INNOVATIVE WAYS OF CREATING AND NURTURING THE FAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract: Today, millions of people practice a wide range of sports, either professionally, to maintain their health or simply for hobby or fanaticism towards a particular discipline or team. Sport is part of a healthy life no matter how old you are - for children, however, it is much more important.
The importance of sport cannot be described but in a few words. It is a fairly broad topic that requires quite a lot of attention from us. In today's society that is moving towards a more sedentary lifestyle, there is a greater need for the daily level of activity to increase at any time. As a market product or service, designed to satisfy a need or desire of the consumer, sport is very special, due to the unique combination of its body and soul components. In our paper we aimed to describe the types of fans and the reasons that determine them to become fans of a certain sports club or a certain athlete, a brief description of the technologies that contributed to strengthening the connection between fans and clubs, and the presentation of the main ways to which aims at creating and nurturing the fan experience.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is obvious that the success and popularity of a sports team or athletes is due to fans, not only because fans are the heart of any successful sports organization as they buy game tickets or buy various products related to your favourite team or athlete, but there are also those whose passion and involvement in the team paves the way for sponsorships and media coverage.

Thus, it is very important to maintain and increase the fan base, especially since we live in this age of digitalization and technology, and sports clubs must find ways to maintain this advantage determined by the number of fans (Calder and Sternthal, 1980).

The fan is the reason why sports exist. Without fans, there would be no clubs, no athletes, no competitions (Florea et al., 2018). Imagine what football or tennis would look like if no one watched TV or went to the stadium. The result is easy to anticipate: these sports would no longer exist.

People are not born supporters of sports clubs. In fact, people are not born supporters of any cause, religion, philosophy or organization. People end up supporting a cause, an idea or a sports club by choosing from the options they have. Sports are governed by the following principle: it is about people, with people and for people.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 TYPES OF SPORTS FANS

The process by which people become fans of his sports clubs of various sports takes place over time. The critical moment of influence is between 5 and 8 years. The factors that influence the decision to support a certain club or a certain athlete are in the context in which the child lives his life.

After the decision to support a certain club or athlete, the fan begins to decide for himself, but still under the influence of the environment in which he lives how much he will support the club and thus in which category of fan will fall. The general tendency is for the intensity of the club / athlete's support to decrease and change over time. Fan behaviour changes over time because the forces that influence human life are stronger than the benefits that athletes and sports clubs bring (Barasch and Berger, 2014).

The sports show is a product with particular characteristics. It is an intangible, ephemeral, unpredictable and subjective product (Barbu, 2009). More is consumed then, at that moment. These features increase the complexity of the product, if fans want to capture all its facets. The interaction between sports fans who attend a sporting event is equally influenced by their perception of its quality. The management of sport clubs must do everything they can to attract and to increase the fans base (Barbu and Barbu, 2012).

The fan of sports events is often characterized by the fact that he has opposing orientations towards the managers of the respective sports franchise. Orientation is defined as an individual's inclination to adapt a predictable behaviour regarding the act of consumption. Studies carried out on participants in sports events (on sports consumers), on how to spend free time, consuming media, sports or purchasing things derived from sports products revealed that there are several categories of fans:

Super fans

The first category is called super fans. It is made up of individuals with a very high orientation. They have a consumer behaviour in accordance with their strong orientation towards the sports product - loyal viewers, important budget allocated to sports, time for sports reading (newspapers, magazines), various purchases of sports products, etc. This category is currently the most numerous;

Social fans

The second category consists of social fans. They consume fewer sports-derived products than super spectators, favouring the associated dimension of sporting events, and yet they are frequent consumers of sports, newspapers and magazines, of sports. They allocate a smaller budget to the sports product;

Experienced fan

The third category is the experienced fan - it is a modern global orientation in the general orientation that seeks a strong level of sensation and emotion when buying the sports product, and therefore spends a lot of time and money to live the sporting events. They buy fewer newspapers, magazines, etc. They are the ones who live the intense sporting experience itself; the latter category of sports consumers is represented by situational spectators. This category is the common point for the

orientation towards sports events. They attend them without being very interested in the franchise, the respective brand.

Citizen

This type of fan is loyal to the entertainment offered by the matches and wants to be close to the competition for the social benefit. He is interested in relaxation and sports. Citizen fan choices are about an interesting match, about a match that many people go to, grandstand 0 or VIP area, social media posts and so on.

Partisan

The supporter is loyal to the club and identifies with its victories and defeats. The partisan's behaviour is strongly influenced by the dynamics of the events around the club and is often found among the ultras.

The lone partisan

The only difference between the lone partisan and the partisan from the previous typology is of a behavioural nature. The lone supporter is not present at the favourites' matches, preferring to watch the matches in front of the TV or not to watch them at all.

The dominant feature is provided by social media behaviour. He fights a war with the supporters of rival teams on social networks to satisfy his need to win over the opponent by resorting to memorable matches of favourites, referees who influenced a certain match against the favourite club or for opponents and so on.

Social media is the forum from where the lone supporter encourages his team or defeats his opponents through comments, posts, shares and likes instead of banners, songs and chants as the supporters do (Cabosky, 2016).

The universal fan

His loyalty and behaviour are dictated by the winning clubs. The universal fan has the most trophies in his record because he only identifies with those who win. His motivation is provided by satisfying the need to identify with champions.

2.2 FACTORS THAT DETERMINE FANS TO CHOOSE A SPORTS CLUB OR AN ATHLETE

Fans are helped in the process of collecting information in the first years of life by the people around them. These people can be: family, friends, colleagues, teachers, neighbours and so on. The importance of the people the child comes in contact with in the first years of life is vital due to the perspective brought to the child and with whom he will work throughout his life.

The family

The family has the strongest influence on the fans. The member of the family with the greatest influence in choosing the club is the father. The child learns by imitating the figures he comes in contact with, and the father's behaviour is the most important to imitate by the child.

If the father is an active fan of a sports club and manifests his attachment around the child, the latter is scheduled to support the same club or athlete.

There are situations in which the father's relationship with the child is deficient, and the child rebels and ends the process of choosing the club by supporting the father's rival team. The same election result can exist in the case of families with several children (Berger, 2011). The tendency is for the youngest child to give up the choices of the older siblings and choose the rival club.

Other family members with the power to influence the child in choosing the club are mothers, grandparents and uncles. The ingredient that determines the choice is the type of relationship that the family member has with the child. If the child spends more time with a certain family member, he will have more influence.

Friends - colleagues

The fan spends an important part of his time with other children. If the decision to choose a club was not made at home, it will be forced by friends and colleagues to choose a camp.

Colleagues and friends put the fan in the situation of a) supporting the chosen club at home, b) choosing a club under social pressure and representing the choice or c) not supporting any club. The fan will shape his identity around the choice and will be influenced by it for a long time.

This process can be changed from generation to generation by technological issues, social changes and cultural trends. The essence remains the same: the choice of the sports club or a certain athlete is made at an early age (6-10 years) by collecting information and attaching emotions that are then translated into actions to represent the choice.

Positive characteristics of the club

People want to identify with winning clubs. Family and friends influence the child in choosing a club by presenting positive characteristics. The promoted positive features of the club will touch the mind and heart of the fan.

Some clubs will only touch the mind and will remain there only with a passing status, others will touch the fan's heart and cause him to become one.

The important action for the fan takes place in his imagination. The fan's mind takes information from reality which it then transforms into imagination so that it acquires a new meaning.

Sports clubs that win trophies or have won trophies are more likely to influence generations of children to become fans. People need to feel and experience success. For this reason, the clubs that dominate the domestic championships and those that are successful in international cups have millions of fans. People want to identify with winners.

In addition to the trophies won by the club, there are other positive characteristics that people take into account in their process of choosing the club. These positive characteristics are the vision, mission, values and tradition of the club. The choice of the club according to these characteristics is not one of volume, but compensates by intensity.

Attachment to these clubs occurs in extremely harsh social and political contexts. The foundation of the relationship between the club and the supporter is built on common values that come from political resistance, economic injustice, social frustration or cultural issues. Clubs become refuges of human life and allow him to repress more than to receive the feeling of winning trophies (Cosma and Orţănescu, 2014).

Another important aspect is the location of the club. People support the club located in the city or neighbourhood where they live. This type of choice is very common in communities where clubs are perceived as symbols.

The value that clubs offer fans is the sense of identity. Basically, the fans have the feeling that the victories and defeats belong to the communities and implicitly to them.

The positive feature that plays another important role in the process of converting people into fans is the age of the club (Stroe and Barbu, 2006). The club's tradition is built over the years and is proof of uniqueness. People want to belong and identify with organizations that have a tradition beyond the time of recent years.

The emotional foundation is represented by the fans' memories. They often appeal to certain matches, to lived experiences, to coaches and players that the club had and so on (Barbu, 2010).

Players and coaches

Fans interact with clubs through sports matches. Interactions take place in the stadium or on TV. During the matches, the field show is staged by the coaches and performed by the players.

Players and coaches are the strongest factors in the process of attaching people to clubs. They represent the heroes that people are attracted to and identify with. The role of the players is crucial in the strategy of football clubs to attract fans and keep the current ones.

People become fans of clubs determined by the qualities of the players. They make a psychological loan contract for these qualities.

This psychological contract is very sensitive because it is based on benefits that the person behind the supporter considers important without the player or the club being able to manage them (Bayer et al., 2016). Virtually any action on or off the field can positively or negatively influence the perception of the supporter.

For this reason, the way sports clubs manage the behaviour of their own players or coaches influences the fans (Cosma, 2017).

When clubs make transfers, they are not just buying or selling a player with certain qualities, but a package with a degree of popularity from which the club can win or lose. The most eloquent example is that of Cristiano Ronaldo who left not only a hole of 40 goals per season for Real Madrid, but also one of hundreds of millions of fans.

2.3 TECHNOLOGIES DESIGNED TO INCREASE THE LEVEL OF INTERACTION BETWEEN ATHLETES AND THEIR FANS

Technology contributes to the development of a relaxed lifestyle. It appears in all areas of life. We can no longer imagine our existence without it. It also entered the world of sports since the 1980s. Today, it has reached a higher level.

It gives you access to special online facilities as in the case of Betano; for example, you can bet on your favourite football team in reality, in a virtual game.

It is expected that the focus of technology development will be on the level of interaction between athletes and fans. 77.6% of the technologies implemented this year will be aimed at improving the relationship between them. In this sense, we discuss areas such as esports, live streaming, betting methods, etc.

16.3% of the technologies will focus on athletes, the main points of interest being their recovery and training platforms. The percentage of 6.1% is intended to strengthen the security of the stadiums (instant visual fingerprinting technologies, safety and protection of fans and athletes, etc.). Augmented reality, combined reality and virtual reality technologies will move to a new level.

They will be able to change the viewing angles of the transmissions up to 360 degrees.

VR glasses will continue to progress and improve the way they watch sports. As technologies advance, the line between athletes and fans will thin. In the end, the level of interaction will be almost complete (Barbu et al., 2020).

5G technology - the first step towards the digital sport of the future

There is still talk about the new technology that will revolutionize the way of communication starting with 2020. 5G technology currently means a leap to hyper speed of 1 ms. I mean, an almost instant response time. Online broadcasts will be continuous, fluid and without signal loss. The traffic capacity of a network will increase 100 times, as will its efficiency.

In sports, this means virtual training environments for athletes. XR (Extended Reality) will allow them to have a mix between bad and virtual environments as they never existed before. Footballers, basketball players and even racing drivers will benefit from multiple advantages with 5G technology.

Fans will be able to have instant replays from various angles. The way you watch the match at home will be completely different (in a positive way). There is even talk of providing personalized content for fans. This, even in a live broadcast.

Sports performance analysis technologies

AI assistants for athletes will help improve their performance. The data obtained during training will be processed at an advanced level to increase the effects on players (Dave, 2016).

Computer viewing technology

It is a market that will reach a value of 25, 32 billion dollars by 2023. It involves the development of the computer's ability to perform multiple visual recognition actions. It will have the ability to interpret and analyse data, including transmitting it in real time instantly. It will be useful for improving stadium security systems. It will also be able to generate dedicated video content, being an excellent sports marketing tool.

Atmospheric control technologies

They were successfully tested at the 2008 Olympic Games. They can be used to ensure a favourable environment when playing a sporting event.

Technologies that have helped the development of sports over time

Without them, sport, as we know it today, would not have been the same:

- High Definition 4K technology - watching sports broadcasts has taken to another level;
- Mobile live video streaming technology - fans now benefit from wearer matches;
- Player monitoring technology - streamlined the way they train, providing coaches with valuable information;
- Digital access technology to sports events - fans won in terms of time saved, and organizers in terms of safety;
- Virtual Reality Technology - watching sports content has become increasingly captivating.

3. METHODS BY WHICH SPORTS CLUBS OR ATHLETES TRY TO CREATE AND INCREASE THE NUMBER OF FANS

Sport is a specific field of activity in terms of the particular intervention it has in sectors such as health, education, social, economy. More precisely, it is estimated that due to the practice of exercise and sports, savings can be made in health budgets, with obvious benefits to the quality of life of citizens. In addition to promoting its positive values, the integration of sport and physical education into the educational curriculum can increase students' academic performance.

Also, in most EU Member States, at amateur level, sport is supported by the voluntary involvement of citizens in local sports associations that unite their own community around them, thus contributing to the cohesion of society as a whole. In some situations, sport can generate a national identity with implications, including up to a country's foreign policy. There is also a strong economic dimension to sport. In the European Union, for example, sport creates 5.66 million jobs and contributes to the formation of 2.12% of GDP. (Carlson and Donavan, 2013).

It is absolutely obvious that technology has made possible some performances that, not further than 15 years ago, were very difficult to imagine. The equipment has constantly improved, but it is obvious that not only the equipment is responsible for the progress of the athletes. Training style, nutrition, physical recovery are all the basis of progress in almost all sports. Thus, fans look at things differently from 100 years ago.

They want to get a complete experience when it comes to a match, the show offered. (Păsărin and Orțănescu, 2013).

Today, due to the evolution in which we live, younger fans want interactive and multi-screen experiences. Among the most common solutions that sports clubs use to create and maintain the fan experience are:

Diversification of the experience lived during the matches

Today, the basic requirements of the stadium experience (a good game and a clear view) remain important, but they are not enough to keep the fans involved, given the wild competition in the entertainment sector (Daugherty and Hoffman, 2014). So very important to win the loyalty of the fans and make them come back, sports clubs must create an atmosphere that fans could not get at home.

Digital signage solutions are used in indoor and outdoor spaces (indoor and outdoor) especially in stadiums with the main purpose of strategically displaying the message to inform the audience in a simple and interactive way.

In outdoor spaces, digital signage networks are present through large LED screens, which are strategically located in crowded areas with heavy traffic, such as shopping malls.

Digital signage solutions are constantly expanding.

Reduction of negative factors

Development of digital technologies such as intelligence artificial intelligence (AI), advanced robotics, scale connectivity the Internet of Things and large volumes of data, portable devices, mobile devices and platforms online, change the nature and location of work and determine who works and when, as well as organization and management work. Currently, digital technologies provide essential services for all sectors of the economy and our society.

Thus, through the development of technology, many of the problems faced by the organizers and fans in stadiums have been reduced, such as queues, insufficient and crowded parking spaces, wanting to create an optimal and memorable experience in the minds of fans before, during and after the end of the sports show. This ranges from real-time parking information delivery to hassle-free digital ticketing or seat food delivery.

Another major problem for today's fans is the lack of connection due to the large number of connections from the same place at the same time.

Using real-time data to understand the game

Regarding the problems that can occur during a match among the fans, the most common is the decision that fans have to make between paying attention to the atmosphere of the game or the information about the match. Thus, the organizers of sports events must be aware of these aspects as

well. They should be able to provide real-time match data and player statistics to improve the fan experience so that they have all this available through an application.

It could be a smart way to help fans have a better understanding of the game for beginners and will delight end fans by creating new ways to analyse the game.

Using AR technology before and during the event

Another way to contribute to the experience that fans have in stadiums during sporting events is augmented reality.

Thus, they have a content that they cannot access elsewhere.

It is a way to refresh the field before and after the game, but also during the game, using AR content on top of the players to improve and gamify the game.

Many teams have opted for this option, managing to create avatars of the main players.

Moving games to streaming platforms

As the entertainment side of sports has gained more and more importance in recent years, the sports streaming market has experienced a great development, contributing to the increase of sports league revenues. As the global competition is very high, sports representatives must create new ways for fans to share the joy that appears during sports matches and outside the stadiums, on the screens of different devices.

Using social media

Today, social media has become the main means by which athletes or sports teams promote or try to strengthen their image, but also to communicate with fans around the world.

It is one of the main ways to capture the fans' attention and keep them up to date constantly not only during matches, but also in everyday life (Billings et al., 2017). Social media allows for constant conversation between teams and fans and is also a way to get people to go to games more often.

The number of followers on social networks or the You Tube channel (the most popular website where users can upload various video and audio materials) is an increasingly accurate tool in terms of the popularity of a star, regardless of the field in which it operates.

The top of the most watched teams on social networks in 2020
1.Real Madrid FC (club founded in 1902) - 234.59 million social media fans
        Facebook - 111 million
        YouTube - 5.49 million
        Twitter - 33.7 million
        Instagram - 84.4 million
2.F.C. Barcelona (club founded in 1899) - 227.49 million social media fans
        Facebook - 103 million
        YouTube - 8.99 million
        Twitter - 32 million
        Instagram - 83.5 million
3.Manchester United F.C. (club founded in 1878) - 130.69 million social media fans
        Facebook - 73 million
        YouTube - 2.59 million
        Twitter - 21.1 million
        Instagram - 34 million
4.Chelsea F.C. (club founded in 1905) - 84.46 million social media fans
        Facebook - 48 million
        YouTube - 1.66 million
        Twitter - 14 million
        Instagram - 20.8 million
5.Juventus F.C. (club founded in 1897) - 87.52 million social media fans
        Facebook - 40 million
        YouTube - 2.52 million
        Twitter - 7.8 million
        Instagram - 37.2 million
6.Liverpool F.C. (club founded in 1892) - 78.33 million social media fans
        Facebook - 36 million

YouTube - 4.33 million
Twitter - 13.8 million
Instagram - 24.2 million
7.Paris Saint-Germain (club founded in 1970) - 77.49 million social media fans
Facebook - 40 million
YouTube - 2.19 million
Twitter - 7.6 million
Instagram - 27.7 million
8.Bayern Munich (club founded in 1900) - 75.47 million social media fans
Facebook - 49 million
YouTube - 1.37 million
Twitter - 4.80 million
Instagram - 20.3 million
9.Arsenal F.C. (club founded in 1886) - 71.2 million social media fans
Facebook - 37 million
YouTube - 1.7 million
Twitter - 15.5 million
Instagram - 17 million
10.Manchester City (club founded in 1880) - 66.7 million social media fans
Facebook - 39 million
YouTube - 2.4 million
Twitter - 7.7 million
Instagram - 17.6 million

4. CONCLUSIONS

Modern sports use sophisticated technology to improve performance. It helps athletes increase their accuracy and performance. Also, technology has promoted fairness in different sports events. Technology makes its presence felt in any sports competition, and this is beneficial for everyone. Especially when we talk about the big international competitions, which take place all over the world.

It is very important for sports clubs to keep up with the times in order to continually create and improve the fan experience because, as we discussed in this article, the sports industry will face a major challenge in the coming years: all digital technologies will change the way in which we play sports, but also the way we look at sports. Clubs need to find innovative ways to impress fans who want complete and unique experiences every time.

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