


GSIC

Global Sports Innovation Center
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Sport SINGAPORE

NEXT-GENERATION FAN ENGAGEMENT:

THE COMING TOGETHER
OF CONTENT,
COMMERCE, CODE &
THE CONSUMER

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ABSTRACT

This white paper is divided into two parts – the first half details how the historical business model of Sport is gradually eroding due to the fragmentation of audiences due to the proliferation of smart phones and 4G data connectivity. The second half show cases innovative fan engagement solutions using next-generation technologies such as augmented reality, computer vision & blockchain across baseball, football, volleyball and cricket.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF AN INDUSTRY DRIVEN BY PASSION

Innovation and technology are redefining all industries, and sport is no exception. Today all organizations are immersed in the digital transformation by making it part of their day to day processes. In the sports sector we see it reflected more intensely in areas such as teams and athlete's performance, data analytics, esports, smart stadiums, media, sponsorship, and above all, in what makes this industry move with passion and emotion: the fans.

We are witnessing the consolidation and arrival of new technologies, tools and platforms for analysis and measurement that are destined to change the classic model that has traditionally sustained sport. If this was already a reality before, after the COVID-19 pandemic it became one of the greatest allies of the sports organizations.

Global Sports Innovation Center powered by Microsoft understands the importance and power of fans to move the industry forward, which is why we decided to dedicate the fourth and final whitepaper of our pandemic-inspired series to this topic. This edition is special, because all the best practices showcased in this document are the ones of our members. With their examples we seek to inspire the industry to continue contributing to the development and promotion of digital transformation processes in what concerns broadcasting, consumer data analytics, data driven decision making and other important points related to fan engagement.

Concluding with honour this series of whitepapers, I want to thank Sport Singapore for being part of this remarkable project as well as for our shared commitment towards digital transformation and development of the sports industry.

I am sure that this is not the end, this is only the beginning of a new path in a long journey that GSIC has started back in 2015. In the years ahead, the force of rapid technological change and globalisation will bring new challenges and great solutions, and we will be there to keep abreast and to be a speaking trumpet for the whole sports tech ecosystem showcasing inspirational examples of remarkable people and organizations who compose the exciting world of sports.



Iris Cordoba Mondejar
General Manager
GSIC powered by Microsoft

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sport is the only content genre, in the face of the ongoing digital disruption, that's retained its appointment-to-watch value, compared to historical contemporaries such as news, movies, and, entertainment. This is due mainly to Sport being unscripted drama, a gladiatorial battle between heroes, and teams who share historical rivalry with the end result unknown at the beginning of every battle. Such rare magnetism's also allowed the business model of Sport, based on ever increasing revenues from television, to have enjoyed unprecedented growth over five decades.

All that is changing, and fast.

The explosive adoption of smart phones through the course of the last decade, fuelled by 4G data connectivity, is changing consumer behaviours as the next-generation hasn't followed the content consumption patterns of its predecessor. The biggest impact has been the fragmentation of consumer attention that has dwindled audiences for television and challenged the continued monetisation of Sport's rare appeal.

Thankfully the intrinsic value of Sport remains, as a mode of communal recreation and tribal entertainment. However, its packaging needs to adapt to the new environment, and place a high premium on convenience so it can compete more successfully, for attention, with the innumerable alternatives available to fans.

Fans, therefore, must also now be treated as customers, who have choices, and, can vote – as much with their feet, as with their eye balls. In order to treat them as customers, sports entities must recognise the urgent need to not treat fans as a singular, and homogenous, whole but rather an aggregation of consumer segments whose needs are often similar but rarely the same. First-party data about fans (such as their email, mobile phone number or address but not their name as its disallowed under new regulation) has a central role to play in converting this realisation into relevance, reach and, ultimately and inevitably, revenue.

Technology, as ever, holds the promise to shed light on the possible ways in which Sport can maintain – and even regain in some instances – its former dominance as the leisure pursuit of choice for the mass market. In contrast to the past, when broadcast television sets provided access to millions, the narrowcasting mode of the mobile phone is a more appropriate avenue to engage billions of fans around the world who are separated by nanoseconds in enjoying live coverage of the same match. The combination of first-party data and new technologies such as Augmented Reality, Computer Vision & Blockchain have the potential to change the economic basis of Sport in the course of this decade.

This paper starts by detailing the macro trends that have led to the fragmentation of broadcast audiences, which poses question for the sustainability for Sport's business model. It then dwells on the types of consumer data that became important with the onset of digital, and, the growing centrality of such data in decision-making. It then proceeds to summarise five case studies from young businesses based in Singapore, Bangalore, Vancouver, Madrid and Tel Aviv that provide a sense of what next-generation fan engagement can and perhaps should be whilst recognising that it's still early days and that the use cases will become more sophisticated in their impact, over time

Over the past decade, the manner in which fans engage and brands activate with Sport – whether it's federations, leagues, clubs, media partners in broadcast, digital or social, athletes, event promoters, venues and/or governments – has rapidly, or even radically, changed due to the rapid and vast improvements in digital technology that's reduced the cost of distribution and devices.

Historically, the majority if not the entirety of the Sports experience was defined by, limited to and built around the match day. The federation or league and their broadcast television partners had a monopoly in the creation & delivery of appointment-to-watch experiences. For the first three decades of the medium's existence dating back to the mid 1950s, Fans 'paid' for the experience through a license fee for public service broadcasters such as the BBC or watching advertising spots within live match or studio broadcasts on Free To Air (FTA) television stations in the USA, Europe and Japan.



From the 1980s, as Cable enabled the rise of Pay-TV channels and led to the emergence of niche, genre-specific channels such as ESPN, fans began paying for value added services through a monthly subscription under annual contract – in two waves. The first was during the decade of the 1990s, and included additional, and more bespoke editorial services such as match highlights, the pre-and-post shows, local language commentary & graphics, daily sports news bulletins etc.



The second, from the turn of the century, involved superior technology features or functionalities such as on-demand or real-time-catch-up viewing, surround sound for home entertainment, a more pristine picture quality through match coverage in higher definition video from HD to Ultra HD in 4k, and a personalised experience through access to multiple single camera feeds and a single set top box feeding multiple television sets within the same home etc. as digital cable or satellite TV took root.

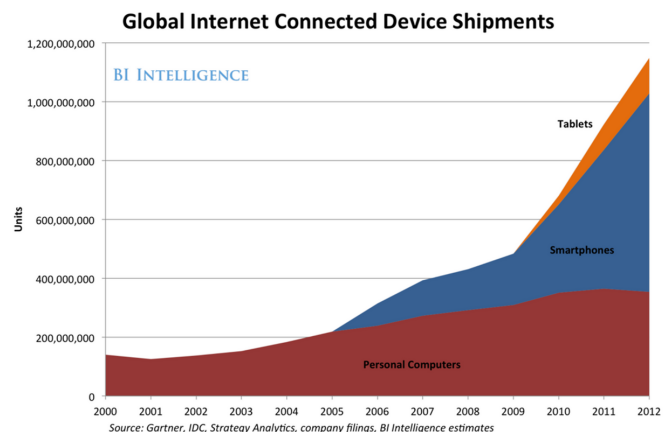
Takeaway 1: Fans had a leaning back experience wherein the match day experience and content outside of it was consumed in a passive or one-way communication from the anchor in the studio or at the ground to the fan on sofa or in the bar. All that would change through the second decade of the 21st century as technology would impact consumer behaviour in an ever-increasing manner.

The second decade of the 21st century witnessed two trends that have changed the dynamics of fan engagement and brand activations. The first (2010-2015) was the rapid adoption of smart phone devices and affordable 4G mobile connectivity whilst the second (2015-2020) has been the growing maturity of next-generation technologies such as Machine Learning, Computer Vision, and Blockchain.

To gain more context on the velocity and magnitude of these changes, we will be well-served by observing the impacts of these two trends, that are increasingly operating in tandem, in other, far larger, and more mainstream, consumer-facing sectors such as retail and entertainment.

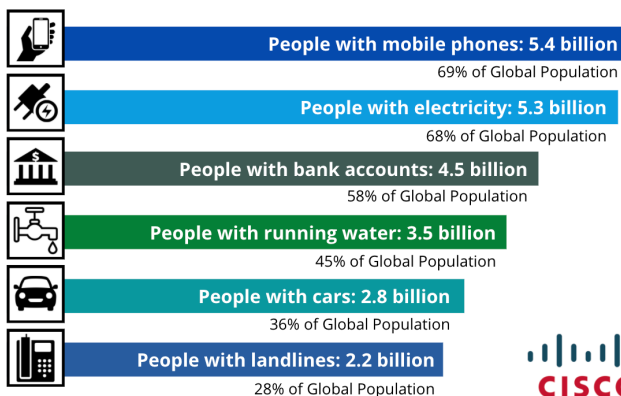
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Mobile Growth Continues Through 2020

By 2020, more people will have mobile phones than electricity at home

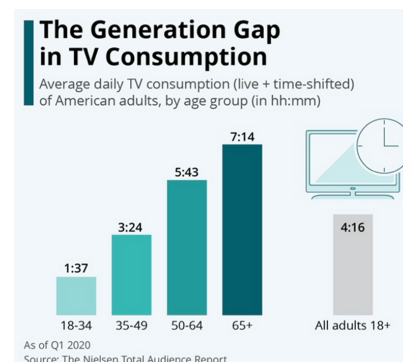
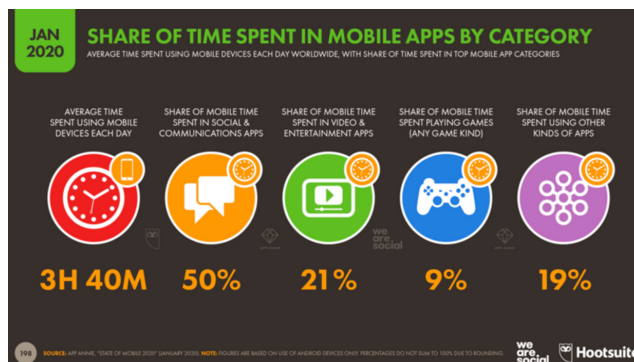


Sport, by comparison, has been a laggard in adopting these new tools and technologies to engage their consumer base – the fan. Various startups in diverse locations ranging from Tel Aviv, to Bangalore, Singapore, Vancouver have been innovating on fan engagement and brand activation playbook using next-generation technology. They have faced head winds as the industry enjoyed a fourth decade of growth from the historical model that was ironically based on broadcasting at a time when audience attention was being narrowcast.

Takeaway 2: The rapid digital transformation undertaken by the Sports industry in the aftermath of COVID-19, and hence mostly under duress, recalls similar reactions witnessed in the music industry in the early 2000s and the print publishing sectors at the beginning of the last decade. Notably, much of the digital rejuvenation of both the Music & Publishing was driven not by incumbents but by players and technologies that more often than not began their existence outside of either of those sectors.

One of the biggest repercussions of the explosion in mobility over the past decade has been the change in consumer behaviour and within it, a seminal shift in the tastes & preferences of fans with far-reaching repercussions on the business model of Sport that's long been based on or around televised sport.

Historically, fans had committed large windows of time to watch appointment-to-view sports events in front of their televisions, either at home or in public spaces such as pubs & bars. The proliferation of smartphones coincided with convenient access to other genres of entertainment content such as music, gaming, comedy etc. that was more amenable to be consumed either on the move and/or in small quantities that fitted well with pockets of time that are often described as the 'magical mobile moment'.

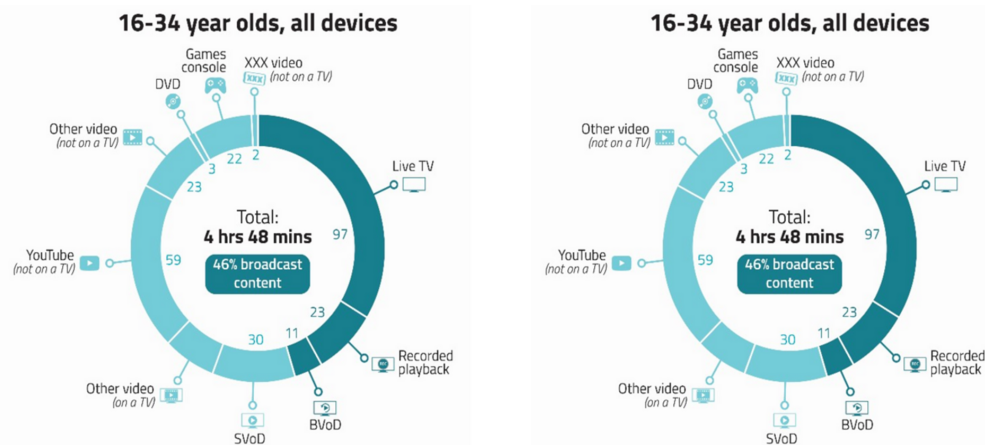


Sport's initial response to remain relevant as windows of engagement began contracting involved short duration match highlights. Such content was made available not only on the website and app owned & operated by the said federation, leaguer and/or club/team/franchise but also found larger audience on the social media networks such as YouTube, Twitter & Facebook around the world as well as Sina-Weibo et al in China.

During the same period that saw the rapid adoption of smart phones, social media networks also began attracting ever-increasing proportions of consumer attention. This was driven as much by the ease of discovering a diverse range of relevant content at the touch of a button as by the social interaction (through actions such as like, share and/or comment) afforded by the design of these platforms.

Takeaway 3: The combination of the above two trends saw fan behaviour depart from its historical self, in two notable ways. First, the 'always-on' search, if not thirst, for sports content by the fans on a 24/7 basis. This was in stark contrast to the limited three to six-hour broadcast window on match days that had become the staple of TV coverage. This consisted of shoulder programming until an hour before the start, followed by the pre and post-match show from a studio, ideally on location, that sandwiched the live match broadcast itself. The second, was the 'leaning forward' nature of engagement on sports, wherein the fan not only consumed what was published but also commented, debated and on occasion protested about the events of the day which added to the narrative and discourse. By contrast, television found it hard to include the fan's voice in the broadcast given the risk of antagonizing one or the other camps which had commercial repercussions.

The net result of these changes has been the growing trend towards segmenting the fan base of a sport - akin to a consumer marketing driven company such as Unilever - rather than treat all fans under a single category as part of a homogenous whole.



A segmentation terminology based on a three-tier definition into Fanatic, Fan & Follower, has been used by federations and leagues, and reflects a focus on fan engagement centered on match day, or, at best, the duration of a weekend or tournament.

THE CLASSIC FAN

TYPICALLY AN OLDER FAN (35 AND OLDER)
HAS ONE TEAM IN EACH SPORT
THEY'RE DEDICATED TO
SPORT IS A BIG PART OF THEIR LIFE

IN THE STADIUM

WATCHES REPLAYS ON
IN-STADIUM SCREENS AND
ENJOYS HALF TIME AND
PRE-GAME ENTERTAINMENT

WILL BUY TEAM MERCHANDISE
FROM THE OFFICIAL OUTLETS AT
THE STADIUM

HAS A SEASON TICKET -
GOES EVERY WEEK

AT HOME

PAYS FOR ADDITIONAL LEAGUE
SERVICES AND SPECIFIC SPORTS
CHANNELS - 45% OF 45 AND
OLDERS PAY FOR SPORTS TV

FOLLOWS SPORTS ONLINE
THROUGH NEWS SITES AND
TEAM CHANNELS - 81% OF
SEASON TICKET HOLDERS
FOLLOW SPORTS ONLINE

WILL DEDICATE TIME TO WATCH
SPORTS ON PAID SPORTS
CHANNELS

WILL PAY ATTENTION TO RIVALS'
GAMES BUT NOT WATCH THEM
IN-DEPTH

THE CONNECTED FAN

TYPICALLY YOUNGER (18-24)
WILL SUPPORT A PARTICULAR TEAM AND LOVES ANYTHING
THAT GIVES THEM MORE INSIGHT INTO THEM
IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE AS MUCH SPORTING
KNOWLEDGE AS THEIR FRIENDS

IN THE STADIUM

WILL ATTEND A LIVE GAME
EVERY 50 OFTEN

WILL USE TEAM OR STADIUM
APPS FOR INTERACTIVE MAPS
OR SERVICES AND ORDER FROM
THEIR SEAT

WILL USE THEIR MOBILE PHONE TO
UPDATE SOCIAL MEDIA WITH UGC AND
CHECK STATS AND SCORES OF OTHER
GAMES - 75% OF 18-24 Y/O'S PREFER
FOLLOWING SPORTS ON A SMARTPHONE

AT HOME

WILL WATCH LIVE STREAMS AND
HIGHLIGHTS VIDEO CONTENT ONLINE
DURING LIVE SPORTS - 81% OF 18-24
Y/O'S MULTITASK WITH TABLETS OR
SMARTPHONES

WILL USE LEAGUE AND TEAM
APPS TO LEARN EVERYTHING
ABOUT THE CLUB

WILL BUY TEAM MERCHANDISE
FROM THE CHEAPEST OPTION
ONLINE

THE CASUAL FAN

MIDDLE AGED FAN (25-34)
IS A FAN OF GENERAL SPORTS, WON'T PICK JUST ONE SPORT
OVER ANY OTHER
SPORT IS A SOCIAL THING

IN THE STADIUM

WILL GO TO ONE OR TWO
GAMES A SEASON - MORE
LIKELY A HIGH PROFILE GAME

WILL USE MOBILE PHONE TO
POST TO SOCIAL MEDIA AND
MAKE CALLS - 45% OF PEOPLE
USE PHONES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA
AND 58% TO MAKE/TAKE CALLS
INSIDE THE VENUE

AT HOME

PAYS FOR TELEVISION SUBSCRIPTION
WHICH LIKELY INCLUDES SPORTS

WILL WATCH MORE SPORTS IN A
SOCIAL SETTING LIKE AT A
SPORTS BAR

USE THEIR MOBILE DEVICES TO
READ NEWS AND WATCH
HIGHLIGHTS ON THE MOVE
77% FOLLOW SPORTS ONLINE

Takeaway 4: To maintain the relevance of its business model on media & sponsorship, Sport needs to adapt. This has led to an increased sophistication in media rights, such as the creation of short duration clips or licensing augmented reality. Sponsorship's had to prove attribution in fan engagement whether the upstream generation of awareness or downstream confirmation of intent or purchase via brand activations. To compete with search, social or ecommerce-based media spends, Sport needs first-party data about fans to be able to treat them as consumers, and, eventually, as customers - this represents an opportunity entry point for innovative technology solutions.

With third-party cookies being discontinued, Sports entities have no choice but to build their first-party databases to identify and engage fans; this recognition's driven innovations in fan engagement & brand activations, a trend that preceded COVID-19 but has been accelerated since.

The growing centrality of first-party data about fans within the economics of Sport is due to the recognition of such information being the primary currency to achieve strategic aims, such as:

- Create direct relationships with fans as permissible by regulation via owned platforms
- Identify segment & estimate the size of the fan base across device, language & geography
- Understand how, when, where, and crucially why fans want to engage with a Sports entity
- Be informed about how best to revise the media rights matrix to monetise fan attention
- Create 'content-to-commerce' pathways for brands to monetise the fans as consumers

However, the capture, collation & curation of fan data to drive engagement has been challenging:

- 1st party data is deficient due to limited existent investment in the necessary technology, human resource or strategic focus in the C-suite to drive insights-based decision-making;
- 2nd party data from partners varies in duration & scope, is not consistent or comprehensive, and, is a patch work of aggregation that's sub-optimal to address the entire fan base;
- 3rd party data is being made unavailable from 2022 by the likes of Apple and Google which is creating a structural vacuum as all Sport entities had a high dependency on this source.

Takeaway 5: The growing absence of data about fans is a strategic concern for Sport at a time when the centrality of insight in its business model is growing and will continue to throughout this decade:

- **Sponsorship in Sport, based on the 'awareness-intent-purchase' fan journey, is being challenged by Social & Search as both channels quantify attribution in the demand funnel. Hence, Sport needs to find a data-driven attribution model for future renewals with brands;**
- **Content, be it live & linear match coverage, highlights and/or documentaries are still powerful magnets to attract the fan, but it's new buyers such as eCommerce platforms or brands require Sports entities to map purchase intent and/or desired segments to price and fan base;**
- **Match day event revenue sources such as ticketing, food & beverage & merchandising increasingly view the fixture(s) as the beginning of a customer life cycle rather than a finite window of opportunity and seek fan data to confirm projections or plan suitable activations;**
- **Host Cities or Countries who pay large sums to secure major sports events, will have limited access to capital during what's expected to be an economically recessionary decade, so data about domestic & foreign fans will help to quantify spend and qualify return on investment;**
- **Player publishing, typified by the Twitter following of Ronaldo (89 Mn), LeBron James (48 Mn) & Virat Kohli (39 Mn), is less at risk, but, if we Music is a forward indicator, athletes will also need to launch their owned & operated digital assets to access data about their fans.**

Case Study 1: ImagineAR, Canada Curating Engagements for Minor League Baseball During COVID-19

The U.S.A. enjoys the most mature Sports industry in the world with large investments across the media, sponsorship, ticketing, merchandising, fantasy and most recently, betting rights across the four major leagues – the NFL, the NBA, the MLB, and, the MLS. In addition there is a healthy culture of talent pathways within the major leagues such as Minor League Baseball (aka MiLB). The latter is away from the commercial spotlight, and often are more open to experimenting and trialing new things. The Vancouver, British Columbia headquartered ImagineAR met with such a success during COVID-19.

In the first instance, it was engaged by the Louisville Bats, the development team for the MLB's Cincinnati Reds. When the pandemic led to the cancellation of the 2019-2020 season, the Bats needed to create value for their corporate partners/advertisers and continue promotional engagement with their fan base.

ImagineAR created three campaigns for the Bats based on use cases involving Augmented Reality, as below:

- The first initiative was a fan engagement interface within the ImagineAR app that served as a digital connect for team restaurant partners in Louisville, Kentucky USA, activated using the AR NEAR ME functionality. **The commercial return was the seamless way in which the franchise transferred fans to retail partners, using geo-targeting.**
- The second initiative was an AR Scavenger Hunt (echoing the Pokémon game that took the world by storm in 2016) with sponsored clues and trophy cards delivered to the smart phones of registered users. **The commercial return was engagement being a funnel to collect first party data such as mobile numbers;**
- The third initiative was a content concierge chat bot that combined tips & tricks from players and coaches that were especially well-received by those who were home bound, offers and specials from brand partners, and, socially responsible messages for the community. **The commercial return was a more engaged fan base, and especially one that's younger than most.**



Support our restaurant partners and practice safe social distancing while enjoying the **Louisville Bats** mobile phone augmented reality experience powered by **ImagineAR!** Follow the easy steps below and you'll be entered to win prizes such as tickets, autographed memorabilia, game day experiences & more!

Participation is FREE. Just download the ImagineAR app from the App Store (IOS & Android), visit one of our restaurant partners, take a photo & share on social media with the AR Buddy Bat at the location and you'll be entered to win!

BONUS: Visit two or more participating restaurants, upload your photos using the form below, and we'll send you **FREE TICKETS!** Details below.

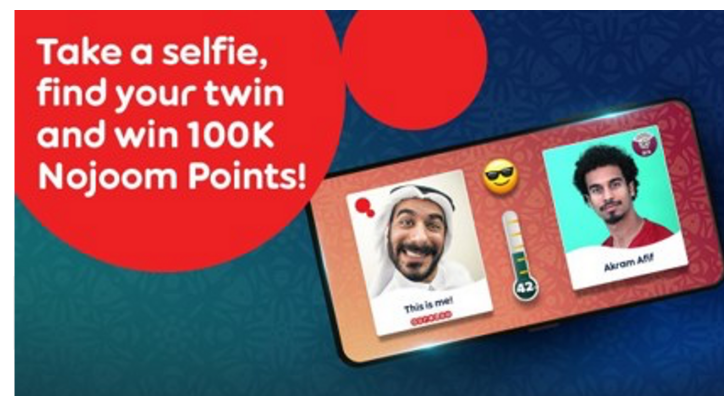
Case Study 2: Brintia, Spain & Ooredoo, Qatar Enabling Augmented Reality Gamification In Premium Club Football

In December 2019, the 16th edition of the FIFA Club World Cup, a tournament between the winners of the six continental confederations as well as the host nation's league champions, was hosted across two venues in Doha, Qatar.

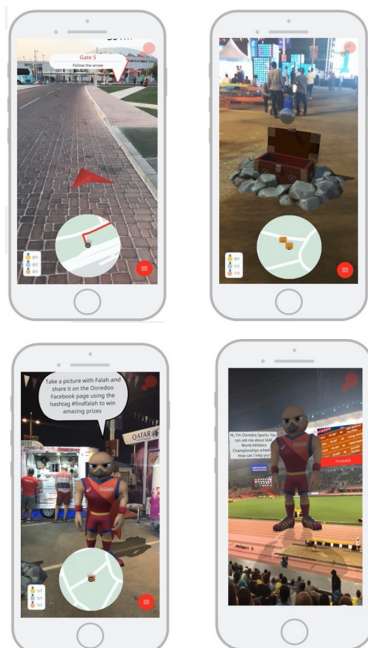
Ooredoo, a tournament partner, was seeking to amplify its vision, "to better service customers and improve their digital lives". More specifically, the national telecom operator was keen to increase interaction with customers through their recently launched platform, Ooredoo Sport.

Brintia, the Madrid-based digital agency, was engaged by Ooredoo and created an all-new Ooredoo Sport App that included three distinct, yet related, experiences using Augmented Reality:

The first was a mobile-centric gamification of a Selfie Twin Comparison where fans sent their photograph to the Virtual Assistant (VA) who would analyse and return the player they resembled the most. This was a simple yet evidently scalable use case because every fan desires the chance to literally have their "image & likeness" matched to a star. The matching function added an element of surprise to the fan engagement which therefore generated high potential for the photograph to go viral when shared on social media by the fan!



The second use case was of an extremely practical nature that combined well with brand activation and commerce. A Wayfinding AR experience was implemented into the Khalifa Stadium, one of two tournament venues. Fans were able to scan their ticket to find the correct entry gate and use an immersive guide map thereafter for directions to their allocated seat. Fans were also prompted en route, as they passed select locations, about brand activations and purchase opportunities to use their loyalty points. The experience not only improved foot fall to avoid congestion but also incentivized and habituated fans to integrated mobile commerce opportunities.



Takeaway 6: During the 13-day tournament, Ooredoo obtained a deeper understanding of their customers through the data insights generated from 16,000 selfie uploads and 4,000 conversations. It was also able to create a digital community of sports fans that enabled it to engage with this segment after COVID-19 pandemic halted domestic league matches. The continued engagement with fans outside of the live match day experience helped the telecommunications operator to avoid churn and maintain subscriptions

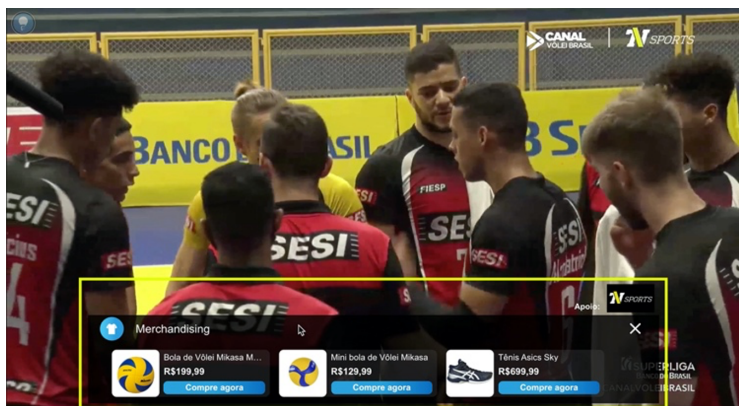
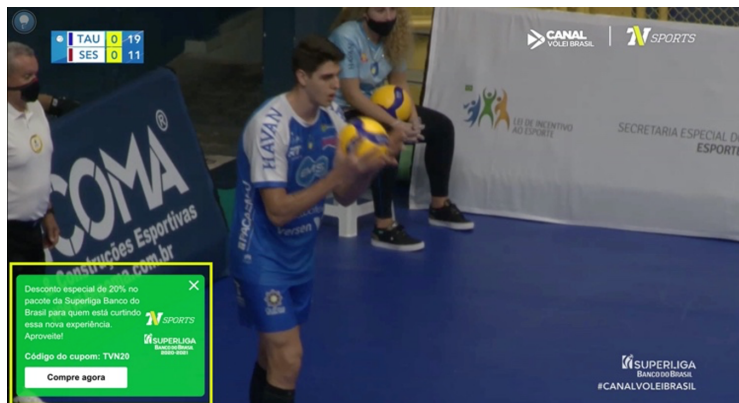
Case Study 3: Edisn.ai, India Curating Engagements for Volleyball & Football Fans During COVID-19

On Page 5, under Takeaway 3/5, we mentioned fans consuming content in a 'leaning forward' mode since the physical interface is more likely to be smart device (and typically a mobile phone), rather than a television set. This creates opportunities to engage fans during a high emotion moment within the live broadcast of the match, either through a deeper, and additional, layer of editorial or through an ecommerce transaction opportunity around a topical asset such as apparel, or goods & services from an event sponsor.

The Bangalore-based startup, Edisn.ai, uses Computer Vision to identify a player or a sponsor logo on any video, whether it's a live match stream or available as an on-demand asset, and click on the image to create a parallel experience whilst continuing to watch the match. This creates value on multiple fronts

By clicking the player image, fan can dive into statistics, purchase merchandise linked to what the player is wearing, and place bets on the player's performance or the result of the match s/he is playing. All this happens whilst retaining full view of the live match coverage by overlaying relevant data on the video feed.

Sponsors can also gain benefits with their logos being displayed over the data layer on the video feed, that a fan can click through to conduct ecommerce, avail special offers and/or register their loyalty by participating in polls and other emotionally connected, 'leaning forward consumer activities.



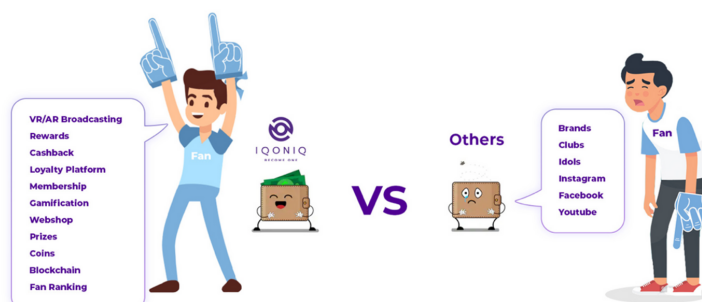
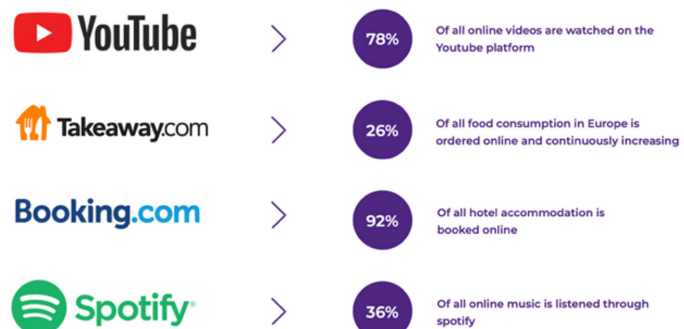
Takeaway 7: The commercial value of such fan engagement solutions using next-generation technology is expected to come to the forefront as media rights depreciate due to the fragmentation of audience on television. Sport entities will have to explore additional ways to monetise the live match window when fan engagement is at its highest as is the potential to commercially harvest the fan's time, loyalty and, crucially, his/her wallet.

Case Study 4: IQONIQ, Monaco Creating the ALL-IN-ONE Experience for Sports & Entertainment

The fragmentation of **broadcast audiences**, witnessed over the past decade, has been driven by two alternative avenues that have attracted the fan's attention and moved eyeballs away from the television set to the smart devices. The first wave was led by **digital media assets** such as websites and mobile applications that were owned & operated either by sports entities such as federations, leagues & clubs as well as by publishers. The second wave was led by **social media** that seamlessly became a second-screen for fans, enabled the creation of communities, and, gave a voice to player-publishers, fan-influencers & branded content.

The combination of the two trends outlined above, and especially the velocity and ubiquity of growth by the social media networks, and more recently by the chat platforms, is set to repeat the challenge of fragmenting audience for the second time in a decade! Sports federations, leagues & clubs are increasingly cognizant of not knowing the identity of their fans since the former are tenants – not landlords – on the social media and chat networks where fan spend much of their time in communities.

Cases to support the ALL-IN-ONE Solution



IQONIQ is seeking to go a step beyond aggregating all sports fan. It's created a suite of services as a means to provides fresh or additional incentives, based on use cases of next-generation technology such as Blockchain, Augmented & Virtual Reality.

The intent is to provide immersive, and personalised if not bespoke experiences for fans so they adopt the platform, spread the word to reduce customer acquisition cost and spend time on the platforms. Data analytics about the fan's tastes & preferences will inform innovation about new engagement and business models, creating a fly wheel of creating and capturing value with increasingly reduced variable cost – much like how social media has scaled!

The ALL-IN-ONE Fan Engagement Solution



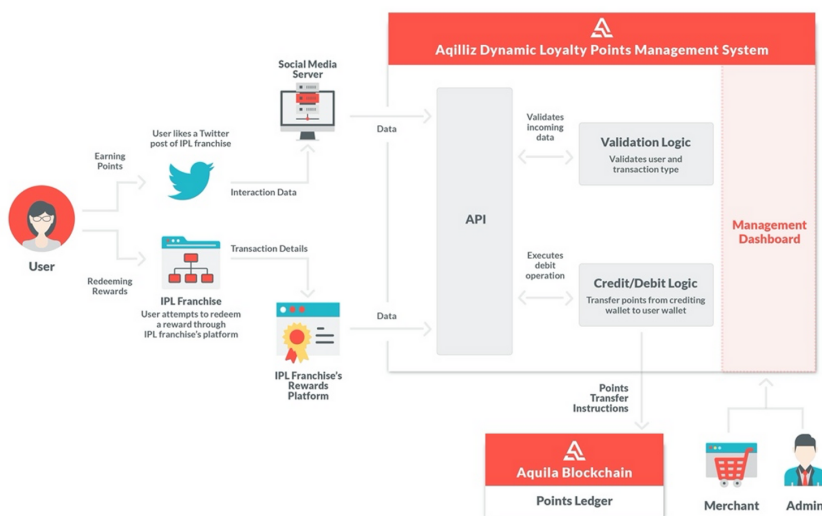
Takeaway 8: IQONIQ is seeking to solve this problem for sports entities by creating a community platform dedicated to the sport and entertainment sectors. This contrasts with the wide range of sectors, interests and topics that are fostered on social media networks and chat platforms. A focus on Sport also recognises that the fan is unlike the classic consumer since the former persevere in their association with a brand – be it player, team, country, publisher etc. – even if it does not meet their expectation beyond the first impression.

Case Study 5: Aqilliz, Singapore Using Blockchain To Reward Franchise Fans For Loyalty, During IPL 2020

Loyalty to their country, club or player, borne of their emotional commitment, has long been a feature of fandom. It's also differentiated fans from being customers as the latter tend to seek, and even opt for, alternatives if the incumbent does not provide a consistently high-quality value addition or benefit.

Historically, sport has tended to take a fan's loyalty for granted, at least in economic terms. Not only that, it's also placed a price on it as witnessed by the ever-increasing prices for season tickets and merchandising. That being said, Sport is fast realising that fans have access to alternative modes of entertainment, and hence their loyalty must not be taken for granted. On the contrary, rewarding the customer for his/her loyalty can quickly become a competitive advantage, and explains the preponderance of airmiles, cash back offer and rewards programs in most consumer-facing businesses.

Aqilliz is a startup in Singapore that recently charted a new course in fan engagement by using Blockchain to reward the loyalty of the fans of a popular club franchise during the recently concluded Indian Premier League (IPL), the world's most high-profile cricket tournament based on the Twenty20 format.



Fans engaged with the Twitter account of the popular club franchise for points which could be instantaneously redeemed for rewards. The Blockchain-powered fan engagement platform ensured real-time viewability of all transactions and redemptions between the franchise, its commercial partners and, the fan. The initiative revealed that simple yet transparent incentivisation significantly boosted fan engagement, with the pilot group engaging 17-times more than test fans.

Takeaway 9: The commercial value of such fan engagement solutions reveal the innumerable options before sports entities to use Blockchain. European football clubs have issued tokens to fans and another prominent Singapore startup, ONE Championship is also tracking next-generation technologies such as Blockchain for use cases that reward a fan for her/his loyalty, by offering digital collectibles to our fans via blockchain-powered NFTs (Non-Fungible Tokens), for example.

Case Study 6:

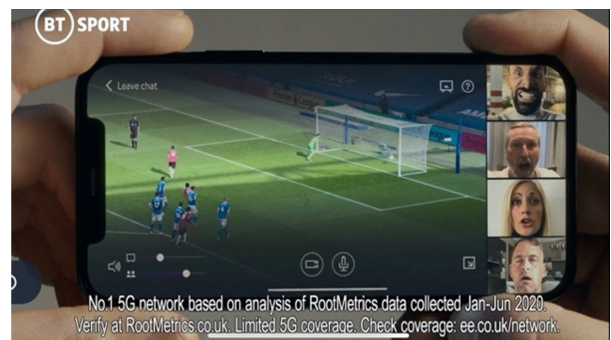
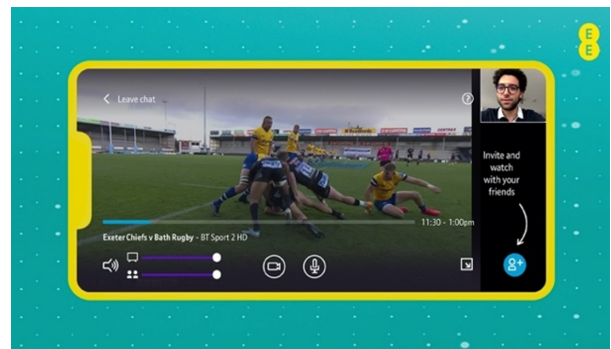
Sceenic, The U.K. Enabling Co-Viewing of Live Sports Using 5G

Sport is intrinsically tribal since it involves high passion involving heroes and rivalries, and, being united in the pursuit of winning, and, necessarily, together. It follows therefore that watching live sport – whether in adjacent seats in a stadium or with friends at home on television or in a larger group on big screen in public places such as bars, street corner & market squares or even in a hall or cinema – is a communal experience. However, not every fan can afford and/or access a ticket to every game, or co-ordinate with friends and family to go to one together. Fans also move cities and often countries, for personal or professional reasons, and so prevented by distance to watch a game together. Hence, an unmet need has existed for some time.

Sceenic, founded in 2013, identified this unmet need rather ahead of its time and has incrementally worked on creating a solution that enables a “Watch Together” experience for sports fans. They were motivated by a passion to allow friends and families to be able to watch online video, TV and experience VR together even when separated by distance.

The social distancing and stay-at-home restrictions placed during COVID-19 rapidly accelerated a far larger societal trend – to frequently connect, despite the challenges of physical space & distance, and seek a sense of being together with the use of modern mobile telephony. It also matured the market for Sceenic and, quite literally, brought Watch Together to the fan’s door step.

In November 2020, Sceenic and BT Sport announced a partnership to elevate match day coverage. The BT Sport Watch Together experience is inside the BT Sport app for mobile. Apple TV users can pair their devices to live the experience on the big screen as well. BT further recognised the ‘leaning forward’ inclination of fans with a “pinch & zoom” functionality in its 360-degree video programming so that fans can see anywhere inside the stadium, compensating for not being able to physically be there due to limitations placed by social distancing.²



Subsequent installations in Continental Europe, namely the Netherlands and Germany is further evidence of this trend now gaining momentum to expand and become mainstream during 2021.

[1] <https://www.uktech.news/news/founder-interviews/sceenics-paul-bojarski-on-how-to-keep-your-tech-startup-lean-20180122>

[2] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/steve MCCaskill/2020/10/15/bt-sport-uses-5g-to-power-social-viewing-and-ar-stats-on-mobile/?sh=2835f301109a>

The 21st Century Plumbing & Piping

COVID-19 had a little-talked-about revelation. That, the over-arching infrastructure for the digital age is finally in place – from the telecom towers to, back end exchanges & data centres, good quality 4G connectivity, and affordable smart phones. It's capability has been severely tested with multiple demands placed on video as it was simultaneously used for home schooling, working from home and, frequently communicating with friends and family for extended periods of time. And finally, as often happens in new areas of the economy and industry, regulation is catching up with the advancements in technology to ensure citizens in civic society are protected, especially around their personal data which is driving much of the monetisation in next-generation fan engagements.

The Digital Demographic Dividend

With little, if any, choice in being home bound for months, large section of the population were forced into a rapid learning curve on digital habits – as they went online to purchase groceries, conduct banking and personal finance, searched for online guidance on health services, sought apps and websites to teach their children or often themselves! The Emerging Markets will enjoy a larger share of this digital demographic dividend as the older segments who came online during COVID-19 have historically been 'money rich but time poor' – unlike the reverse case for younger audiences below age 35 – and, hence, will have a potentially higher contribution to the economy.

Technology Bridges Two or Three Worlds

The extended use of Augmented Reality by ImageinAR, IQONIQ and Ooredoo Sports in North America, Continental Europe, and, the Middle East has bridged the offline and online worlds. Stadiums have come to life on mobile phones much like in a game, and players-on-the-pitch have become characters such as in a movie.

Similarly, blockchain and computer vision applications by Aqilliz in Cricket and Edisn in Volleyball reflect technology-enabled innovation in the constant pursuit of exploring new horizons to engage the current – and crucially the next – generation of fans. Both these case studies are in their infancy and seeking to solve what might seem like today's problems but, are in fact, tomorrow's opportunities for Sport.

The Scenic-BT Sport relationship on the other hand, bridges three dimensions: the on-air broadcast world with graphics and multi-camera coverage; the online community engagement of fan chat and debate; and the more offline on-ground consumer experience of fans watching in stadia, at home or in the bar. Such as triangulation of fan experiences are recent and become more seamless as 5G enables zero latency in high concurrency, video-based, two-way fan engagement.

Sport Can't Take Fans For Granted

Ensuring a connect and following with fans remains the biggest supply side dependency to guarantee the future of Sport. Seeking to engage fans in Sport is no different from a business seeking to deeper their customer connect to avoid churn and looking to grow into new segments.

Fans are also Customers, who have choices

Sport is fast recognising that the 21st century fan is also a consumer in the entertainment economy and, hence, must be treated as customers who options to choose how to spend their time, money, and – crucially – loyalty. The lattermost has historically been a currency that's always associated with a fan but one that Sport can ill-afford to take for granted if it's continue to stay relevant if not central to Society and enjoy the continued and unprecedented commercial success of the last three decades and more.

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Global Sports Innovation Center was born in 2015 with the support of the Microsoft Sports division in order to create an international meeting point for innovation applied to the sports industry. Since then, GSIC is successfully operating based on a model that allows sustainable growth and the construction of a global ecosystem of companies and institutions linked to sports and technology.

GSIC is betting on a vision of teamwork, building from the effort, providing support to entrepreneurship, applied research and education, as well as generating a meeting, networking and business space for our members' network that today reaches 225 members. All our members in 38 countries get involved in different onsite and remote activities that are helping them with their internationalization processes.

More info: <https://sport-gsic.com/>

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