Bölüm 5

From Stadium to Digital Screen: Changing Dynamics of Sports Consumer Behavior

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Abstract

This book chapter explores the changing trend in sports consumer behavior from traditional sports venues to digital spaces. Building on the main theories like "Uses and Gratifications Theory", motivational models, the Psychological Continuum Model, Social Identity Theory, and the Experience Economy, it describes how digitalization and globalization have reformed motivational factors of sports fans, their engagement patterns, and the development of commitment. Digital spaces, streaming channels, and communities have extended access to sports consumption, allowing hybrid behaviors where physical and digital experiences coexist. These changes have affected key motivations, including information seeking, entertainment, social belonging, and identity expression. The chapter discusses how sports organizations and clubs should adapt to this changing setting by developing strategic, data-driven, and engagement-focused approaches. Finally, it underscores that while experiences in traditional sports venues remain valuable, contemporary sports fandom is increasingly characterized by hybrid, interactive, and digitally enhanced consumption.

1 Introduction

Stadium attendance has been among the most unique types of sports consumption in the 20th century. Besides, sports fans have been travelling to stadiums, attending fan-related ceremonies, and sharing experiences, identities, and cultures in their related communities (Yoshida et al., 2023). In the past, there were limited forms of sports consumption; TV broadcasting was one of them and was considered an alternative to sports venues. However, during the last two decades, sports consumption has been transformed with significant effects of digitalization and globalization. High-speed internet connection,

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digital social media spaces, and video streaming platforms have substantially changed how sports fans interact with sports (Haffner et al., 2025; Zhong et al., 2025).

This transformation is not solely an essential technological change but also signals a substantial reformulation of the sports fans' consumer behavior, their engagement, and motivational patterns (Zheng & Mason, 2022). In today's World, sports consumers typically utilize both physical and digital platforms, resulting in dual interactions across multiple platforms. Accordingly, sports fans can enjoy viewing live sports games globally through online streaming platforms, interact with other sports fans in digital spaces, and can purchase desired sports content and its related products without limiting their joy only to the game day (Haffner et al., 2025). As a result, most sports clubs and organizations face intense competition in the online market, requiring progressive data-driven engagement strategies (Christodimitropoulou et al., 2025).

This book chapter, therefore, aims to explore the changing dynamics of sports consumer behavior within the idea of the transition from physical sports venues to digital spaces. It starts by reviewing the main theories of sports consumer behavior, namely, "Uses and Gratifications Theory," "Motivational Frameworks," "Psychological Connection Models," "Social Identity Theory," and "the Experience Economy." Additionally, it investigates changes in consumption contexts, motivational factors in the digital era, hybrid fan experiences, and managerial implications

2. Theoretical Foundations of Sport Consumer Behavior

2.1. Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory provides information to comprehend the why and how people interact with specific media. According to U&G theory, the audience is the active decision-makers who select media to meet their cognitive, affective, and social needs. (Katz et al., 1973; Rubin, 1984; Ruggiero, 2000). In terms of sports, it indicates that sports fans intentionally choose the digital media content based upon the gratifications they seek, for example, information, social interaction, escape, or entertainment (Vale & Fernandes, 2018).

The importance of the U&G theory has increased on online platforms in which sports content is diverse and easily to access from everywhere (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Moreover, digitalization can improve consumer agency by enabling individuals to create personalized consumption models rather than

conforming to programmed broadcast forms (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012). Thus, U&G theory remains vital for comprehending today's sports media behavior.

2.2. Motivation in Sports Fandom

Motivation is the main element to comprehend the consumption in sports. In the related literature, there were some identified motives, including aesthetics, drama, escape, socialization, vicarious achievement, knowledge, and family attachment as the fundamental determinants of sports fandom (Wann, 1995). These motives were further expanded by Trail and James (2001), who developed the Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC), providing a solid tool to examine spectators' psychological motivators.

Although these motivational structures were initially formed in stadium settings, they still remain relevant in digital spaces as well (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012). Hedonic motivations such as drama and excitement are achieved through online live streaming, and, conversely, social factors are more frequently expressed through online communities and interactive media rather than traditional stadium settings (Filo et al., 2015; Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

2.3. Psychological Connection and Fan Development

According to The Psychological Continuum Model (PCM), sports fan development includes a series of stages. These stages begin with awareness, attraction, attachment, and end with allegiance. To build the psychological bonds, individuals need to repeat and expose themselves through emotional investment and lived experiences. Digital spaces can significantly influence this by accelerating the awareness, improving the action with constant exposure and attachment (Funk & James, 2001).

Furthermore, allegiance is commonly stated in digital platforms by frequent media consumption, navigating online fan communities, buying merchandise, and being on many online platforms. Therefore, PCM theory is still providing a precious framework to understand the transformation of fan loyalty in digital settings. (Yadav et al., 2023).

2.4. Social Identity and Team Identification

According to Social Identity (SI) theory, individuals get part of their self-concept from group membership, because of searching to be positive and belong to something (Tajfel & Turner, 2001). In the sports context, team identification is a strong psychological factor that has an impact on loyalty, emotional responses, and consumption. Indeed, it has been evidenced that

individuals with high team identification are more likely to attend games, view media, purchase merchandise, and engage digitally (Kwon et al., 2022).

Furthermore, digital platforms can strengthen SI processes because they can allow constant expression of sports fandom. Indeed, sports fans state their loyalty and identity openly through their social media profiles and online discussion channels, thereby improving their sense of belonging within broader communities (Choi et al., 2025; Lianopoulos et al., 2025).

2.5. Sport Consumption and the Experience Economy

Pine and Gilmore's (1999) framework, "the experience economy framework," suggests that there is an upward trend in consumers' expectancy for the precious and memorable events and emotional memories. The nature of the sports is highly experiential, mainly shaped in the ritualistic environment and emotionally intense stadium atmosphere. However, with the advent of digital spaces, the experiential connection extended to allow deeper interaction and immersive consumption beyond sports venues (Chohan & Schmidt-Devlin, 2024).

3. From Stadium to Screen: Transforming Consumption Landscapes

Traditionally, sports fans have attended sports venues, mirroring a sense of community, emotional closeness, and shared reality. Yet, economic constraints, travel preferences, and changes in lifestyles can limit live participation in sports venues. Simultaneously, digital streaming platforms and mobile technological advancements allowed sports fans to view sports games from remote locations (Caulfield & Jha, 2022).

These advancements have led to different types of consumption patterns. Today, the digital spaces are more accessible globally, reaching their audience conveniently and allowing sports fans to watch many different games around the World. Even though the traditional way of live attendance still has its value, digital streaming services have become the primary form of sports consumption, particularly for the younger generation (Pizzo et al., 2018; Hutchins & Rowe, 2012).

4. Motivations and Experiences in the Digital Sport Consumer Era

Digital sports settings have a significant effect on reshaping the classic motivations. Below are some examples of these motivations, considering this trend.

- **Information seeking** is substantially improved since sports fans can easily reach the game-related statistics during the games via mobile digital technologies

- **Hedonic motives** maintain their essentials by having been satisfied via high-definition streaming.

- **Social motives** are still the center point of sports consumption; however, primarily in digital spaces. Digital channels enable sports fans' interaction, even though they are not physically present at sports venues.

- **Identity expression** is now driven by digitalization in sports consumption, which has made sports fans more visible through interactive engagement (Filo et al., 2015).

5. Digital Fan Engagement

Digital interaction instruments have become one of the most important keys to managing sports organizations. Platforms in social media help sports fans interact emotionally. Research suggests that engagement with social media is fueled by entertainment, identity, social interaction, information, brand love, and empowerment motivational factors. Today's research in sports management focuses on engagement in digital spaces to improve loyalty, trust, and affect sports consumption. Thereby, engaging sports fans has become a pivotal part of the sports business (Mohammadkazemi & Falahat, 2024).

6. Hybrid Consumption: Integrating Physical and Digital Experiences

In the modern age, the screen and the stadium coexist in hybrid ecosystems. Accordingly, a great majority of the sports fans adapted themselves to both digital screens and live attendance at stadiums. For example, they attend live games in stadiums to experience the joy and other emotions, but at the same time, they look at their digital screens to follow real-time game statistics, etc., during the games (Çelik & Şirin, 2023). On the contrary, in digital spaces, the stadium atmosphere is simulated via some special interactive features to attract remote sports fans (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012).

Besides, the increase in the hybrid trend can even be seen in sports venues, as they are equipped with mobile connections and other digital features to improve sports fans' experience (Pizzo et al., 2018). Thus, the contemporary consumption of sports fans should be designed both digitally and physically.

7. Implications for Sport Organizations

Since the changing nature of sports consumption requires adaptation, sports clubs and organizations should comprehend a wide range of consumer behaviors, such as stadium-focused sports fans, hybrid sports consumers, and digitally oriented sports fans, and adapt their strategies in this manner. Moreover, combining the design of experience is crucial for the harmony among both the digital and the physical contact points. Furthermore, data analysis plays a key role in the management of engagement and decision-making parameters.

8. Conclusion

The shift from physical environments to digital settings is one of the most important changes in today's sports consumption. Many classic theories still have their value; however, they need an adaptation for the digital spaces. In the modern era, sports consumers generally focus on both digital and physical settings, and they are primarily driven by motivational factors like entertainment, belonging socially, expressing identity, information, and taking part.

Instead of a downward trend for live sports events, the rise of digital spaces forms a hybrid sports consumption that is influenced by personal needs, engagement, globalization, and the desire to interact with others. From the point of view of scholars, this transformation process provides a number of opportunities for advancements in existing theories. For the sports clubs and organizations, it clearly demonstrates that there is a need for adaptation in order to maintain engaging and future-oriented sports fan engagements.

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