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RESEARCH TOPIC:

“Improving fan engagement in european football using the tactics applied in other sports leagues.”

**MASTER THESIS
GENEVA BUSINESS SCHOOL**

**MASTER IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
Major in Sports Management**

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Declaration of Authorship

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I would like to conclude this section with two life lessons my grandparents told me:

- *“ No matter how high you rise, always remember to keep your feet on the ground.”*
- *“If ten doors close in front of you, the eleventh one will always open up.”*

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Abstract

In this research we are going to analyze the relationship between RCD Espanyol's relations with their fans, how they can improve the engagement and which approaches from NFL, NBA and IPL can be implemented by the club. The main purpose was choosing Espanyol as the research essence is due to the fact that the club is often overlooked in sports, especially football. Not many know for the fact that apart from FC Barcelona (the heavyweights), RCD Espanyol is also based in the city of Barcelona being in the same competition and all attention falls on FC Barça. Conducting a research on this club would give me better insights about the philosophy and identity of the club while also assisting the club in rethinking and upgrading their fan engagement approaches.

I executed an investigation made by a questionnaire survey of 213 participants including Espanyol fans belonging to different nations, fan groups and preferences. However, I believe the main stronghold points of opinions came from the response of the Espanyol fan group that supports the research. The main purpose was to understand what motivated the subjects to support a team/ club and their opinions on whether and how RCD Espanyol can improve their fan engagement especially by applying strategies from other above mentioned leagues.

There was also a significant focus on consumer behavior that acts as the first and the most crucial action in the fan engagement process from the analysis of various strategies implemented in NFL, NBA , IPL and the subject club itself. I saw some great perspectives from other researches which shed light separately on each of the aspects of the process to understand it more clearly. I also deduced which innovative and notable strategies from other leagues can be used by RCD Espanyol in their enhancement of fan commitment and experience and further provided recommendations.

With the big investment money flowing in the sport industry, there is an immense room for improvement as it lags behind in several aspects such as transparency and understanding fan emotion. The key approaches can be identified in our findings that will help the club improve the fan experience such as consumer behavior, hospitality, marketing, Corporate social responsibility, Club principles, performance and player influence and external media impact. I created a model out of these aspects by recognizing them and linking each one to another in a flow.

At the end of the paper, we shall be able to relate to the expectations fans have, their opinions and recommendations which helps us answer the research question. This can be an easier process based on the proposed model.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Sports is one thing in my life that holds the utmost importance. For many, it may be just a part or a small aspect, but for me it is critical in every aspect since it has been in my family since a couple of generations. One of the main aims of this paper is to understand the problems surrounding fan engagement in European football, how clubs struggle to sustain it from time to time and what other major sports leagues or franchises in the world do differently to maintain the excitement of the game. Albert Mundet (Director of FC Barcelona Innovation Hub) in a talk show panel said that rather than competing with other football clubs like Atletico or Real Madrid, they work with them because the main competition is to keep the fans engaged in the sport. I will be covering specifically one club named RCD Espanyol de Barcelona and other subsidiary aspects like marketing influence, performance, fan behavior and so on to put different perspectives for the club.

According to *The Connected Fan* (2017), the efforts put in by the club or franchise to improve the stadium experience and build stronger ties with the fans can be termed as 'Fan engagement'. The notion is quite new in a way where the fans can connect with the players, the club and how the franchise communicates to keep the fans bonded together with unity. Stadium service and hospitality is an important aspect for the first hand experience for each individual fan. Enhancing the manner of reaching out to supporters or people can yield more and more people into following the club and generating higher revenues.

Let's look at the NFL, an American football league that celebrated its 100th anniversary this year (2020) is altogether a different sport in comparison to European football or soccer. Since its inception, there is a strong culture in the United States of America to follow this sport which involves the engagement of all age groups irrespective of their religion, race or colour. The game can be viewed from home, workplace, bars, coffee shops, supermarkets, etc, wherever one goes, they can see people watching NFL games on Sundays, Mondays and Thursdays. In terms of enjoyment and food, a typical NFL game is viewed with a combo of a bunch of beers and chicken wings which is the food culture while watching the games.

When it comes to fan experience and involvement, the franchises are serious about maintaining the excitement and balance amongst the supporters. Each team or franchise has a different approach to bind the supporters together, keep them updated on the progress and sport itself. (Bowen, 2012) I shall explain the further specifications later in the thesis.

Cricket as a sport has come a long way since its invention and has seen massive changes in its tournaments, game length, intensity, technology, as well the whole structure of the sport itself. From 5-day test matches in the beginning which actually took place over the course of five days to 50 over games which still took approximately 8 hours to complete in a day. Later in mid

2000's, a twenty-over structure was additionally introduced which concluded the game in a matter of four hours.

In the summer of 2008, Lalit Modi came up with a T20 tournament structure which would monetize the Indian Cricket, profit the franchises and the players and make the game extremely exciting. The tournament season would run for two months and involved an insane amount of investments from film stars and businessmen who would buy a particular franchise. Each team consisted of star players and a conglomerate of cricket players from all national teams to play in respective franchises that bid on them. The very first thing the IPL did was that they sold respective franchise to celebrities, film stars or famous businessmen(Chopra, 2019)

The National Basketball Association (NBA) on the other hand has been famous around the world since decades which has seen legends such as Larry Bird, Magic Johnson, Michael Jordan, LeBron James & Kobe Bryant who recently passed away in a helicopter crash in Los Angeles which came as a massive shock to the NBA fans across the world. Until recently, the fans of the NBA as a league were mostly limited to the United States. The global interest and fan following took a leap just a couple of decades ago across the world.

The NBA has multiple factors for globalization and greater fan following. The brand kept growing after foreign players were recruited one after the other in the 80's. This led the NBA to broadcast their games in the other countries of the world too where people were excited to watch big rivals face off, one of the biggest being between the Los Angeles Lakers and Boston Celtics. The induction of Michael Jordan into the league attracted thousands of followers outside the United States as well. One might say the productive investments in the resources, modern tech and management has resulted into today's wide market of the NBA. (Krasnoff, 2017)

Coming to the main focus of the thesis, that is the Real Club Deportivo Espanyol de Barcelona (RCD Espanyol) is a football club based in the city of Barcelona, Spain and plays in the first division of the Spanish League (La Liga). The club was initially founded by Angel Rodriguez in 1900 and was called Sociedad Española de fútbol to distinguish itself from other local Barcelona clubs, as most of its players were foreigners. Soon after, king Alfonso XIII bestowed the title "Reial" which translates to "Royal" in english, the club was renamed to Reial Club Deportivo Espanyol in 1912. The club wears the colors white and blue in honour of Roger de Lluria, a legendary navy commander from Catalonia. In 2010, the club relocated its stadium facilities to a new locality with the capacity of around 40,500 seats in Cornellà-El Prat of Barcelona. Recently in 2016, the club was acquired by Chen Yansheng, a chinese businessman. ("RCD Espanyol," n.d.)

The club has a direct competition from their city rivals - FC Barcelona, who has one of the best football teams on the planet. The club has never won a la liga trophy and hence is overshadowed by FC Barcelona in terms of trophies, budget, quality of players and success. Whenever one

mentions “Barcelona” as a city, people naturally start to imagine FC Barça and barely any people relate to RCD Espanyol. Despite having quite an old history and some well known legends like Alfredo Di Stefano, RCD Espanyol have always been a low budget club, a smaller global brand and a mid table football team performance. Hence, it is quite necessary for the club to have a proper structure, wider reach, better fan hospitality, engagement and brand growth, not only in Spain but across Europe and rest of the world as well.

We are going to understand what contributes to arouse the interest of fans towards a football club, RCD Espanyol in particular. It is clear that other than the loyal fans or existing followers of Espanyol, the club struggles to expand its market in other unknown areas or with people with different tastes in football. We will be assuming that the club is not aware of the expectations, behaviour and requirements made by their consumers, be it existing or new and come up with new innovative ways to improve the relationships and services for the fans. This will be based on the strategies applied in the National Football League (NFL), National Basketball Association (NBA) and Indian Premier League (IPL) and its compatibility with the club and the leagues they are competing in.

Chapter 2: Summary of Literature Review

The research will involve the communication between the Football clubs, the fans, consumers of their services and how the organization works to retain the relationship with their interests, in this case for RCD Espanyol. Motivation for a certain behaviour and engagement towards the sport will be the key areas of observation. Let's look at some of the aspects such as consumer behavior and the key driving forces.

The core element of consumer behavior is the decision making process. It constantly contains a risk that any action the consumer takes will not be exactly as he expected but they are a certain number of chances wherein his experience would be unsatisfactory. One of the traditional problems can be identified as Brand loyalty which is considered as a tool to minimize the risks involved in consumer risk. When it comes to choosing brands in case of basic items such as sugar, coffee or cereal, consumers choose one specific brand as per their liking and taste. (Bauer, 1960)

Rational choice theory and even less reasonable forms of this general methodology battle that item choice is in part dictated by the foreseen fulfillment with that item. Customers wonder if the buy will turn out to be satisfactory or terrible, if the item will work or not, regardless of whether the person in question will be "fulfilled" or "disappointed." It is incomprehensible to contend that this deduction isn't a determinant of item decision in for all intents and purposes all occurrences where purchaser choices are made. (Weiner, 2000)

According to Meryl P. Gardner (1985), in order to analyze the job of mood states in the buyer conduct and propose their marketing suggestions, a system is required to interlinks strategic areas, promotion strategies and the process of consumer behaviour. It is clear that certain actions manipulate the mood of consumers depending on communication with staff, physical environment, transactions, overall experience, etc which ultimately impacts the purchasing choice of the buyer.

Bauer has clearly explained the relationship between consumer risk and brand loyalty. If people can have a certain preference in which brand they choose even for the basic commodities, it is logical to assume they will have a preference when it comes to football clubs as well. That obviously depends on certain factors such as the club's success, trophies acquired, play style, fan experience services, players and their public image, location, and most importantly the values of the club to which people can relate and follow. A similar linked idea has been put by Bernard Weiner where he mentioned that consumers are always wondering about the buying experience and if the product will fulfill their requirements based on their decisions. Gardner on the other hand has given a different perspective taking into account the effect of mood towards a decision making process. Naturally, a positive mood is an opportunity and in terms of football, the clubs

must put the requirements and needs of the fans to optimal level in order to keep their mood positive and minimize the turnover. Clubs should take every opportunity, create a positive setting for the fans and keep them loyal to the organization, values and the team.

Hospitality is also one of the key aspects in the process of fan engagement and preserving their interest in the sport and club. According to Lashley and Morrison (2001), the social influence in the “hospitality” concept is mainly physical arrangement wherein hospitality and its components occur which affect the way an entity like food, drink, treatment or accommodation is produced or consumed. It helps in creating deeper connections with the people around and fulfilling the need to socialize, luxury and displaying one’s financial status.

Instead of believing that the hospitality framework includes a particular context such as the accommodation or specific items such as food and beverages or specific players like hosts, service providers or guests, hospitality is a state and an impact of social ties, spatial arrangements, and power structures. Hospitality is developed by, yet additionally profitable of, specific settings, spaces, governmental issues, objects, social jobs and relations. Considering the way talks and practices of hospitality make their own settings where certain methods for being as one, thinking about each other, or barring the other are standardized furthermore, repeated. While talks of hospitality recreate regular exhibitions of fellowship, be that as it may, they likewise open up the probability of doing fellowship any other way – of envisioning inside and outside, outsider and companion, self and other, host and visitor in new, radical and conceivably risky ways. (Lynch, Molz, McIntosh, Lugosi, & Lashley, 2011)

Here, different writers have had two opinions on the concept of “Hospitality” where Lashley and Morrison have explained in simpler terms about the idea. They focused more on the social influence and physical arrangements which include food/beverages, treatment and customer services as components. While the latter set of writers in the above paragraph have emphasised that “Hospitality” is not only about the physical service but more important factors are involved in the process. In the context of fan engagement concept, the most logical argument would be the one made by the latter writers namely Lynch, Molz, McIntosh, Lugosi & Lashley (2011) because, the elaborated concept made by them include spaces, politics, objects, social roles and public relations which in fact goes hand-in-hand with sports fan engagement and hospitality.

Best example would be Tottenham Hotspurs, who according to The Sun, are generating £800,000 in food and beverages on each gameday at White Hart Lane stadium. Matchday special services such as street-food vendors, the club’s original microbrewery serving craft ale and the longest bar in any football stadium in the world, and 3 seconds per pint beer pumps has put the fans and visitors at awe and jolly. Their hospitality services match to none other clubs and are available as per the need of all age groups. (Tottenham hotspurs, n.d). This range of services offered have put Tottenham Hotspurs in the top business charts and are attracting more & more people as fans towards the club. Surely, now after this implementation in the newly renovated

White Hart Lane stadium, people will not look only towards Emirates stadium or Stamford Bridge, home of Arsenal and Chelsea FC respectively, but make Tottenham's stadium surely worth a visit.

Another important element linked to fan engagement is Marketing. The existing and prospective customers in the sports industry specific to a football club are always looking for content to stay connected to their club, players and movements. According to Lovelock and Patterson, (2015) in their book "Services marketing" have described that the new organizations entering the market face a number of entry barriers and on top of that there occurs an increase in competition mainly to field specific sectors. Such firms must implement strategic marketing plans to have at least a certain amount of competitive advantage which may ease the process of brand building.

In modern days, digital marketing is at the core of marketing as most of the audience is present on digital social media and mobile phones rather than traditional print. In the digital marketing setting, a firm would add to digital systems via digital communications, for example, paid media, social media, owned media and inbound marketing. Characters outside the organization's environment like clients, different firms would likewise add to the company's growth through market-initiated technological transmissions. (Hewett, Rand, Rust, & van Heerde, 2016)

In the recent experiments of Uyanık & Yükselen, (2020) suggest that when the marketing department has little state in crucial strategic decisions in high market businesses, the business will suffer in terms of performances. And when, marketing department tries to shape things up, the consequences are positive. These findings put a spotlight on the critical role of the marketing department in an organization, especially the industry dominants.

The above mentioned writers have put forward their views on the perspectives of marketing concepts. Each of them consists of sub-aspects which impacts the business depending on the decisions made. All of them significantly distinct, yet interlinked when it comes to application of those explanations. While in recent times, the advancements in technology has enabled businesses to market their brand, product and services across the globe making the world a smaller place. It is safe to say that the impact marketing has on the core business strategies is crucial not only for survival in the market but to send a specific message to the target audience. When it comes to applying marketing fundamentals to football or sports, the term coined is called "Sports marketing". It covers a deep understanding on how football clubs and organizations can connect with the fans and audiences with the right content and communication method.

For example, Real Madrid has partnered with several external companies or industries such as Fly Emirates, Bwin, Audi, Microsoft, and Hankook tyres to name a few, that sponsor the club one or the other way. This function doesn't just bring cash inflow into the club but also promotes

Real Madrid as a global brand where those sponsors are present and increase their fan following. Infact, it also satisfies and reassures the existing customers/fans that the club is financially stable.

Corporate Social Responsibility is one of the important factors driving fan engagement and attracting communities towards an organization, in this case a football club like RCD Espanyol. According to Adams (2004), CSR has drawn expanded consideration from market members, controllers, and the business press lately. The pattern toward expanded commitment in CSR activities has risen principally from the requirements of different partners for more data about the association's social and ecological practices, and its cooperations with nearby communities.

Communities, people and investors respond less adversely to restatements by firms that are increasingly CSR capable, showing that CSR execution impacts speculator's view of restatement divulgences. (Wans, 2020). This is a clear explanation that the people and the local communities always expect social work and ethical behaviour from the firms that interest them. Companies involved in frauds, pollution, financial scandals or anything of the sort that is against the public interest and approval tend to have a terrible reputation. In turn, when firms engage in CSR activities, events, fundraisers for charity, contribute to environmental sustainability, etc are praised in the regional community which builds a bond of trust and hope that ensure growth and development. The public will not hesitate in this case to purchase the products or services from such companies.

There is a concept of “supererogatory” which means doing a particular thing beyond expectation or more than what is asked for. The organizations which are supererogatory are able to fuse innovation and capability to address the stakeholders due to the process of constant growth and learning from their own and others’ mistakes. They communicate with stakeholders at every turn which results in a more responsible, cautious and sustainable method of brand development and adjusting to market dynamics. (Tencati, Misani & Castaldo, 2020). Looking at this explanation, I see no reason why the people or the concerned community would not build a hard-wired trust with the businesses which implement a supererogatory way of undertaking CSR campaigns.

According to a study by Sen, Bhattacharya & Korschun, (2006) on how the awareness about an organization’s CSR campaigns influenced stakeholders’ general beliefs and mentalities towards the organization as just as their goals for professional collaboration with the firm, consumer their good/services and purchase their shares. The people who knew about the company's CSR activities, in their study, had progressively positive affiliations, showed better and noteworthy identification with the organization. They displayed a more noteworthy purpose to buy products, seek employment and invest in the company shares and stock markets than the others who were not knowing of the campaign. (p.164). It is not only important to engage with the CSR activities to develop ties with the stakeholders but on top of that it is also crucial for the company to

market or promote their CSR activities and projects to make people aware of such happenings which might be of their interest.

For example, Fundación Real Madrid and Fundació FC Barcelona are one of the support systems of both the football clubs that the clubs have built their virtues and values on. These “Fundación” (Spanish) or foundations are basically the CSR divisions of the respective clubs that promote sports and other activities in several countries including Spain in support of orphan children, old age groups, handicapped persons, economically poor children, and lately in solidarity of COVID-19 pandemic, etc. Player recruitment, brand building, increase in fan following towards the respective clubs, fundraisers, sponsorship, etc are the main tasks on the agenda when these divisions of the football clubs are undertaking CSR campaigns. (Real Madrid, n.d). RCD Espanyol also has a foundation as a CSR front. It facilitates certain things such as grassroots development programs, fostering humanity and care and all-round development for the sports lovers. (Espanyol, n.d)

Player impact and performance make a major difference in how a team plays or succeeds eventually. Take any mediocre football club and just imagine putting a star player who can make a tremendous impact on the team performance, the seasons and a possibility in winning titles with that club. In all the years of a given club’s existence, hundreds of players play for the club up to present day and if we really think through, there are hardly some players in a mediocre team who may have impacted the team positively at some level.

For example, the NBA franchise Chicago Bulls had never won a championship in its history, weren’t a widely recognised brand, hardly had some fanbase and were the underdogs of the NBA league. At that time the big hotshots namely Boston Celtics, Los Angeles Lakers and Philadelphia 76ers were mainly dominating the NBA. Enter Michael Jordan. In 1984, the Chicago Bulls drafted a young “Small forward” with the number 3 pick, and nobody had even imagined his potential. He carried the Bulls to six NBA champions until his retirement in 1998. “Air Jordan” is the name given to him for his ability to jump and dunk high on the basket, he is considered as the greatest basketball player ever. (Reynolds, 2017). The impact Michael had on the Bulls attracted millions of followers and people into loving the NBA and the franchise itself. A classic illustration of how player performance and brilliance can have a massive effect in fan engagement.

Another case of colossal impact by a player performance and ability - Tom Brady for the New England Patriots in the NFL. Never had the Patriots won a superbowl until Brady was drafted. He was the second last pick in the 2000 NFL draft at the 199th slot and didn’t get proper game time until the 2001 season which eventually led Patriots to their first superbowl victory. Under the coaching of Bill Belichick, he won 6 superbowl rings in 20 years until his recent move to

Tampa Bay Buccaneers. His overall completion percentage was 63.8 with a total of 541 touchdowns and 74,571 passing yards. One might say he is the perfect person playing as an architect on the field irrespective of whether his rushers or receivers are top players are not, he made every receiver look world-class. (Tom Brady, n.d). When people barely looked at New England before 2001, the Patriots dynasty would go down in the books of history as one of the greatest teams in that era. Today, they have fan bases and supporters across the US, Canada, Africa, Europe and Australia all influenced by the sheer brilliance of Tom Brady. And as of now, it is too early to judge the situation for the patriots after his departure in February, 2020 joining the Buccaneers. A new sun may be rising in Tampa bay with the joining of Brady and Rob Gronkowski.

Now that we've observed several factors about the fan engagement process, they're the internal aspects that affect the whole concept. One major factor is the "Media" which plays out as an external element to supplement the fan engagement process. Media plays an important role in influencing fan or consumer behaviour towards a particular club. When people talk of the power held by the media, it is because they can shape the way they report a certain subject and manipulate millions of readers and audiences into thinking a particular thing.

The media molds many stories and communicates forwards in such a way that the readers and audiences are influenced in a certain way of thinking. (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Eagleman, 2011; Reese, 2007). People find themselves in sports to escape from their daily routine and engage with the entertaining aspect of the sport. It can motivate feelings of excitement, self-esteem and stress relief. (Raney, 2006). Media plays a critical role in satisfying that aspect for the people or sports enthusiasts. It can be either through the way of journalism, broadcasting, social media or live reporting.

The study proves that the firms which tend to have greater media coverage and spotlight usually perform better in terms of finance and customer engagement than those who don't. The company's reputation in the media has a distinctive positive effect on the overall performance especially in marketing and acquiring new customers. Even in a situation of economic recession the firms having more media attention have greater stock returns. And hence, performance is heavily interlinked with market expectations which is portrayed by the media channels to viewers. (Yu-Chen Wei, Yen-Ju Hsu, Yang-Cheng Lu, & Chia-Chi Huang, 2016).

Based on the arguments, one conclusion can be derived is that the audience can be heavily influenced by the word of the media. The brand image or reputation of the company can be altered in either way based on the organization's relationship with the media because it can make a massive difference in the financial performance, attract new customers and retain the existing customers as well. As for football, there are several media firms which don't see eye to eye with many football clubs and they are often criticised and defamed in their articles, videos and podcasts especially when the clubs make even the tiniest error. Biases in the media industry are

also one thing when the agency is based in a certain location and tend to favour the local clubs more and show the sweeter picture by criticising other rival clubs.

For large scale sporting events such as the FIFA world cup, UEFA Champions League, Superbowl or the NBA finals, where the audiences are willing to spend money, it narrows down to how the organization or the club provides their services. This ultimately influences the value which the audience can relate with the overall experience of the event. Services and hospitality assistance such as speedy, polite and effective services, a clean and pleasant location or venue, high quality food and beverages, etc can be included. As per the study, these factors were observed to be directly affecting the mood, satisfaction and experience of the audience with regards to a big sports event. People were more likely to engage into the game, with the event staff and other fans at the event given the quality of services. The event organizers, the host and the club officials have to ensure that the pricing for utilities such as parking, food and beverages, game tickets and other essential or luxury services are fair, affordable and reasonable. It is also critical for them to understand the measures they need to take to engage more fans, provide quality services and exceed expectations of the audience for future sustainability of the event. (Jones, Byon, & Haiyan Huang, 2019).

According to Vale and Fernandes (2018), the literature involving sports management as a subject, very limited study has been conducted in regards to fan engagement and influence especially when it comes to social media. Their research mainly was understanding social media from the sports organizations, pro athletes and some from a fan perspective. The need for information, motivation and brand loyalty are the key aspects of “consumption, contribution and creation” respectively. Socializing and involvement also showed up as positive signs for engagement with the clubs on social media, especially facebook. And hence, better virtually looking and interactive social media user interface can be innovative and attract bigger masses and fans towards the club/organization. Lastly, brand loyalty proved to be the greatest driver in engaging fans and creation is the heartfelt and rare bond a fan develops with his favourite club.

Research conducted by Stander & De Beer (2016) revealed that different fan groups pertaining to different sports clubs behave distinctively unlike. This explains that fan engagement should be promoted via practical interventions. In their study, two supporters groups and utilization of social media were proposed as the guns which clubs might use to upgrade the commitment to the fans. Both uncovered potential worth and were examined from a sober minded point of view.

Firstly, it was observed that the supporters from the organized groups were more engaged than those who were not. These fans demonstrated a behaviour that intended to permanently remain involved within the supporters community and contributed to promote the club activities and interests. (Millward, 2012; Zagnoli & Radicchi, 2009). Secondly, supporters who used the

club's social media platforms and streams would experience better engagement and virtual interaction with the club than those who did. (Shank & Lyberger, 2014)

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The main objective of this chapter is to describe the method of research to be conducted within the thesis to answer the research problem or question. The main objective of the research is to determine how the Real Club Deportivo Espanyol de Barcelona can improve their fan engagement especially by implementing the strategies used in the National Football League (NFL), National Basketball Association (NBA) and Indian Premier League (IPL). The research methodology will be conducted by collecting two main data and information:

- 1. Primary data:** It basically comprises sending out google form surveys to people chosen at random who follow any of the sports from Soccer, American football, Basketball and Cricket and analyzing their views and choices by the questionnaire. The questionnaire to be specifically sent to RCD Espanyol fan group on facebook to gather first-hand opinions about the club's strategies and fan experience. Other test subjects would include cricket fans from India, Soccer and NBA fans from around the world, and NFL fans especially from the United States. The response to be then analyzed for finding the conclusions and providing solutions to the research.
- 2. Secondary data:** This data mainly consists of literature review and analysing the finding of different researchers in every aspect of fan engagement. This would be reviewing the aspects such as fan engagement concepts in general, consumer behavior (key driving force), Marketing, Hospitality, Performance/ player influence, Corporate Social Responsibility, Club's philosophy and values and finally Media (an external factor). Secondly, it will also be based on research about the club's current fan engagement strategies and what new measures the club has implemented. Thirdly, finding out the recent developments and approaches made in the NFL, NBA and IPL that would summarize their strategies to ensure commitment, interest, interaction and engagement from their respective followers.

The purpose behind selecting the above methods to carry out the research is mainly to understand the preferences, ideas and opinions from the fans supporting their own respective club or franchises. Since original research on the topic has not been done before on RCD Espanyol's fan engagement strategies and also a very limited research exists on research on other clubs regarding fan engagement, the above methodology would provide a clearer understanding and potentially put forward valuable insights on how the club can implement these approaches. Undertaking surveys especially within some of the fans of Espanyol itself would prove to be crucial in understanding their current satisfaction level of connection and expectations or hopes from the club. Gathering data from fans of Cricket, NBA and NFL will be of the same importance as it will give us apprehension of the fan preferences and tastes in those leagues as well. At the end, we shall be able to deduce and analyze the methods through which Espanyol can enhance their fan engagement process keeping in mind the current restrictions and obstacles in the midst of Coronavirus crisis.

The research purpose and the solutions can be put forward by the proposed model that basically describes the process of fan engagement through categorizing 6 main aspects which are the effects of one parent element called consumer behaviour. The simpler understanding of a basic model can be seen below. We shall see in detail the model later in the thesis.

Fan Engagement → Consumer behavior → Marketing, Hospitality, Player influence/Performance, CSR, Club's culture and values.

The limitations to collecting the data are not many. The existing literature is limited to certain areas of the topic or as a whole related to fan engagement concepts. Topic specific information or data was not available and hence connecting links and related articles can be used to analyze and reach a conclusion. One of the major disappointments was not being able to contact the officials and concerned persons working in RCD Espanyol due to the coronavirus pandemic, however communication with the fans was accessible. Further, popular sources such as Goal.com, The Stadium business, Insider Sport, LA times, Bleacher report, Washington post, Forbes and other official websites of the organizations to be accessed to retrieve the data and information to answer the research question.

Chapter 4: Body of the Thesis & Findings

The term “Fan” has been popularly derived from the word “fanatic” which involves those persons who are extremely passionate and are willing to invest their resources to support their favourite sports clubs. It may be in terms of financial, emotional or motivational aspects of the investment towards the club. They aren’t just any spectators or audience of the sport in the crowd, rather they are those individuals who over a period of time develop emotional relationships and commitment for their respective pro sports clubs. (Wann, Melnick, Russell and Pease, 2001).

In my view, there are five main categories of sports fans. They are:

- 1. Bandwagon fans:** The one who is in full support with the team that's winning or doing good in the respective leagues. They disappear when one team which they’re supporting starts losing and jumps to another team/club which is performing good. They don’t follow the player transfers or trade deal, management decisions nor are interested in the ideology and culture of the club. They are also often termed as “Plastic” fans or “Glory hunters” due to their constant change in team preference. (Epic design, 2006)
- 2. Social fans:** These types of fans are less attached to the team or the club emotionally compared to the rest. They don't usually keep updates on what’s happening within the club/team except for major news or announcements. They just stroll along casually with their buddies who are more involved supporters probably just to blend in or have fun. He may not really be interested in the game and is more focussed on their drinks, chats and phones. (Kious, 2018)
- 3. Focussed fans:** They are moderately involved with the culture, updates and news about their club. They usually stay loyal but that can depend on certain major factors as well.
- 4. Hardcore fans:** Die hard sports fans are engaged with most aspects of the sport, team or the club and are extremely passionate about it. They don’t miss the games on the television and keep a close track on updates and movements within the club via newspapers, social media, TV, etc. They invest their resources financially and emotionally to stay connected to the club and its activities. Losses and defeats disappoint them and they keep high expectations of performance from the players in game and management in business aspects.
- 5. Ultras:** The group of supporters which are termed “ultras” are extreme, violent and passionate about their team. They are the sports hooligans are typically chaotic, drunk and at times create bizarre atmospheres in the stadiums to support their respective teams.

Violence, cursing and falling out with the opposite team’s ultras is one of the negative aspects of this category of fans which stresses the club and security. (Goal, n.d)

RCD Espanyol and their current strategies:

Real Club Deportivo Espanyol is a football club based in the city of Barcelona and plays in the first division of the Spanish league. However, one doesn’t simply associate themselves with the club as their city rivals Football Club Barcelona are one of the giants in the European football industry. Be it in terms of trophies, finance, player quality, performance, hospitality, media relations, stadium capacity, fan following, etc, FC Barcelona trumps Espanyol in every aspect possible. In my view, increasing fan following and expansion can benefit RCD Espanyol in many regards and can put them in the competition well enough as a base to potentially grow much larger as a brand.

To have a clear picture about the club, below is an organizational chart of RCD Espanyol that portrays the hierarchy in the club starting from the president to the Board of Directors.


Office	Name
President	Chen Yansheng
Vice president	Carlos García Pont
Secretary	Jorge Sarró Riu
Vice secretary	Iñaki Frías Inchausti
Directors	Wang Lirong
	Hongyuan Wang
	Mao Ye Wu
	Zheng Zefeng
	Lu Zuilan
Business and coordination director	Mao Ye Wu
Sport general area manager	Óscar Perarnau Figueras

CEO	Roger Guasch
Professional football director	Francisco Joaquín Pérez Rufete
Academy directors	Àlex García Borau
	Fran Navarro Ortiz
Femenino football director	Lauren Florido Revilla
Femenino sporting director	Francisca Camúñez Moreno
Head of medical services	Manolo González Postigo
Marketing and commercial director	Agustí Filomeno Alsina
Sponsoring, hospitality and new business director	Antoni Alegre Puzo
Financial director	Joan Fitó Pardo
Chief communications officer and director of institutional relations	Agustín Rodríguez Mas
Social area director	Alberto Ariza Navarro
Head of Ciutat Esportiva Dani Jarque's schools and academies	Eloy Pérez García
Stadium director	Josep Toldrà Alegret
Office manager	Olga Moscatel Vivet
Administration and human resources manager	Lam Joi Kin
Security director	Antoni Guerra Rojas
Telecommunications director	Ángel Rojas Gómez
Business coordination and expansion in Asia	Senon Chen

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(Espanyol, n.d)

The club is legally structured as ‘Sociedad Autonoma Deportiva’ or Sports Public Limited Company. In 2016, Chen Yangsheng became the president of the club after buying the majority stake in the club. The club’s objective since then has been on developing Espanyol’s brand awareness in Asia, especially China. Instead of being competitive with other clubs, the president focuses more on self development and open-minded collaboration with different projects to ensure growth of the brand. (La Liga, n.d). The club aims to compete in the top professional competitions in Europe and Spain. The main task is to develop and promote football from the grassroots and amateur level. Besides, the club also has marketing through different channels, events, merchandise and all rights regarding sports equipment, media and accessories as their objectives. (Espanyol, n.d).

Season ↓	Competition	Matches ↓	sold out ↓	Spectators ↓	Average ↓
19/20	 LaLiga	13	0	305671	23513
18/19	 LaLiga	19	0	368364	19388
17/18	 LaLiga	19	0	339095	17847
16/17	 LaLiga	19	0	387275	20383
15/16	 LaLiga	19	0	365442	19234
14/15	 LaLiga	19	0	354475	18657
13/14	 LaLiga	19	0	375812	19780
12/13	 LaLiga	19	0	400954	21103
11/12	 LaLiga	19	0	454608	23927
10/11	 LaLiga	19	0	497671	26193
09/10	 LaLiga	19	0	529355	27861
08/09	 LaLiga	19	0	448455	23603
07/08	 LaLiga	19	0	423471	22288
06/07	 LaLiga	19	0	528198	27800
05/06	 LaLiga	19	0	432412	22759
04/05	 LaLiga	19	0	344590	18136
03/04	 LaLiga	19	0	178000	9368
02/03	 LaLiga	19	0	145400	7653
01/02	 LaLiga	19	0	373300	19647
00/01	 LaLiga	19	0	139700	7353
99/00	 LaLiga	19	0	16900	889

(Transfermarkt.com, n.d)

The above chart indicates the total visitors and average seasonal attendees at RCDE stadium from the season 1999/2000 to 2019/20 and clearly the club has not sold out the seats completely in that time duration. The capacity of the stadium is 45,500. (Transfermarkt, n.d)

Recently, RCD Espanyol renewed their contract for sponsorship with a catalan beer company - Estrella Damm until 2023 who have been their long running sponsors. They have had a collaboration approximately for the past 30 years now. Estrella Damm also promotes the “Star Player” award which allows the audiences and fans to vote for the “player of the game” at the end of every match. There was also a recent partnership extension with CocaCola, however some of their deal may be at risk as Espanyol is sitting just 5 point above the relegation zone and hold a potential threat of being demoted to second division league as of March 2020. (Williams, King, Mccullagh, 2020). On top of that, the club also struck a major agreement with an entertainment company Producame to provide their stadium for concerts and music events. RCDE stadium that is located in Cornellà de Llobregat, Barcelona has a capacity of about 40,000 people and can host concerts and entertainment events to have more brand presence in the media and public which can potentially attract people towards their club. The first major event hosted there was in 2010 when Black eyed peas performed in Barcelona. (The Stadium Business, 2019).

Espanyol’s current league position poses a big question for its investors ,stakeholders and the fans as they might incur financial and marketing losses if the team is relegated to the segunda division. On the brighter side, the club has landed a great deal of partnership and sponsors, and has a great potential to sign even better agreements given the firm management from the new chinese owner and the existing spanish directors. Hosting concerts and international events can open up their brand awareness and reputation across the world and possibly attract new fans and supporters towards the club. One of the competitors is “Palau Sant Jordi” stadium located in Montjuic hill of Barcelona which is known to hold mega music events.

In February 2020, RCD Espanyol formed a new alliance of collaboration with CaixaBank, a financial bank based in Catalonia to convert RCDE stadium into the first cashless stadium in Spain. It implies that the spectators and fans will not need to convert money or cards in the arena and any purchase inside the stadium will be done via Espanyol’s protected and integrated versatile mobile application. It will transform the way payments are made and its efficiency on the day of the game. The club’s marketing and retail director Augustin Filomeno on the app unveiling stated that any transaction required by the customers from checking the match info to not carrying physical cash, can be done through the app. The app is engineered so that the fans will not need to bring a physical paper ticket to the stadium on match days to gain entry into the stadium through the phone and also with an option to virtually transfer it to another person if the ticket holder is unable to attend the respective game. Furthermore for even more luxurious experience on the app, pick-up points have been set to purchase food and drinks as well as accessories and merchandise. The aim of this campaign was to design an app for both iOS and

Android. The key spotlight is that it is one of the first football clubs in the world to introduce a total cashless E-wallet and various other mentioned services. (Streeter, 2020).

The club also not long ago hired Molcaworld to recreate and restructure the heart of the RCDE stadium: the players' locker rooms and the tunnel. The objective was to modernize the club image with the roots and traditions intact, especially their mascot which associates with the club's spanish/catalan fans: "the parakeets". The changing rooms were designed in a circle with a lighted up symbol of the parakeet on the ceiling. This was the idea which would honour the club's traditions and culture and make the current and future players feel at home and comfortable. A fascinating innovation was introduced in the entrance hallway which allows the players or the squad to be seen in different outfits and kits when the visitors or tourists walk by. This has an impact on players' motivation of how they're portrayed visually and provides an appealing component to the people visiting the stadium on a tour. The redesigning has also attracted heavy attention from the football, the media and also from the fans of other clubs globally. (Molcaworld, n.d). One might think that how this might be related to fan engagement, but if you look at it from the fan's perspective, this strategy from RCD Espanyol will gain a high amount of visitors coming on a stadium tour which is quite unique in terms of experience.



January 28th, 2019 marked an important day in the story of RCD Espanyol and La liga as the club completed signing of a quality player named Wu Lei from Shanghai SIPG. This became a classic tactic for Espanyol and La liga to boost their fan base in China and bring in more and more people into following the club. Post his arrival in the catalan club, la liga started a digital content strategy that makes the chinese fans experience la liga games, updates and events, including the Wu Lei progress in the la liga. They promoted the player's image through all chinese social media platforms as well such as WeChat, Sina Weibo, Toutiao and Douyin. Expanding the fan base globally outside Spain requires focus and understanding about the local audience and available platforms, it is not an easy objective that can be achieved overnight. (La liga, 2019)

Strategies in Indian Premier League (IPL):

The Indian Premier League or best known as IPL is a cricket league that is played annually in India starting from 2008 April. The mastermind behind this idea was Lalit Modi, a businessman from Gujarat who proposed a league format with a gigantic amount of budget and investments. There are usually 8 teams in the IPL which is played in April, May and June each year involving eight major teams namely:

- Mumbai Indians
- Chennai Super Kings
- Sunrisers Hyderabad
- Kolkata Knight Riders
- Rajasthan Royals
- Delhi Capitals
- Royal Challengers Bangalore
- Kings XI Punjab

Just a couple of months before the league commences, there is an auction held for all franchises to bid on or retain certain players. All franchises have a fixed budget of 100 Crore Rupees (1 Billion INR). The league consists of most international and Indian cricket stars who play together as a team. What attracted the international players was the money they would get from their respective franchises to play in the first team or even warm the benches.

According to Laghate (2019), to engage and be connected to the fans the owners of the teams look forward to investing heavily in the social media platforms by putting up video content, new apps, team updates and merchandise. There are some heavyweights like Mumbai Indians, Kolkata Knight Riders and Chennai Super Kings who are based in Metropolitan cities with massive amounts of people and crowds who are gradually increasing. According to Indranil Das Blah (Kwan entertainment & marketing solutions) the fans naturally tend to engage with the team their city is associated with and the star players representing the team. One of the factors can also be the Bollywood celebrities who own the franchise such as Shah Rukh Khan owning KKR or Preity Zinta who owns Kings XI Punjab. Such blockbuster teams don't necessarily require much for fan engagement. The idea is to keep the fans connected and focus on the franchise growth outside the two month tournament duration. Each franchise has their own ideas and innovation strategies to entertain the fans. For example, CSK who have a huge fan base, invites fans to support and watch practice sessions and friendly games. In 2018, CSK arranged a special train for the loyal fans called "Whistle Podu" from Chennai to Pune because all their games were moved from Chennai to the city named Pune. They also stretched their merchandise business to gifts, premium range of Sonata watches, school bags and toys for kids, etc. On the

other hand KKR, topped the social media following charts with their ever-active platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. They also introduced their channel on Snapchat after the app went insanely popular across the world. The best approach they initiated was with a fan group loyalty program called Knight Club. Four-time champions - Mumbai Indians created a collaboration with Netflix and Conde Nast Entertainment to launch an original series called "Cricket Fever: Mumbai Indians" which was basically a documentary about the team's success and domination. Royal Challengers Bangalore, despite not having won the championship, created a platform for their fans all over the country where they can connect/talk with the players, engage in chats and get special online content regarding behind-the-scenes, players' lifestyles and training sessions and diet. The franchise also now has an application where one can purchase the tickets and apparels.

It is not a theory but a fact that Indian Premier League is out of the ordinary cricket tournament in the world. It has introduced advanced technologies such as Spider-cam, LED stumps and Decision Review System (almost the same as VAR in football). These initiatives elevate the fan experience to another level especially for those who are watching on TV and cannot be in the stadium momentarily. The city of Bangalore is considered as the technological hub in India, and to that advantage, RCB introduced Collaborative robots or "Cobots". This innovative and technologically advanced application in the franchise gave their bartending and cheerleading services a massive edge above the rest. It led to a hike in fan engagement, sale of tickets and viewership especially inside the stadium, while it also brought in more excitement and glamor to the games. (Rishav, 2018).



In 2015, the IPL introduced a cutting edge initiative called 'Fan Parks' to penetrate into other smaller cities and towns and attract the attention of the people. This allows the fans in thousands to gather around in a field and have a stadium-like experience by watching the game with

thousands of other fans on a big screen. Surprisingly, the entrance to the ground is free for all fans and it is hosted across 19 states which cover 36 cities. A smart implementation especially in deep and untapped corners of India. There's also music, food stalls, beverages, merchandise stalls and other stalls by sponsors for optimal hospitality of the visitors and fans. (International Institute of Sports Management, n.d). This particular strategy was a bit surprising to be free of charge, especially from BCCI. However, it lured large numbers of crowds to these parks and the IPL was able to reap profit from this in terms of ticketing, broadcasting and sponsorships.

Strategies adopted by the National Football League (NFL):

The National Football League (NFL) has the majority of the fans based in the United States and Canada. A typical game lasts around 3.5 hours with around 52 players in each squad. There are currently 32 official NFL franchises namely: Arizona Cardinals, Atlanta Falcons, Baltimore Ravens, Buffalo Bills, Carolina Panthers, Chicago Bears, Cincinnati Bengals, Cleveland Browns, Dallas Cowboys, Denver Broncos, Detroit Lions, Green Bay Packers, Houston Texans, Indianapolis Colts, Jacksonville Jaguars, Kansas City Chiefs (Current Champions), Las Vegas Raiders, Los Angeles Chargers, Los Angeles Rams, Miami Dolphins, Minnesota Vikings, New England Patriots, New Orleans Saints, New York Giants, New York Jets, Philadelphia Eagles, Pittsburgh Steelers, San Francisco 49ers, Seattle Seahawks, Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Tennessee Titans and Washington Redskins. (NFL, n.d). The league starts in mid-september and finishes in early February with Superbowl as its final game.

The league and franchises have excellent presence on the internet and social media. But that was not the case earlier as the NFL has experienced disasters and problems in the past when the concept of internet was young and the league's approach on digital platforms were not strategized and planned. However, the NFL is now fully aware of the advantages the social media, especially twitter, can have on game day. They launched an Amplify program in a deal with twitter to engage with more users and attract more brands to partner with them. The NFL sends promoted tweets to more than 284 millions users worldwide through the twitter amplify which has all up to the second highlights of what is happening in the game. According to Vishal Shah (Vice-president of digital media business development at NFL), around 30 million people interact with the NFL in some or the other way on twitter, and its videos are 4.5 times more engaging than the other amplify partners. Twitter took their partnership to another level with the NFL by creating "unique timelines" for all the matches of the week where the fan can exchange ideas, analysis, trolls and even criticisms before, during and after the games. The partnership with twitter also goes beyond the season especially during NFL combine and drafts sessions where it can engage with huge amounts of people to give out updates on new rookies and draft picks. (Zafar, n.d)

In April 2020, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic that had struck the world hard, especially the United States of America, the NFL conducted its first ever online draft. And in this time of a nationwide lockdown, the franchises embraced digital platforms and innovative ways to engage with the fans. The biggest challenge was to host a draft party online with the usual traditions, focussed on the communities, interactive and most importantly-live. Franchises such as the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, San Francisco 49ers and Arizona Cardinals hosted official watch parties on its social media for the draft. The 49ers conducted its live party in collaboration with Levi's which featured a live DJ, player interviews and reactions, especially when they drafted Javon Kinlaw, a rookie Defensive tackle. The entire draft was integrated for optimal fan experience on all digital streams by hosting fan polls for them to participate. The franchise also used branded graphics to advertise the sale of the season's tickets. The NFL also broadcasted a zoom call hosted by Rich Eisen and Deion Sanders with special guests such as Tom Brady, DJ Khaled and Kevin Hart to discuss picks and analyze the draft talents. The league ensured that the entire draft show was easily accessible, was subtly interactive and kept the fans watching the show. (Grabyo, 2020).

One of the most interesting concepts the American sports league have put up is the half-time show. The concept of half-time shows is very common and its part of the sporting culture especially in the US. One of the best examples is the NFL Super Bowl halftime show which takes place in one of the most awaited events of the year where singers and celebrities put up a musical or dance performance to entertain the crowd. It is a popular happenstance which attracts the attention of the fans and also non-followers in the US and many other fans across the world. This keeps the people watching the program glued to the TV even during the break or half time of the game.

According to Ogus (2019), many concepts and new innovative applications by some franchises go unnoticed at many times. With the development and testing of 5G technology booming especially in the US, the NFC East division's Dallas Cowboys have introduced a new installation called "Pose with the Pros" where fans can engage with a new augmented reality allowing them to take a picture with their favorite players virtually. The camera on the unit basically clicks a picture of the players in uniforms with the fans. This particular implementation harvested over 50 million social media views. Such a concept offers the fans more entertainment, bond with the team/club and more reasons to visit the stadium for first hand experience. It won't be long before such innovative ideas and application of 5G tech reaches other stadiums around the US, not forgetting European stadiums such as Camp Nou, Santiago Bernabeu Stadium, Tottenham Hotspurs Stadium and more.

In 2020, the Oakland Raiders, a team based in the Bay area neighbouring San Francisco 49ers will be moving to a brand new stadium in Las Vegas, Nevada. The franchises will end their 14 year stay in the bay area of San Francisco after the approval of NFL. One of the major reasons is

that Nevada as a state does not have a football team in the NFL and it's a constant dilemma for the fans as to whom to support. The franchise's move over to Las Vegas will bring big funds and investments to the state and moreover, the Raiders will make a donation to the Nevada State Agriculture meal program to feed the school children for lunch and breakfast. The owner, Mark Davis is hoping to reduce the overall debt of the state drastically by contributing indirectly from the club's profit as well. The franchise, extra-curricular and CSR activities like these will retain the fans from the bay area and will be able to attract more fans in Las Vegas by representing and embracing the culture of Nevada. (Daniels, 2020).

In around 2014-15, the Seattle Seahawks introduced an official Seahawks Teamapp for the supporters which presents a wide range of videos, pictures and other content regarding the team to their fans worldwide. The major advantages can be availed if one is visiting the stadium especially on a matchday. Their integrated feature called "Ticketmaster" is used to gain entrance to the stadium via smartphones, a map of the stadium with navigation included, on-demand video highlights or replays, updated stats on the players, etc. The franchise measures the number of people accessing the app in the stadium and analyzes their experience based on feedback. In the same season, they collaborated with Starbucks which also shares a decent market share in Seattle and they installed several beacons in the Starbucks stores. During the playoffs especially, whenever a fan who had the Seahawks App walked in the outlet, the app would send a very unique content such accessible to only those and after a certain amount of visits the fan would receive a \$20 gift voucher as a gift of goodwill and loyalty. The campaign gained a big success for Seahawks and Starbucks, and there was a significant amount of improvement in consumer satisfaction and engagement. (Hall, 2018)

Strategies applied in NBA:

The National Basketball Association (NBA) is the pioneer of all basketball leagues across the world and consists of the best teams and players. Every professional player dreams to play in the NBA as it is one of the most competitive leagues on the planet. Unlike the NFL, the NBA has only 2 partitions - Eastern Conference and Western Conference. Teams located in the Eastern half of the USA are a part of Eastern Conference and the same concept for the West. There are currently 30 teams in the league. They are: Atlanta Hawks, Boston Celtics, Brooklyn Nets, Charlotte Hornets, Chicago Bulls, Cleveland Cavaliers, Dallas Mavericks, Denver Nuggets, Detroit Pistons, Golden State Warriors, Houston Rockets, Indiana Pacers, LA Clippers, Los Angeles Lakers, Memphis Grizzlies, Miami Heat, Milwaukee Bucks, Minnesota Timberwolves, New Orleans Pelicans, New York Knicks, Orlando Magic, Philadelphia 76ers, Portland Trail Blazers, Sacramento Kings and San Antonio Spurs. (NBA, n.d). The NBA's presence now is pretty much worldwide where fans are eager to watch the games irrespective of the timing inconvenience in different time zones of the globe. Only a few years ago, the NBA's majority of

the market existed in the North American continent but now, it has grown tremendously overseas.

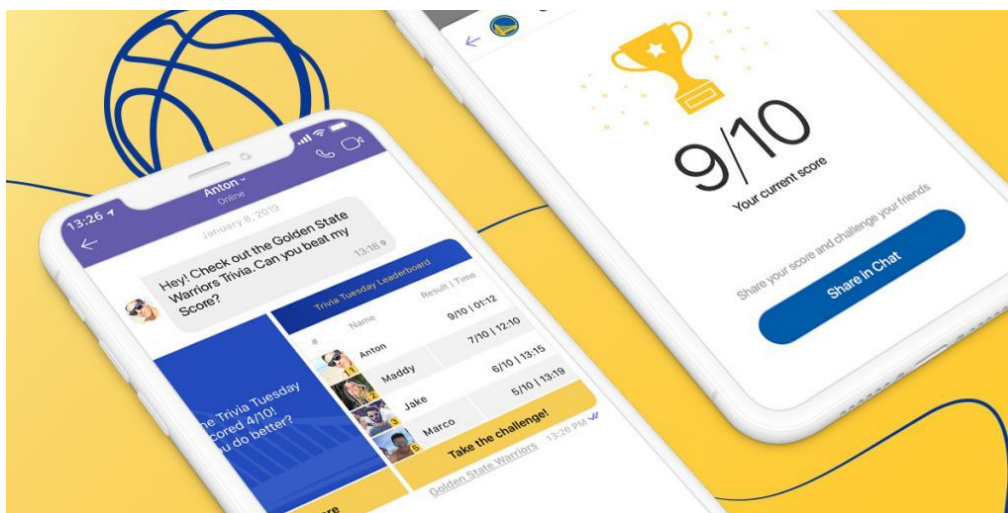
A very recent development with the league is that amidst the lockdown in the United States, in April 2020, the NBA formed a partnership with Microsoft to redefine the fan experience and engagement in a more personalized and digital manner. In a statement, the league commissioner Adam Silver said that the main goal was to make personalized and customized content for the supporters which is accessible whether inside the stadium or anywhere else in the world to completely link with the game and interact with teams and players. The partners will create a direct-to-consumer platform on Microsoft's cloud service and will implement artificial intelligence for customized telecasting and other features that will help grow NBA's fanbase worldwide. The core idea is to present and portray the NBA innovatively and with emotional connection to the fans in the new era of technology. The platform aims to provide the fans log-in, put their preferences such as team, players, stats, history and gaming for a full personalized experience for the existing as well as future potential fans. (Martin, 2020).

In the 2019 NBA finals, the underdogs Toronto Raptors faced the reigning champions Golden State Warriors which went down as one of the iconic moments amongst Canadian people as it was the first time a Canadian team won the NBA championship. At the time of the final, Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment permitted local and community screenings called as 'Jurassic Parks' and for the Game 1, they hosted 36 event parks in the province of Ontario. These fan parks were for communities and fans of Toronto Raptors, apparently the only Canadian team in a US dominated NBA league. By the time game 6 arrived, about more than 60 parks were organized across the world for the fans to view such a historic event in countries like Brazil, China, South American continent, Italy, Mexico, Japan and Philippines. Another major influence on the fan excitement was Drake's presence in the arena and the parks which was portrayed by the media brilliantly. Thousands of people tuned in just to watch Drake and his reactions to the game being a Raptors fan. According to reports, around 44% of Canadians tuned-in to watch the most important NBA game of the year, perhaps their lives. Local media and TV channels fired up hours before each game's tip-off to present their analysis, content and exclusive coverage for the supporters. The franchise also came up with an extraordinary tagline for the finals - "We the North" (being the only franchise located north of the US border). Furthermore, the merchandise sales on the NBA store rocketed by 80% more than usual. All it took was one NBA championship to increase the franchise value of the Raptors more than their hockey teams and not forgetting the impact the superstar Drake had as a brand ambassador on the fan engagement in Toronto. (Rock content, 2019).

As the world was in the COVID-19 pandemic, the NBA planned to host a live online player's tournament for their official videogame 2K20 (yearly editions) to keep the fans connected with the game as the league had cancelled all its games indefinitely. It was a collaboration between

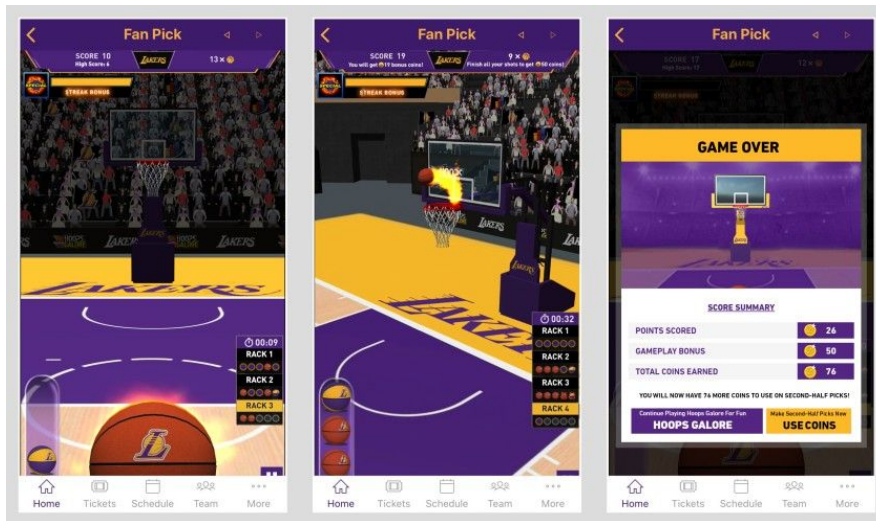
the organization, NBA players association and game developers 2K which included 16 players to play the tournament namely - Kevin Durant, Trae Young, Donovan Mitchell, Devin Booker, DeMarcus Cousins and others. The competition was broadcasted online on ESPN platforms, NBA channels, and 2K channels which all included youtube, twitter, facebook and twitch. The winner would win \$100,000 which would be funded to charity in support of the coronavirus relief campaigns. The NBA senior vice-president, Matt Holt said that the e-tournament was a greatly innovative idea that would keep the fans across the globe engaged with the league developments and was a subtle opportunity to strengthen ties with partners like 2K and NBPA. The broadcast would also show the camera on the players in their homes to capture their reactions. (Williams, McCullagh, Nelson, McCarthy, Roberts, et al., 2020).

The Golden State Warriors also set a good example for creative fan engagement as it is also one of the most popular teams in the NBA. Their stardom arrived when they drafted Stephen Curry, an extraordinary Point Guard in 2009 and winning the NBA title thrice in the period of 2015-2020. Apart from other efforts to reap fan connections around the world, the franchise has partnered with Viber that provide a deeper communication for the fans with the organization. The app is powered by Rakuten which allows instant chatting and calling. The fans can access the features of the app such as trivia quiz weekly, stickers, official warriors chatting robot that can update the user on the schedule, scores and exclusive content regarding the team. The Chatbot is also available in multiple languages so it can have a wider reach in the world. (Knecht, 2019). Golden State Warriors hold their fans in high regards and so, their philosophy and culture is portrayed by the team slogan “Strength in numbers” which is popularly used as a hashtag to unite the fans and express the culture of San Francisco.



One of the heavyweights Los Angeles Lakers also have a very creative concept where it allows the fans to enter draws and make predictions on the game to win exciting rewards. They have an app called “Lakers fan pick” where before the game tipoff the fans can log into the app and make

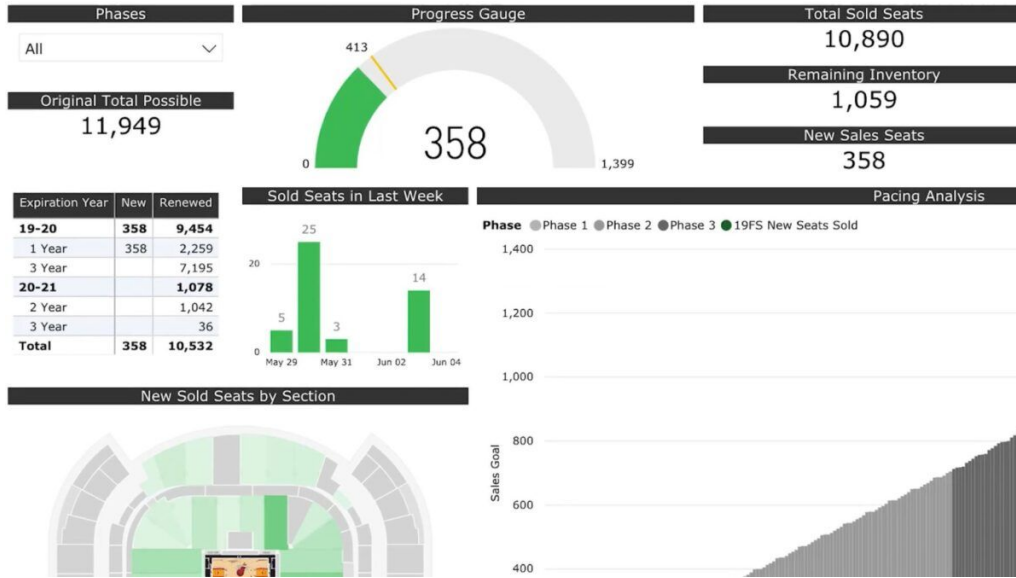
predictions about the scoreline, win or lose, etc. A concept of virtual coins is introduced to bet certain coins on a prediction and win more coins in return if correct. Fans can also earn coins through a feature called “Hoopers Galore” which is basically a game where the users have to make 3-point shots from different angles in a particular time frame. All the coins accumulated at the end of the game allows the fans to buy certain merchandise such as caps, tickets, t-shirts, etc for the specific coin value. The app including its features were introduced in the pre-season of 2019 and it received a great response and engagement from the fans worldwide. (Gonzalez, 2019)



When it comes to fan engagement and growth of the industry, the NBA is dead serious about it and they execute their development brilliantly. The fact that, the NBA is an example to the world and pioneers of basketball as a sport, one can expect a high level of content, marketing, hospitality and more from being one of the only leagues from the USA that presents itself as a global brand and tries to bring in more and more audiences from corners of the world. According to Sprung (2019), from the 1.4 billion people in the country of China, nearly 640 million of those watched some or the other NBA game in the 2017-18 season which is more than half of the population existing in the United States of America.

In the case of Miami Heat, the franchise has made tremendous efforts in order to improve fan experience on game days apart from providing free caps, towels, flags and bobbleheads to early comers. Partnering with Microsoft, Heat uses data from fans’ online presence, interaction and in-stadium attendance to customize their experience with the club. The main personalization begins when the fans walk in the arena, the ticket drops in immediately on their phones instantly. Once inside the stadium, the attendees can get messages about nearby food stalls and vendors for snacks and beverages to have while watching the game. The technology analyzes the exact times, fans walk into the arena or to the food sections, and restructure the functioning of those food counters which can ultimately reduce the wastage. The franchise’s digital department also sends

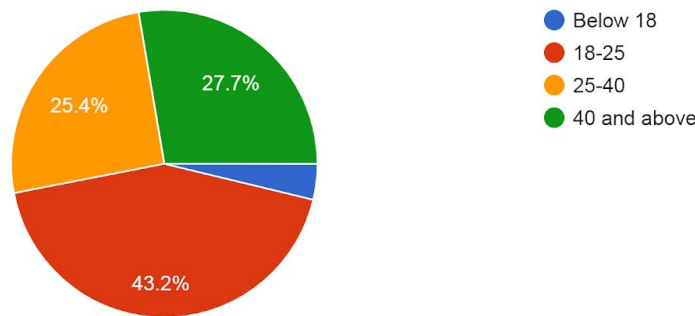
promotional messages and emails to the registered fans to advertise ticket sales, new offers on merchandise and content surrounding the team. (Microsoft, n.d). Such proactive and smart measures not just attract the fans into liking the content, but retains the focus of the existing fanbase who is constantly hungry for updates and content.



Findings:

In this section at first we are going to analyze the findings of the primary data collected from 2013 participants who completed the survey form. The analysis will subsequently create a link between the consumer behaviour & preferences and fan engagement process. Once the preferences, choices, opinions and recommendations of the fans are understood, we can propose a framework that improves the loyalty and commitment from the fans. But first let us look at the samples derived.

Age category
213 responses

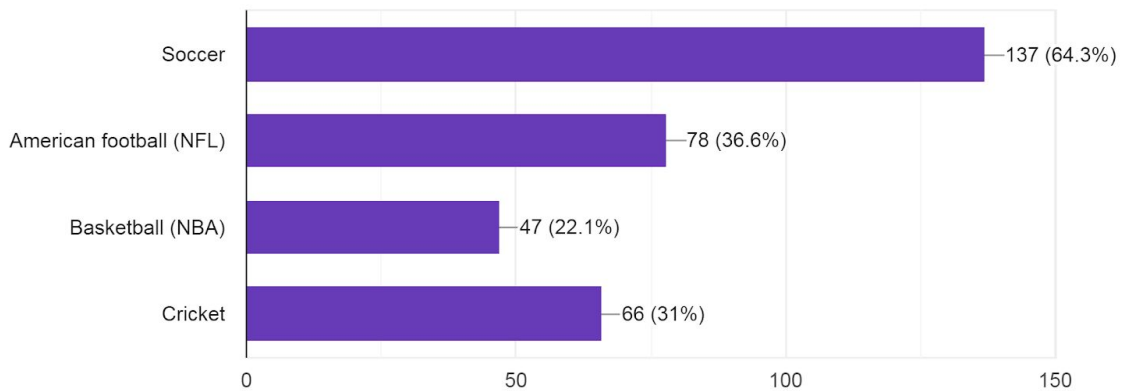


The survey concluded with the amount of 213 responses. The participants were randomly chosen by sending out the questionnaire forms on various sports related groups and individuals who follow sports on social media such as Whatsapp, Instagram and Facebook. Amongst the 2013 respondents, 17 persons were RCD Espanyol fans. In the chart it can be clearly observed that 43.2% (majority) of the respondents were from the age category of '18-25', which is a very young population. Surprisingly, we had more percentage of respondents belonging to the '40 and above' age group and surpassing the '25-40' age group which is generally quite the category that are into sports than their older counterparts. Meanwhile, only 8 participants out of the total were below 18 category. Every category has their own likings and tastes in sports and hence contributes differently to the respective fan culture.

The responses to the different sports followed by the test subjects were also somehow as expected yet a few surprises in that regard as well.

Which of the following sports do you follow?

213 responses

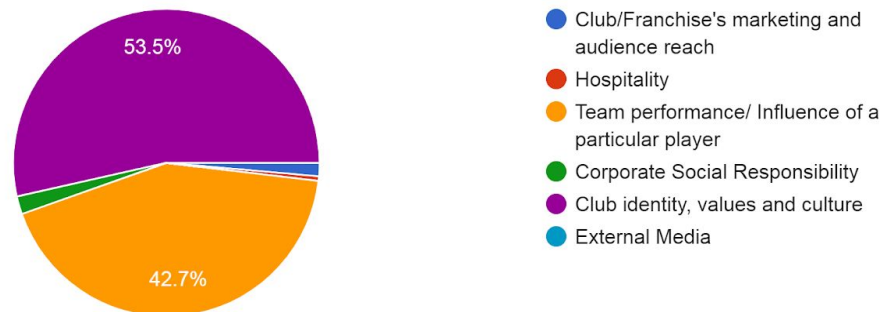


As the famous saying goes “Football is not a sport, it is a religion”, was proven in the survey when about 137 persons (64.3%) out of the total selected ‘Soccer’ as a sport they follow and turned out to be the highest share. ‘American football (NFL)’ stands at second place with 36.6 % of the total people following the sport which this came as a surprise as the majority of the test subjects were outside the US where it's mainly popular. ‘Cricket’ emerged with a good number by 31% of followers, being a sport played only in selected countries. The most surprising share can be noticed in ‘Basketball (NBA)’ since the sport is quite globally spread but only consists of 22.1% of the respondents following it making it the least followed compared to the rest in the survey. Basketball is more widespread than Cricket or American football and yet the data reveals otherwise which is a bit astonishing.

In the question following the previous one, respondents had the freedom to type in their favourite team in the answer box. The maximum answers pertaining to this question were mainly - San Francisco 49ers (NFL), Real Madrid (La liga), FC Barcelona (La liga) and Espanyol (La liga). Since the survey was also conducted in a RCD Espanyol fan group on facebook, many responses from their supporters were received. Other teams which the respondents mentioned were Bayern Munich, Green Bay Packers, Mumbai Indians, Indian cricket team, Arsenal, Liverpool, Chennai Super Kings, LA Lakers and many more from Serie A and Premier League and NBA. The main objective here was to only examine the demographics of team preferences in big numbers.

What is the most important thing that influences you to support your favorite team?

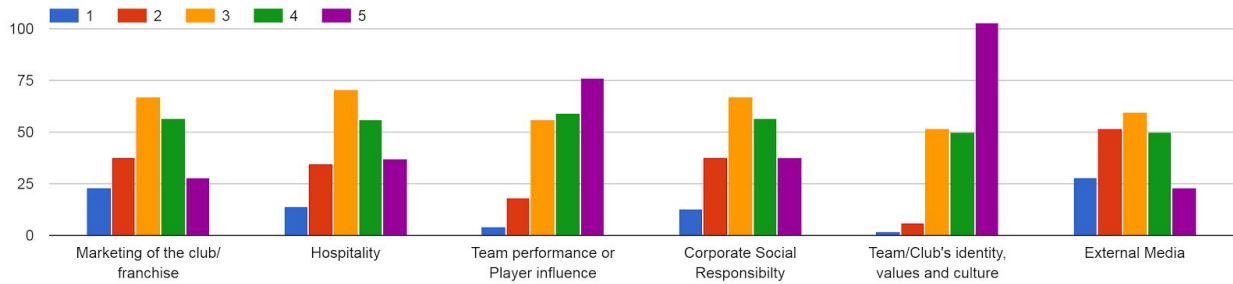
213 responses



Then we identified the priorities of the test subjects as fans and what influences them into supporting their favorite team. The examination revealed that the majority of the fans tend to be related to the values, culture and identity of the club that it represents. It is a crucial factor similar to people following a religion that comprises lifestyle, culture and values associated in life. A sporting club or franchise runs on a similar basis for promoting their players, teams, and the very identity that the local or international supports can feel an attachment to through a concept that unites them. In this case 53.5% of the fans chose this concept as the most elemental aspect. Team performances, trophies and influence of a particular player also drives a huge mass of people into supporting the team and here we can observe 42.7% of them prioritized this element over the rest. About 1.9% of the respondents selected Corporate Social Responsibility, 1.4% of the persons opted for the 'Club marketing and audience reach' aspect while only 1 person prioritized hospitality. None of the test subjects selected 'External media' as a top choice. Here we can clearly observe two major factors according to fans that prove to be influential in supporting their respective teams.

The respondents then had to rate each of the key aspects of the model on a scale 1 to 5 that are influential in the decisions of supporting a team. Again the results were pretty much as we expected.

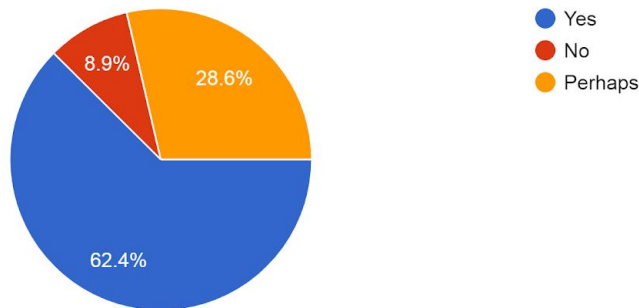
Please rate the above aspects on a scale 1-5 that influences you as a fan.



We can clearly observe the biggest amount in the ‘Team/Club’s identity, values and culture’ aspect with about 103 respondents opting for the same. The colors in the graph explain distinctively the scale of 1 to 5 in five different colors as can be seen above. The second highest majority marked in the category ‘Team performance or player influence’ with 76 persons prioritizing that over the rest. Meanwhile, ‘Hospitality’ and ‘CSR’ categories saw almost the same amount of respondents indicating it as top choice with 37 and 38 picks respectively. While 28 respondents selected ‘marketing of the club’ as the most influential factor and only 23 persons picked external media. Speaking of external media, it saw the highest number rating it as the least influential aspect. So, in short, according to the subjects, external media plays a minimal role in impacting their decisions in sports, while ‘Team identity, values and culture’ and ‘Team performance’ as the two major elements. On the other hand, there also are many participants who rated ‘CSR’, ‘Hospitality’ and ‘Marketing’ as average components.

Do you believe your favorite club/franchise understands the fan expectations and emotions and does enough to fulfill that?

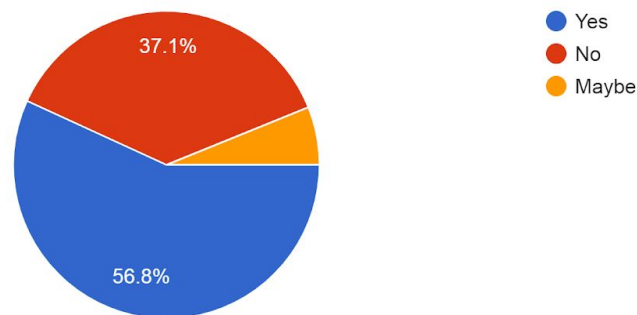
213 responses



Furthermore, the participants were also asked whether the club they supported are currently putting enough effort to comprehend & fulfill the expectations of the fans and their emotions. About 62.4% (i.e. 133 respondents) agreed with the fact that their club/franchise is fulfilling the expectations of the fans and supporting them by understanding their feelings or emotions. Only a handful of people, i.e. 19 subjects denied the statement and implied that their club was not managing their demands and requirements or were disappointed with their efforts. And 28.6% of the fans were unsure whether or not their supported franchise did enough to satisfy the expectations. From the above pie chart we can say that the clubs often keep the demands, behaviour and feedback in mind and try to improve their experience and expectations.

Are you aware of a soccer club based in Barcelona, Spain named "RCD Espanyol"?

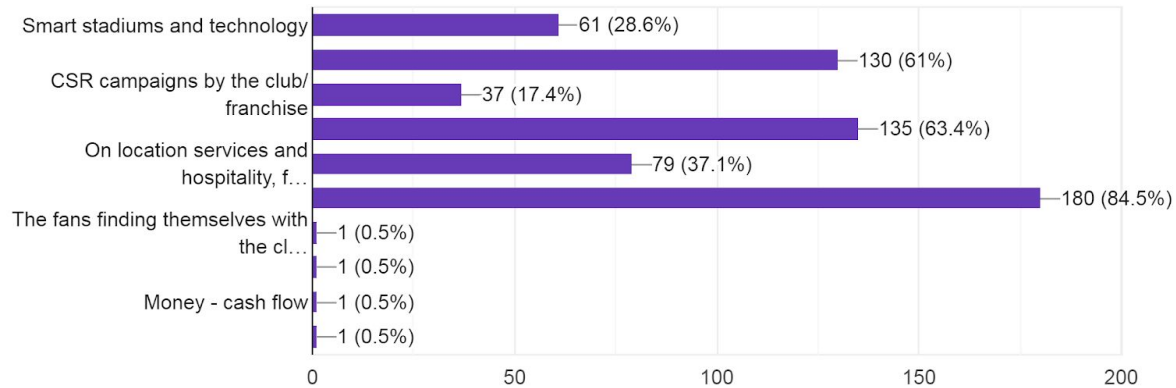
213 responses



With regard to the chart above, many of the test subjects were from the United States and India where awareness about La liga or RCD Espanyol is not present in every case, with an exception of the respondents who were actually from the Espanyol fan group. However, we observed a majority of responses who were aware about the club by 56.8% or out of the total, 121 respondents. The participants who were unsure or may have a vague idea about Espanyol's existence consisted of only 13 persons while a big amount of 79 (37.1%) people had no idea or recognition about the club. We can say that Espanyol's international presence might be decent in Asian countries and Europe but they need to increase their brand awareness in the United States.

Which of the following strategies do you think are most effective in engaging the fans into supporting a team? (Select any 3 of your choice)

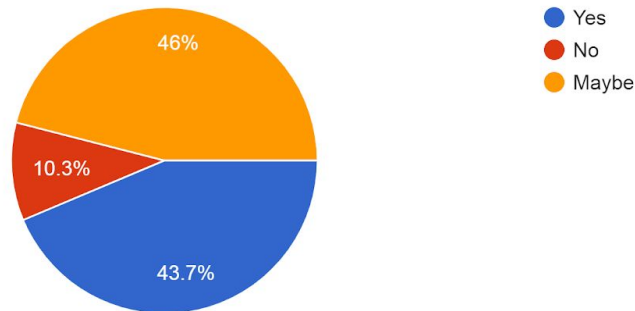
213 responses



Further, data regarding fan opinion on strategies of fan engagement was collected. The respondents selected any three of their choice with an option to suggest anything outside the list as well. The majority amounting to 180 responses (84.5%) chose the option ‘signing new and talented players, improving team performance and winning trophies’ as a strategy they believed would enhance the fan engagement and experience for any given club or franchise. 130 people also opted for social media content and marketing as a good tactic to boost the fans and retain them. A little more number was observed in the subjects who voted for ‘fan community screenings, fan parks and interactions’ with 135 picks as a decent way to promote community gatherings. Hospitality and on-location services had 37.1% selections while 28.6% picks were seen with the fans who preferred smart stadiums and technology. Surprisingly, the CSR aspect saw the least votes with only 37 responses compared to the rest of the given strategies. While some participants recommended extra schemes such as Financial stability and complying with fan sentiment.

Do you believe some of the strategies of fan engagement by your club/franchise in NFL, NBA or IPL can be implemented in a small budget club such as RCD Espanyol of Barcelona?

213 responses



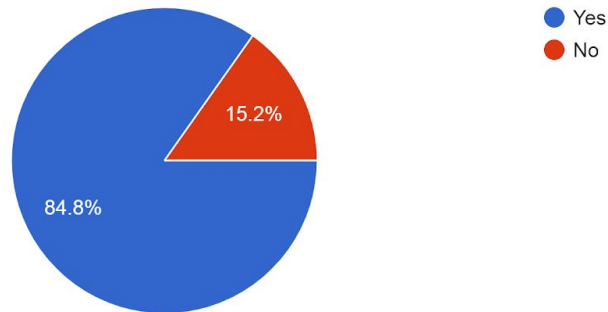
Moving on, the question regarding the main focus of the research on how RCD Espanyol de Barcelona can organize their fan engagement strategies based on the examples applied in NFL, NBA and IPL was put forward to the participants. Honestly, the question surrounding this might have been a bit deceptive because the majority of about 46% respondents chose 'maybe' as the option wherein they cannot say for sure what is on their mind. Perhaps, because all of them do not follow NFL, NBA, IPL and soccer at the same time that could have raised a doubt in their minds. While almost 44% of the subjects agreed that the strategies can be implemented based on certain conditions and only about 10% disagreed with the statement or the idea regarding the same.

Following the above question, the samples were asked to provide ideas on what particular strategies could be implemented by RCD Espanyol based on their perception and opinion with a short answer. Some of the common key note ideas are as follows:

- Social media campaigns.
- Signing of quality and talented players.
- CSR activities.
- Spreading their culture and philosophy.
- Attractive merchandise.
- Fan community gatherings.
- Reducing ticket prices.
- Player interactions.
- Increasing the use of english language to develop outside Spain.

Do you think RCD Espanyol can have a much bigger fan involvement given that they perform brilliantly and possibly win the Spanish League?

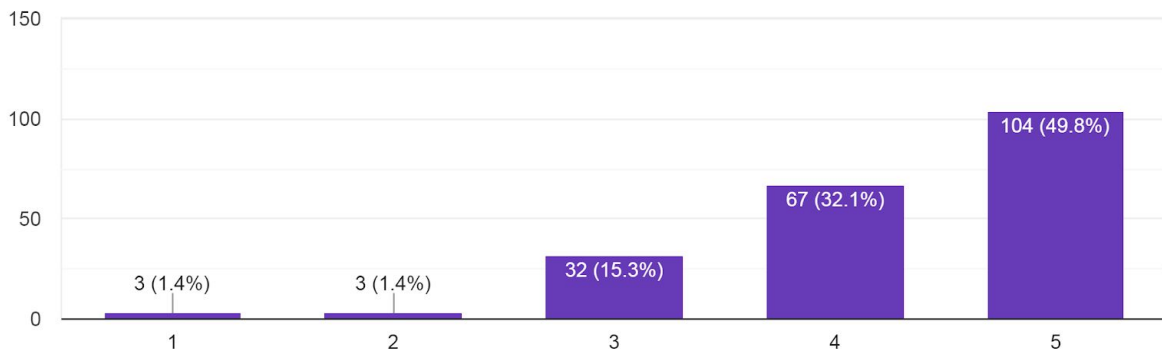
204 responses



The ultimate objective of any football club is to win trophies by performing brilliantly, getting constant support from the fans and developing as a brand. Additionally, we asked the subjects whether they think if the fan involvement and engagement can surge in the case that RCD Espanyol performs brilliantly and pulls off a Leicester-esque successful season by winning trophies such as Copa del Rey, finishing top 4 in the league or even winning La liga considering the odds. It was no surprise with the responses where a 174 (about 85%) responded positively while only 31 participants denied the possibility for the club to increase their fanbase and customer market. It is quite logical to agree with the statement given the fact that this would collaterally be a business and brand growth.

On scale 1-5, how important do you think it is for the club (RCD Espanyol) to promote their local culture, philosophy and values to ensure fan commitment?

209 responses



By now we already know the importance of promoting the club's culture, identity, philosophy and values into the market. Ultimately, the final question asked the participants to rate how important it is for RCD Espanyol to spread its philosophy and culture on a scale 1 to 5. A combined picks from ratings 4 & 5 saw 171 votes (aggregate 81.9%) that are in favor or in importance of nurturing the values and ideology of the club within and beyond Europe. While only 3 subjects gave the ratings 1 and 2 for the concept of developing club principles or beliefs. Only about 15% responses opted for the rating of '3' which basically implies a neutral opinion on the question.

To conclude the survey, it can be proved that the majority of fans value the Club's Philosophy, culture and principles the most, while team performance and play impact also has a significant role in boosting the fan engagement in any given sports. With respect to Espanyol, although majority fans thought perhaps the tactics from other mentioned leagues can be implemented by RCD Espanyol, there was also a high number who believed that it could be executed. Hence, the club's focus should be on international presence with local beliefs and cultural promotion of the club's philosophy. Respondents' recommendations such as signing new players and talent acquisition, fan gatherings and community screenings and social media marketing should be the core areas where the club can focus on to engage more and enhance the experience of the fans.

Now that we have analyzed the whole sample of 213 participants and understanding the strategies applied in the leagues - NFL, NBA and IPL, also studying the recent developments and functional approach in Real Club Deportivo Espanyol. We can now look upon a framework that explains the process and provides a solution between the club and fans to connect more harmonically.

A brief analysis of sample of RCD Espanyol fans:

To understand the ideas better, we shall be segregating the data collected from the Espanyol fans and analyse it. Of the total responses received from fans of various clubs and franchises across different sports, a data of 17 Espanyol fans was also recorded that might provide better insights as to what expectations and opinions they have about their club's fan engagement strategies.

Age category	Which of the following sports do you follow?	Which is your favorite team? (can be more than 1)	What is the most important thing that influences you to
25-40	Soccer	RCD Espanyol	Club identity, values and culture
40 and above	Soccer	R.C.D. Espanyol	Club identity, values and culture
40 and above	Soccer	R.C.D Espanyol	Club identity, values and culture
40 and above	Soccer	Basket. Soccer	Club identity, values and culture
25-40	Soccer	Espanyol	Club identity, values and culture
40 and above	Soccer	Rce Espanyol de Barcelona	Club identity, values and culture
18-25	Soccer	RCDE	Club identity, values and culture
40 and above	Soccer, Basketball (NBA)	RCD Espanyol	Club identity, values and culture
Below 18	Soccer, Basketball (NBA)	Espanyol, Racing Santander	Club identity, values and culture
40 and above	Soccer	Rcd Espanyol	Club identity, values and culture
25-40	Soccer	RCD ESPANYOL	Club identity, values and culture
40 and above	Soccer	RCD Espanyol de Barcelona y Real Madrid	Club identity, values and culture
40 and above	Soccer	RCD Espanyol de Barcelona	Club identity, values and culture
40 and above	Soccer	RCD ESPANYOL de BARCELONA	Club identity, values and culture
25-40	Soccer, American football	RCD Espanyol, NE Patriots y Boston Celtics	Club identity, values and culture
25-40	Soccer	Espanyol	Club identity, values and culture
40 and above	Soccer	DC Internazionale /Rcd Espanvol	Club identitv. values and culture

As we can observe in the above table, a larger number of fans (10 of 17) belonged to the age group '40 and above'. Hence, a very few numbers were below 40 years of age, making the sample an older population. Upto five people were aged 25-40 and the rest were either below 18 years of age or between 18 to 25. The most astonishing fact that can be observed is that every single respondent selected 'Club identity, values and culture' as the most important aspect that influences them to support their team. This shows how important the espanyol's culture and philosophy is for their supporters.

[Marketing of the club/franchise]	[Hospitality]	[Team performance or Player influence]	[Corporate Social Responsibility]	[Team/Club's identity, values and culture]	[External Media]
3	3	2	3	4	2
4	5	3	3	5	2
4	3	5	4	5	4
2	3	2	3	3	2
3	3	3	3	5	3
4	5	4	5	5	2
1	5	3	4	5	3
2	3	1	1	5	2
4	3	4	4	5	5
2	3	2	2	3	2
4	4	3	4	4	2
2	1	4	2	5	2
5	5	5	3	5	4
4	3	5	4	5	1
4	4	5	4	5	4
1	4	3	3	5	1
3	2	2	2	3	2

The graph above represents the perception of the fans on six different aspects that influences or engages them to support Espanyol (Since it's data of RCDE fans). The respondents were asked to rate each aspect on a scale 1 to 5 based on the importance they feel it holds for all the aspects. As we can observe, 12 out of 17 responses from Espanyol fans have given the paramount preference to the 'Team/club's identity, values and culture' aspect. Hospitality has got the most respondents giving an average rating of '3' with about 8 people opting for it. Meanwhile 'External media' has got the maximum of low importance ratings of either '1' or '2' which means that this is the least significant aspect that influences the fans to support Espanyol.

Do you believe your favorite club/franchise understands the fan expectations and emotions and does enough to fulfill that?	Are you aware of a soccer club based in Barcelona, Spain named "RCD Espanyol"?
Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes
Perhaps	Yes
Yes	Yes
No	Yes
Perhaps	Yes
Perhaps	Yes
Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes
Perhaps	Yes
Perhaps	Yes
Yes	Yes
No	Yes
Yes	Yes
Perhaps	Yes
Yes	Yes
Perhaps	Yes

Further along in the above figure, the fans were asked if they are satisfied with their club's efforts to connect and provide services with understanding their emotions and expectations. 8 respondents were happy, content and those who agreed to the statement about fulfillment of expectations. While only 2 subjects responded by selecting 'No' about the fact. Meanwhile the rest of 7 respondents selected 'Perhaps' as an option where they were not sure about it yet towards a positive side. In the question followed in the next column, people were asked if they were aware of the RCD Espanyol. Naturally, since all of the 17 subjects were Espanyol fans, they responded 'Yes'.

Which of the following strategies do you think are most effective in engaging the fans into supporting a team? (Select any 3 of your choice)
Social media content and marketing, Fan community screenings, fan parks and interactions., On location services and hospitality, free merchandise, half time shows, etc, Signing new and talented
Smart stadiums and technology, Social media content and marketing, Signing new and talented players, improving team performance, winning trophies, etc
Smart stadiums and technology, CSR campaigns by the club/franchise, Signing new and talented players, improving team performance, winning trophies, etc
Smart stadiums and technology, Fan community screenings, fan parks and interactions., Signing new and talented players, improving team performance, winning trophies, etc
Social media content and marketing, CSR campaigns by the club/franchise, Fan community screenings, fan parks and interactions.
Social media content and marketing, CSR campaigns by the club/franchise, Signing new and talented players, improving team performance, winning trophies, etc
Fan community screenings, fan parks and interactions., On location services and hospitality, free merchandise, half time shows, etc, Signing new and talented players, improving team performance
CSR campaigns by the club/franchise, Fan community screenings, fan parks and interactions.
Smart stadiums and technology, Fan community screenings, fan parks and interactions., On location services and hospitality, free merchandise, half time shows, etc, Signing new and talented play
Smart stadiums and technology, CSR campaigns by the club/franchise
Smart stadiums and technology, Social media content and marketing, On location services and hospitality, free merchandise, half time shows, etc
Social media content and marketing, Fan community screenings, fan parks and interactions., Signing new and talented players, improving team performance, winning trophies, etc
Social media content and marketing, Fan community screenings, fan parks and interactions., Signing new and talented players, improving team performance, winning trophies, etc
Signing new and talented players, improving team performance, winning trophies, etc, La força d'un sentiment
Smart stadiums and technology, Fan community screenings, fan parks and interactions., On location services and hospitality, free merchandise, half time shows, etc, Signing new and talented play
On location services and hospitality, free merchandise, half time shows, etc
CSR campaigns by the club/franchise, Fan community screenings, fan parks and interactions., On location services and hospitality, free merchandise, half time shows, etc

In the figure above, participants were supposed to select any three most important strategies of their choice which seemed to be most effective in engagement and experience. The option of 'Signing new and talented players, improving team performance, winning trophies, etc' got the most picks with about 11 selections, followed by 10 votes for 'Fan community screenings, fan parks and interactions' by the participants. There were 7 picks each for all three aspects of 'Smart stadiums and technology', 'Social media content and marketing' and 'Hospitality'. The least number of preferences can be seen in the 'CSR campaigns by club' option with only 6 picks. This proves that Espanyol fans prefer player signings, performance and trophies the most, also considering the fact that the club has never won the first division league in Spain.

Do you believe some of the strategies of fan engagement by your club/franchise in NFL, NBA or IPL can be implemented	Which ones would you recommend?	Do you think RCD Espanyol can have a much bigger fan involvement given that they perform	On scale 1-5, how important do you think it is for the club (RCD
Maybe		Yes	5
No		Yes	3
No	Take care of the team's bases	No	4
Yes		Yes	5
Maybe		Yes	4
Maybe	More external media	Yes	5
Yes		Yes	5
Yes	Feedback with audience	Yes	5
Yes	I don't understand this question	Yes	5
Yes		Yes	3
Maybe	of supporters for a Lunch with a player clu	No	3
No		Yes	5
Yes		Yes	5
No	Sign in better Players	Yes	5
Maybe		Yes	4
Yes		No	4
Mavbe		No	5

Additionally in the table above, the participants were asked if they believed RCD Espanyol can implement fan engagement approaches from NFL, NBA and IPL to which a higher number (7 selections) agreed with the statement. While 6 persons thought it may perhaps work and only 4 respondents denied the possibility of the strategies being applied. Following on, recommendations with regard to the previous questions were asked, but only a few people responded to it. Some suggestions were to sign better players and talents, more media exposure, feedback with the audience and fostering the fan base. One innovative idea recommended was for the players to have weekly lunch with some fans to have a greater bond with the club and its roots. Further along, about 13 respondents believed that RCD Espanyol can engage more fans and improve if the team put up better performances and probably win La liga, while the 4 remaining disagreed. Fans were then asked to rate the importance of promoting philosophy, culture and values for Espanyol on a scale 1 to 5. We can notice that 10 of 17 subjects gave a rating of '5' being the most important, 4 people grade the aspect '4' which also puts it in high importance while only 3 respondents rated it average with '3'.

To conclude the survey of Espanyol fan population of total 17 participants, the results reveal that it is of paramount importance for the majority of the fans to engage with the club with two main things -

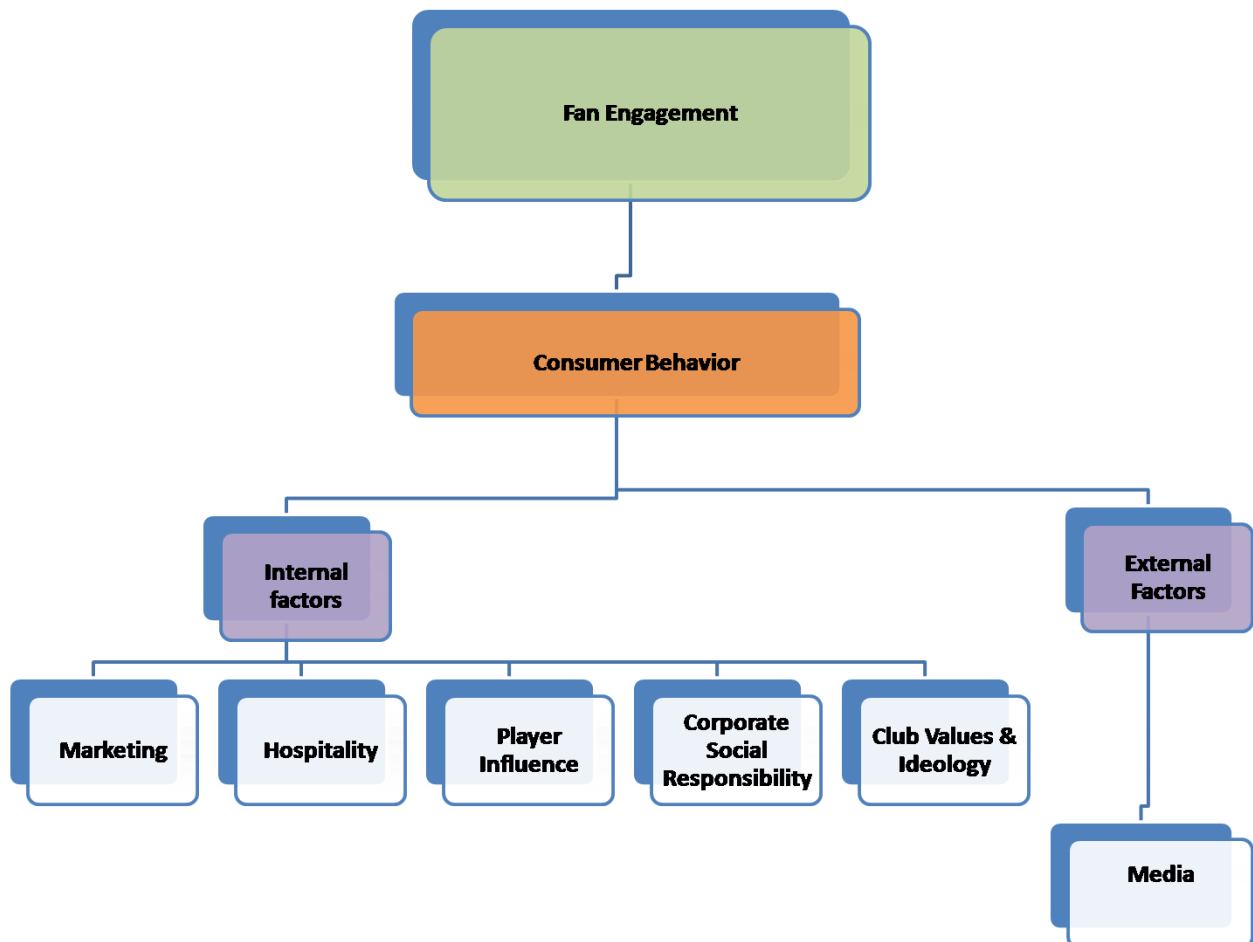
1. Club's philosophy, values and traditions which represent the culture of the catalan people and the city of Barcelona.
2. Significance of performance, signing of new talents or players to improve the play which is understandable given the fact that Espanyol has never won the Spanish first division league.
3. Fan community gatherings and screenings that portrays the same passion for the club.

Majority of fans also feel positive about the fan commitment and engagement strategies inspired from the other leagues of NFL, NBA and IPL.

Chapter 5: Model proposition, summary, conclusion and recommendations

Fan engagement model proposition:

One of the most important aspects of a business and in the case of sports clubs, it plays a crucial role in integrating the fanbase and results in increased influx of revenues towards the club. It needs critical thinking and analysis once all the missing links between the fans and the club are identified. And the one stronghold component would be understanding consumer behaviour.



Consumer behaviour is at the heart of understanding the flow towards fan engagement through both internal and external factors. The expectations, requirements, necessities, demands and interests of the fans in sports must be examined closely as to how each segment responds to various outputs. Based on the different types of fans mentioned before, the expectations and enthusiasm of each fan is different at many levels. Some don't expect a certain output or services while the other segment will be demanding the optimum services for the best experience. RCD Espanyol is a low budget and overlooked club, and for it to comprehend the mentality and behaviour of the fans is crucial. It allows the club to step ahead and work on the aspects that will ensure commitment and arouse interest amongst the local as well as international fans. As Espanyol stays strong to its Catalan roots and culture, it must also adapt as it engages international aspects and markets to promote the club and the team. As the cultural differences arise due to the presence in international countries, the club will need to expand their horizon and function based on how each demographic works.

The next function in the fan engagement process is application of internal factors. Beginning with marketing, it is one of the integral aspects especially in retaining the existing fans of the club. Marketing in sports plays a big role in attracting potential sponsorships and new fans to integrate with the club. Technology has become an important aspect of modern lifestyle and the clubs have taken the social media by storm to post creative and exclusive content, pictures, videos, player interactions, etc with its followers. It is important to grow as a club and promote the brand overseas especially when it is a football club. Global audiences does not only increase the fan base but also contributes majorly in clubs financing through broadcasting, merchandise sales and ticketing. It is of paramount importance for a club like Espanyol to have an international reach but staying loyal to the local culture.

A fan always expects hospitality from their favorite club mainly in physical form. The term hospitality generally refers to the range and quality of services available at the location of the event. This includes fair and reasonable ticket prices as well. Stadiums and arenas providing free merchandise to early entries, special fan packages provided by the club, comfortable atmosphere are some important elements included in a venue with good services. Quality food and beverages, catering, high tech smart stadiums for easy access and mobility, player interactions, etc are more luxury features that many stadiums provide and receive a positive healthy response from the attendees. As the world goes digital, add to it the recent Coronavirus crisis that had halted the football match might not have taken a heavy toll as one might have thought. Many clubs engage with their fans by providing online hospitality settings such as player interactions, lucky draws, trivia, merchandise offers, and much more to keep the commitment from the fans intact. Several examples of excellent online hospitality can be observed in the NFL and NBA. The 2020 official NFL draft was operated and held online where franchises selected their picks based on an online algorithm which was first in its history. The broadcast also received a positive response from the fans watching from their home in lockdown and the league managed to execute it innovatively.

The third component in external factors that contribute to the fan engagement function is player influence and team performances. For many supporters, this might be the most important aspect in supporting the club or a team. Trophies, glory and dazzling performances from the players on the pitch always catches the eyes of the audiences. Glory of the club has always attracted more fans in any given sport, unsure about their allegiances. But for that time being, the club benefits from their spendings and earns more revenues through different channels. History has always seen great teams and dynasties in football, basketball and NFL, and many of them fail to maintain the high standards in terms of performance and consequently the brand suffers losses in terms of finance and customers. For example, in 2016 Leicester City FC created history by winning their first ever Premier League title being the underdogs of the league and had been promoted to the first division a year prior. The players who weren't well-known at that time, became overnight heroes for the British town. Presence of a particular player can also make a massive difference in how a team performs. Michael Jordan is one of the greatest ever to play in the NBA, before him the Chicago Bulls weren't known to many. In 1998, when he left the Bulls, the franchise had won 6 championships in 8 years and Jordan was the finals MVP in all of them.

Hosting CSR events and campaigns elevates the value of the club and demonstrates their philosophy. Corporate Social Responsibility is another significant aspect that contributes to the good image of the organization in the market. It assures the people with faith and trust towards the organization and improves their value. In football, there are several aspects to CSR such as organizing fundraiser events for the orphan children, old age, poor people, disabled persons and the less privileged people prevailing in the global society. Charity games and donations are also an important part of CSR perspective. In a way, the club's CSR side also represents the virtues and culture of the club and its beliefs. Brand awareness can substantially increase due to its CSR activities, especially in the international community that can strengthen the fanbase. Many football clubs such as FC Barcelona or Real Madrid have their CSR foundations as the base and groundwork of their clubs. One such example is set by Chelsea Foundation which works on a wide spectrum of initiatives such as education, employment, child abuse, promoting disabled persons to play football, working on development of women sports and so on. The club uses such campaigns and activities to have a wider and global reach to make people aware of Chelsea FC's principles.

Any given football club is built on the base of its philosophy, culture and values. The values represent what the club stands for. Even in the corporate world, every company or industry represents an ideology and culture that defines their very existence and purpose. In football, people tend to be emotional about football if it portrays the local culture and values in their club by playing football and helping the local community grow. The culture also shows what the organization believes in and how it operates by standing up for the rights and ideas of the community. For example, FC Barcelona goes with a famous motto '*Mes que un club*' which means '*More than a club*' that represents that it stands for the identity and idea of the catalan people and their culture. This motto describes so much about the club with just four words. Liverpool's famous motto '*You'll never walk alone*' is the key selling point of the club as a

brand across the world that sends a powerful and motivating message that might entice the fans into connecting with the club, symbol, principles and ultimately football.

The final aspect in my model is a factor that impacts fan engagement externally is media. The external media, sports channels, periodicals and magazines play quite an overlooked yet salient role in influencing the inflow of customers/ fans towards the organization. The very reputation of the club lies in the hands of the media who have total control in portraying the image of the club to the mass audiences. The clubs do their best to not let out certain things outside the club that might affect their name through the media. The media companies sometimes also have their preferences, dislikes and voice over certain clubs which do not confer with public interest. At number of times the media sends out information to the public by misunderstanding the situation or statements from the club which ultimately costs heavy for that organization. Media has a strong arm in driving the thoughts of the fans, may it be positively or negatively. The fans often blindly believe what the media publishes and hence, tables can turn really quickly. Considering RCD Espanyol has good relations especially with local media such as Marca, Mundo Deportivo, Onda Cero, AS and more, transparency with the club has to be maintained to avoid misleading the fans. For example, in 1993 the American media reported that Michael Jordan was spotted gambling just before game-2 of the Eastern Conference Finals against the Knicks. According to Quinn (2020), Jordan made it clear that he was not addicted to gambling, but rather it was his pastime hobby. Despite that it was reported that he had an addiction and the media & the reporters stormed him out with questions and doubts. This lowered his performance for the next game and they lost the second game with Michael underperforming scoring only 3 of 18 shots. And hence Media would be the last aspect in the fan engagement model that comprises several important elements that define the entire process from one parent source called consumer behaviour.

Summary and conclusions:

As expected, the study gave us a detailed idea regarding what the fans prefer to have, their expectations from the club they support and strategies they think that might be implemented in RCD Espanyol. However, there were some limitations since many of the test subjects with regards to the NFL belonged to the San Francisco 49ers fan group which might be a bit biased in terms of choices and tastes. Although we did receive responses from the fans of other NFL franchises as well. One of the key aspects of the study was that we got about 17 responses from the supporters of RCD Espanyol itself that provides us with accurate information as to what they expect from the club and what new initiatives they would prefer for the club to implement to keep them happy and engage more fans inbound. As different sports are also concerned within the study, the supporters of each different franchise in each different sport display different emotions, feelings and cultural values towards the club.

There are several strategies that would help Real Club Deportivo Espanyol de Barcelona to upgrade the level of fan engagement. As the whole structure of football is different to that of Cricket, basketball and American football, the implementation of the strategies in other leagues will be challenging and yet potentially successful for Espanyol if a structured model is nurtured. Looking at the examples from the other leagues and analyzing the current implementations by the club, the club can improve their fan experience and participation by mainly staying strong to their local Catalan roots and promote the club as a brand overseas more than what it usually does. Brand awareness overseas and understanding the fan emotions and expectations will substantially increase their fan reach and ultimately bring in more revenue. It is believed that the fans of Espanyol were generally regarded as non-Catalans because historically the club was in favor of a unified Spain, contradictory to FC Barcelona who favored Catalonia independence. Given the circumstances, the club needs to expand globally by promoting their philosophy, culture and values of being “Maravillosa minoria” or ‘Marvelous minority’. This would be their most significant and powerful play in order to grow the club culture.

Secondly, the survey reveals that another noteworthy factor that would prove to be impactful is the signing of new players and coaches to improve their performances. Brand value would multiply if the team wins a major trophy such as La Liga, Copa del Rey or Europa League for instance in a spectacular season finish. Sponsorships and investors will be more willing to invest in the club that has strong values and a potentially good performing squad that are title contenders consistently and hence, people in the industry would be more attracted to follow the club and their games.

The literature review indicates us that technological upgrades that enhance the fan experience, fan community screenings and gatherings to invoke unity, special services for the fans, tickets raffle, possibly introducing robots for certain tasks like bartending, etc are some potential aspects that can be learned from the Indian Premier League. The NFL also provides a classic example that can be implemented by Espanyol such as broadcasting games live on Twitter with exclusive content, virtual online fan gatherings to watch the games which will be played behind closed doors for the time being, half-time entertainment, ‘Pose with the pros’ concept which is currently used by Dallas Cowboys, making contributions and services to local social community and free merchandise distribution to early entries are key ideas. The club can also look upon the ideas from the NBA which is now a well-known brand around the world like personalized apps, using a public figure as the brand ambassador, fan parks, historic sporting performances, online gaming tournaments, club slogans to form unity in fans and smart features on the app for better in-stadium hospitality experience. The one thing the club needs to manage is the finance and brand image through media relations. The strategies can be implemented given the perception of the club and their openness. A sturdy organizational structure, digital department, marketing and hospitality department are the key players that need to work with chemistry and have a strategic plan for implementation.

Recommendations:

It is a recommendation for the club to use the model or framework proposed in our research to potentially see an improvement in the fan engagement by looking through the strategies in other leagues. Although, the change cannot be seen overnight but rather it's a base for the club to guide them through a bigger picture that follows in the future between the fans and the organization. Some of the recommendations based on the literature review and survey data analysis are as follows:

1. First and foremost, the club's primary focus on international awareness should be by promoting RCD Espanyol's philosophy, history, culture and value with which the existing and future fans can associate themselves. Special focus should be put especially in countries such as China, India, Indonesia, Japan, South American continent, Philippines, etc. who have a great following for La liga.
2. The club's secondary focus must be developing the youth academy, performances and signing of quality players within a specified budget through an accurate scouting system. Developing grassroots programmes in Spain and abroad like other big clubs do to recruit youth players. This would attract the public when the performances are good enough to have a spotlight. (Ex.- Leicester City)
3. Given the current coronavirus pandemic crisis, the club must partake in the local community services, solidarity aids and donations in any kind wherever possible to put themselves into the media and public spotlight. Engaging and reaching out to more people, especially those in distress through various organizations like Esperança, common goal, Ajuntament de Barcelona, etc would improve the clubs image drastically locally and internationally.
4. Engage more on digital and social media platforms in this crisis and maintain the same in the future since technology is taking over. The club can create partnerships with leading digital industries like Microsoft, Google or perhaps IBM to make creative content, interact better with fans anywhere and remain technologically advanced compared to the rest although RCDE stadium is already the first cashless stadium in the country. The club can also work on creating a more interactive and innovative app which includes players playing trivias or games to earn coins and later exchange the collected coins for merchandise or tickets.
5. Work on applying the mentioned strategies from NBA, NFL and IPL that will attract decent attention from other clubs and fans, including local. Espanyol can install their own 'Pose with the pros' screens where fans can select virtual augmented reality to click pictures with the club's players. Cheerleaders are also a huge attraction in all of the other mentioned leagues, perhaps introducing female cheerleaders on matchdays can prove to be fruitful in terms of better attendance and fan experience. Like in IPL, Espanyol can organize public gatherings of the fans in Barcelona, and other local or international locations (Ex.- China, India, etc) where they have a decent amount of fans to watch the game together once it is safe post coronavirus crisis. Otherwise, an online watch party is also popular where people can chat whilst watching the

games. Organizing online FIFA gaming tournaments amongst the players of different football clubs of Spain to gain attention of the fans of all participating clubs. Half time shows and entertainment preserves the attention and interest from the fans. It gives them the feeling of a satisfactory stadium experience, and hence RCD Espanyol should consider implementing it. Creating hashtags or slogans associated with the club mentality (ex.- #TotsSomEspanyol) to promote the league and cup campaigns that unites the fans together and possibly affecting players' performances positively. There can be many other approaches that Espanyol can implement from concepts of NFL, NBA and IPL's strategies.

6. Providing the attendees with reasonable prices for tickets, merchandise and food & drinks with quality innovative services. Keeping in mind the aftermath of the coronavirus crisis, for certain months sports will be played without an audience and hence, RCD Espanyol should put more efforts to provide quality content such as hosting online fans to players interactions, covering all training sessions, and possible live stream of matches on selected platforms.

7. Creation of a documentary film that would encapsulate the story of the club and partnering with Netflix or Amazon prime can potentially prove beneficial for extra engagement. Espanyol as a club has its own history with the club, players, coaches and its connection to the city. Portraying content such as historical clips, training sessions, player's life, etc in a documentary film positively will charm the viewers.

8. Getting a local/international celebrity to attend the games and support the club can acquire and attract fans towards the club potentially. Especially if the club manages celebrities like Alvaro Morte, Ursula Corbero or Alba Flores who are spanish yet internationally trending to strongly promote RCD Espanyol through any approach will stimulate and attract millions of people into following the club and ultimately increasing their revenues.

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