPORT FANS AS SPORT CONSUMERS**

Fan engagement provides a compelling strategic advantage to clubs, as it is engagement with the brand personality that moves people to actively consume club products and services offerings. Across the world, and within the domain of all flourishing professional sport codes, clubs leverage high levels of engagement of fans to enjoy sustained development despite sluggish economic growth prospects. Thus, engaged fans will actively seek opportunity to attend the specially arranged events of their preferred sport club, such as attending games or being present at special activations such as fan opportunities for meeting the players of that club. Engaged sport fans commit financial resources and emotional energy in seeking interaction with their favourite sport club (Leal & Moutinho, 2008; White & Absher, 2013; Stander & Beer, 2016). In other words, a sport fan is a sport consumer which spend on club merchandise directly to levels of fan engagement, i.e., engaged fans is likely to purchase club products, such match ticket, attire and general merchandise, on a frequent and continued basis.

The link between fan engagement and purchasing behaviours may be explained by customer engagement theory. In general, this theory argues that consumers, when considering a purchase of a product or subscribing to a particular idea, will conduct a cognitive and /or affective evaluation of the extent to which such a product, service or idea is aligned to their own personal values, preferences or moral and/or ethical. It means, when the consumer perceives congruence between his/her personal values and the offering of the product, service or idea, that consumer is likely to frequently display behaviours to consumption (Shilbury, 2009; Maltese & Danglede, 2014). For Norris, Wann & Zapalac (2014), the theory introduces marketing concepts in order to seek relationship with customers by emotional affinity aim to sales. Relationship marketing is complex as it is reliant on trust and identify with a brand, but when such trust and identity is established, repeated purchases are highly likely, and commercial growth will follow. Given that, fan engagement is related to relationship marketing as its reflects the absorption with a brand a sport fan experiences and is indicative of the long-term commitment and emotional investment the fan makes into the professional sport club's brand, making it an influential predictor of buying decisions.

Team loyalty has a significant positive impact on the fan's consumption behaviours and attitudes. This implies that generating maximum team loyalty, or fan base support, is significant goal of every sport team. Hence, team loyalty includes fan allegiance, fan loyalty, fan support, team attachment, fan avidity, fanship, fandom and sport customer loyalty. The more loyal a fan is to a team, the more they will engage to consume. Highly loyal fans are likely to view their expenditures as an avenue of supporting the team, as opposed to simply paying money in exchange for good or service. This turn leads to many fans being less price-sensitive when purchasing team or player merchandise (Piipponen, 2011). Collignon & Sultan (2014) state that fans as consumer have created several challenges and opportunities for television viewing preferences, customer service preferences and loyalty towards a team or player. In this case, understanding fans – as consumers – and what motivates him or/her to consume a sport product is also essential in to successfully create and deliver the sport product. With regard to motivation, sport consumers have been examined from both peripheral and psychological perspectives. The peripheral perspective focuses o on factors not directly related to the actual consumer, for example, the stadium capacity, geographic location, weather, and win-loss records. The psychological perspective examines factors related to individual fan perceptions, preferences and expectations.

Thereby, sport fan and consumer may be defined as a process involved through which individuals select, purchase, use and dispose of sport-related product, services and benefits. For this, sport marketers use sport consumer behaviour research to determine how to position the marketing mix – product, price, distribution, promotion, professional, process, performance and program. Research assists sport marketers identify how a sport product and/or service provides the opportunity to achieve desirable outcomes and develop effective marketing strategies that communicate these positive features (Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer & Exler, 2008; Shilbury, 2009; Maltese & Danglade, 2014). In general, the study of sport consumer behaviour examines attitudes and behaviours of the individual relative to sport products and services. Indeed, fan and/or consumer behaviour describes how individuals devote available resources of time and money toward sport consumption activities. For Blumrodt, Desbordes and Bodin (2013), the study of human behaviour is important for understanding sport consumers, such as: (a) psychology principles is that each individual is different and therefore each individual has a unique personality, different perceptions, life experiences, capabilities and interests, and importantly different attitudes, beliefs and values; (b) sociological principles, as it is undertaken individually as well as in groups.

By transferring the loyalty concept to fan behaviour, the following activities constitute a loyal behaviour in the team sport context: attending the favourite club's games live in the stadium, watching the favourite club's game on television, consuming other club-related media, purchasing club merchandise, wearing the colours or logo of their favourite club, and trying to convince others that the favourite club should be supported. Cross buying refers to a fan's practice of buying additional products and services from a favourite club brand in addition to the ones he or she currently owns, particularly, relevant for sport marketers today because most professional clubs now have brand extension strategies whereby they are expanding the range of branded products and services beyond club merchandise (Funk, 2008; Piipponen, 2011; White & Absher, 2013). Therefore, the sport consumption recommends (Clark, 2011, Maltese & Danglade, 2014): (i) using behaviour consumer for shaping the fan/consumer; (ii) segmenting them using by cultural, socially and demographically perspectives, and articulating them to the behaviour; (iii) explaining impacts of these segments considering sport club business; (iv) and defining a specific marketing mix in order to suite business of the club to target audience and behaviour consumer. Thus, sports fans act in the same way as consumers of other products, but, sports fans are particularly steadfast in their loyalty towards their club.

### **'NEW' INTERACTIONS BETWEEN FANS AND TEAMS**

By the large, being a fan is no longer just about watching and cheering. Empowered by social media, fans now expect an unprecedented level of access to players, coaches, and owners. What is more, they expected to be part of decisions that were once made behind closed doors. Besides, fans have increasingly used their collective power to influence leagues and franchises. With access to myriad twitter feeds and other sources of information, fans not only have more power but more potential points of conflict and disgruntlement. What might set them on the warpath will become increasingly difficult to predict. A team's financial decisions, broadcast blackouts, rule changes, trades, or off-field behaviour may spark outrage. In fact, social media can rekindle and give new life to long-simmering disputes, like the controversy around the Redskin's name and logo. Or, the backlash can happen nearly instantaneously. If a star player gets in an altercation at an after-hours nightclub, fans will be discussing and building consensus about the incident

before the sun rises the next day (Clark, 2011; Collignon & Sultan, 2014; KPMG Reports, 2014; The Future of Sports, 2015).

Originally, fans counted on sportswriters, talk radio hosts, and tv commentators to lead the conversation about their teams. Whereby, emerging generations of fans – armed with powerful media advices and always-on connectivity, and social media platforms with massive reach – have stated to take control of the conversation, effectively becoming a major media entity in their own right. Teams, leagues, and sponsors who fail to respond to activist fan movements rick major damage to tickets sales and brand equity. Thus, fans become an ever more powerful force in breaking news and creating consensus with little deference to traditional sources of information like sports journalists or official commentators. It recognises that everything about sports is participation and fan participation is critical (The Future of Sports, 2015). It is about engagement, giving the fan control, power and accessibility, i.e., that is what it means to be a fan. If a manager treat fans like customers long enough, eventually they will start behaving that way, reducing their irrational love for their team to a cool-headed, dollars-and-cents decision to buy tickets or not, with no more emotional investment that deciding whether to go to the movies or by new tires. Technology is radically changing the relationship between fans and the teams they love. The amount of content produced by fans uploading video streams and images of live games – from smartphones inside the arena – will regularly exceed the amount generated by official broadcasters – and will be seen by everyone around the world. Teams will designate fans-appointed ombudsmen to represent fans in major team decision; far-sourced input will be common. Mobile devices and augmented-reality headgear will display the statistical advisability of plays and audible before they happen. Thus, the balance of players, team, fans and media have shifted. Fans no long just watch, they participate, analyse, critique, deconstruct, fantasise and connect with their favourite players and teams in real time. Being a sport fan has never been so emotionally charged, or fun, as it is today (KPMG Reports, 2014). Over time as fans have gotten more and more organised, the ritual monopolies teams and leagues have enjoyed have been broken. League organisers and sport clubs will have to learn how to communicate with authenticity or be ignored.

For Norris, Wann & Zapalac (2014), the influence of social media on sport organiser and clubs is growing rapidly as channel communication. An increasing number of professional sports leagues are relying on the internet, social networking site and mobile technologies to market their team, citing it as a cost effective avenue for reaching a larger audience of sport fans – or consumers. The internet enriches the sport experience through in-depth product (team related) information, venue information and interactive experiences. In the point of view of Collignon & Sultan (2014), whether fans are watching their favourite team play from home, at the sports bar, or among 70.000 screaming fans at the stadium, sport marketers are eager to enhance experience and increase fan interaction by customizing the use of technology within each setting. Then, through technologies emerging today – flexible screens, motion controls, haptic, etc – or tactile – technology, smart glasses, virtual and augmented reality – the merging of real projected worlds will produce a seamless experience, a complete illusion. This sort of technology is just starting to learn and understand how to control, manipulate and share visual and aural perceptions. The possibilities are vast.

Thinking in those fans who are priced out of for attending live sporting events, third venues emerge as the go-to spaces to experience the newest and most exhilarating sports entertainment

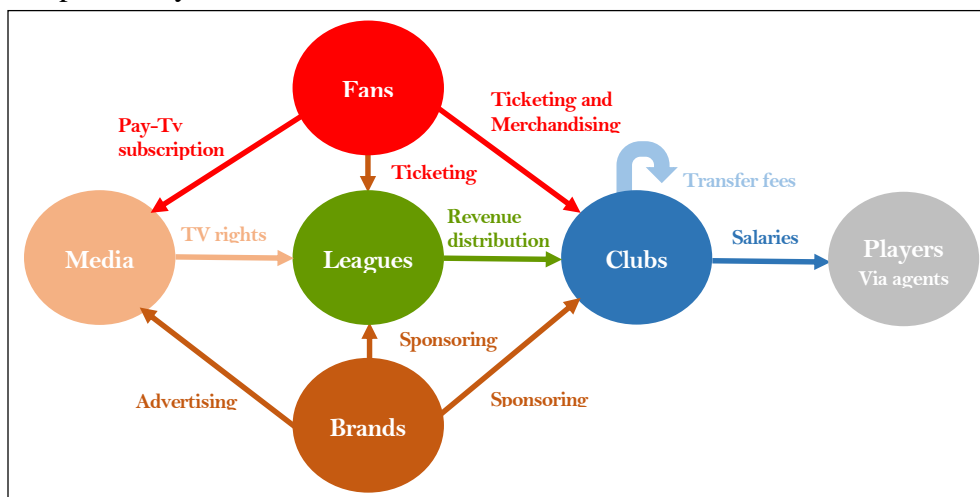


technology. Augmented reality, interactive table top technology, holographic replays, and 3D displays will make their first public appearances in the 21<sup>st</sup> century's family-friendly. Third venues offer the best elements of stadium atmosphere, more creature comforts than the stadium, and friends fans to celebrate with – the perfect integration of live and digital moments. This modular experience can be consumed a *la carte* to fit the personalised fan experience. Third venues will be the first place it will be able to see life-sized replays up close and in fully realised 3D. The first generation of these displays will not be true holograms – it will not be able to view them from all sides –, but they will still appear fully 3D to the viewer. Initially this technology will be used to enliven pre and post-game interviews. However, as the technology advances, it will bring life-sized instant replays into sports bars and luxury lounges. While bars are for adults, the third venues are for families and friends who want to feel a stadium atmosphere at home (KPMG Report, 2014; The Future of Sports, 2015).

### SPORT FANS AS A FOUNDATION FOR REVENUES

In the sporting market, with regard to fans, money flows in many directions, from fans to pay-tv providers, from fans to ticketing and from fans to merchandises, see figure 1. Fans are crucial elements for securing revenues to sport clubs. The sport ecosystem based on flow of money developed by Collignon & Sultan (2014) drawn the attention for attendance of fans in stadium and at home on TV. However, due to space (seats) available on stadium as well as big distances a new term arise, that is 'sport viewership'. Sport viewership are those people that watch their team play. This could mean that the games are consumed by attending the games or via electronic media, as pay-tv providers; they are titles as sports spectators. The more loyal fans are, the more they will engage in media consumption related to the team, including watching games. Highly loyal fans will often plan their entire schedule around watching games. Besides, these fans typically experience more pleasure and stronger emotional reactions when watching a game than casual fans. Watching games allow the highly passionate fan to feed their feelings of identification with the team. In fact, it seems that watching a game consummates the relationship between the fan and the team in powerful way.

Figure 1: Sport Ecosystem

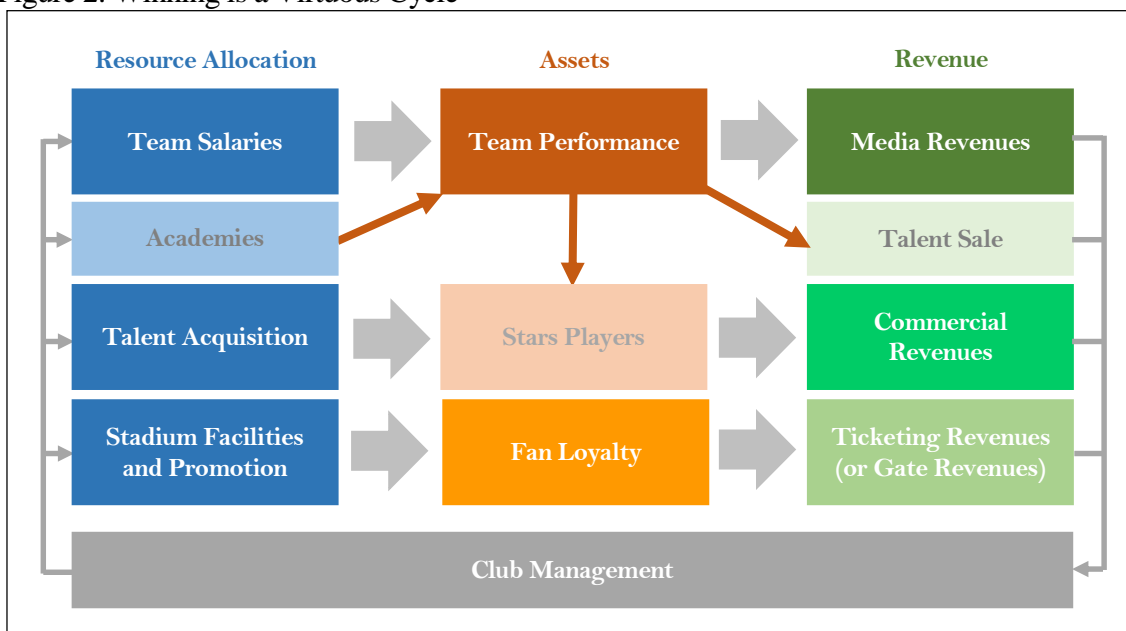


Source: Collignon & Sultan (2014, p. 6).

Nevertheless, for making money on sport professional, Collignon & Sultan (2014) use as references sport events, as Super Bowl in United States, Premier League in England or

Wimbledon in London. They recommend analyse five critical elements for producing revenues for sport club: fans, media, leagues, brands and club (itself). Fans excitations for spending their money to buy packages of pay-tv providers for matches and products relate to clubs, and, to become a membership of clubs. Media buying rights of matches for broadcasting for an audience of fans, which watching games using different platforms, as tv, websites and apps. Brands choosing right partner clubs, leagues and athletes and, also, choose the right types of partnerships, such as official partners, suppliers, naming rights for arenas or advertising inside of arenas. Leagues organise seasons and championships, although, in most case they also play an intermediary role in flowing revenues to clubs, especially, media rights money. Club obtains revenues selling tickets, licensed products, sponsorships and media rights; but revenues may be increased, clubs need to achieve three indicators: (i) performance, i.e., winning, it generates interest in fans, which it generates media revenue – viewership; (ii) presence of star players, who mobilise sponsorships, ticketing and merchandise – commercial revenues; (iii) loyalty, by membership in order to assist clubs to get more revenues, see figure 2.

Figure 2: Winning is a Virtuous Cycle



Source: Collignon & Sultan (2014, p. 9).

According to Clark (2011), Piipponen (2011) and The Future of Sports (2015), sport clubs require to rethink together the sport as business from league organisation for encouraging fans and, consequently, obtaining revenues. European and North American clubs (in several sports) have been found out that a strong sport club is unfolding of a structure and organised league. League is foundation for sport clubs share their motivation on rules, players, images and revenues. From league is provided all arrange of products and/or services that will be offered to fans, spectators and media, and, still, making business with sponsorship for improving revenues. European and North American leagues have achieved great result timing matches taking into account family viewing, television and in-stadium, suitable ticket pricing structure with special offers for family tickets, refurbishment of stadia, better viewing angles, spectators friendly game formats, broadcasting in at least two languages (local and in English), marketing involving sport celebrities

as heroes and ambassadors of various teams and engaging with school and colleges by offering student tickets driven to audience. Besides, leagues and sport clubs have created supporting infrastructure as facilities like restaurants, bars, fast-food chains, merchandise stores, book and music stores, etc. They have transformed in-stadium sport a spot of entertainment and experience unforgettable to fans and using the sport club brand for commercialising products and services for enhancing revenues and profits.

### **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Hence, marketing-driven strategies enable to sport to respond better to fans/customers' needs and to reach even more fans. Sport has turned in to be entertainment and economic success in becoming a more central element in sport. The sport business has also become increasingly more customer-oriented. Game facilities and other service-extensions have evolved; ticket process have increased significantly in recent years, and individual fans may not be able to afford tickets and corporations are more often ticket-buyers. In fact, technological development has improved sport's availability and experience. Following a certain team and/or league or finding out information of specific sport is constantly easier. Sport has great spectator appeal, which gives sport a chance to gain revenues from many sources like ticket sale, media rights, sponsorships, licensing of products, etc. The representatives of all different interest groups are naturally customer form sport clubs' perspective. As several revenue sources exist, sport can employ business and marketing professionals who further develop commercial opportunities. The most important target market for all sport clubs is still game-attending fans. Due to people's willingness to follow sport performances on site leads to that other customers – sponsor, media, etc. - consider sport products as interesting investment targets (White & Absher, 2013).

Indeed, for attracting more fans and spectators to events and, consequently, making more revenues, sport clubs depend on strong, structured and organised leagues, because sport clubs are associated to leagues. But, for making feasible a commercial league seven components required adjustment (Clark, 2011, Collignon & Sultan 2014; KPMG, 2014, The future of Sports (2015): (i) governance framework: need to be able to sustain and recognised by associated as an official sport federation for organising championships; (ii) league timing: the tournament (or championship) need to be organised, respecting fans, spectators, media rights and international time zone in order to attract more spectators around the world and positioning brand and team images and no competing with another leagues; (iii) players: hiring and involving top players of the country or, still, the world to maximizing the competition level within teams and, thus, attracting more fans, spectators and media focus; (iv) marketing: developing an effective marketing plan focusing on fans, spectators and, still, quality services by sport actors (or sponsorships); (v) fan base: planning marketing strategies for engaging fans in order to participate on sport events and experiences, understanding all of them as consumers; (vi) stadium infrastructure: qualifying all arrange of activities which are developed inside of stadium, before, during and after sport experience; (vii) game performance: improving the quality of games in order to capture fans, spectators, media and sponsorship interests for applying new investments. For presenting a quality entertainment, on the one hand, it is suitable five elements for offering a sport entertainment marketing-oriented (Maltese & Danglade, 2014): (i) suppliers in this environment are players. Their interest to play and their skills influence the success and the profitability of a club or league; (ii) customers are spectators or fans are the users of the sport product that is made in sport business; (iii) infrastructure consists of the services that guarantee the match performance such as sport arena or stadium and its supplements; (iv) competitors

which drawn attention to two features; first, there is competition between other sport clubs that participate in the same league, and the other feature is competition against other sport arts and even other leisure time activities; (v) groups of interests are stakeholders which assist and support sport clubs, ticketing, media, transportation, etc.

One the other hand, it is recommendable follow four steps for guarantying a sport event (offer) to customers-fans (demand), in marketing orientation (Shilbury, 2009; Piipponen, 2011; Norris, Wann & Zapalac, 2014): (i) developing an enhanced understanding of customers-fans: marketer sport teams should try to learn as much as possible of their consumers. It is essential to know fans' perceptions of the sport club brand. By enhanced relations responding to fans' needs will develop. Technology can assist in these efforts; (ii) increasing the interactions between fans/consumers and the sport club brand: indeed, teams should strive for enhancing regular interactions with fans/consumer to encourage players as well as coaches to attend would be a significant improvement. Product extensions such as sport bar, restaurants, museum or fan shops would also increase team's visibility; (iii) reinforcing and rewarding loyalty to team brand: traditionally in sport environment customers are forced to pay for being loyal. Rather than forcing customers to pay, voluntary and symbolic offerings could be provided. Recognising and rewarding fan loyalty is becoming more prominent; (iv) and consistent integrated marketing communication to reinforce key brand associations: long-term vision should be employed in the planning of marketing activities. Instead of on-field performances, which are always uncertain, emphasis should be moved to the core values the sport organisation wants to promote and communicate. Sport teams should put less focus on success in their marketing efforts.

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