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Sports Media Landscape – Investigating Parasocial Interactions, Behaviours and the impact of sport absence due to Lockdown

Pedro Miguel Bicho Fadista

Master in Marketing

Supervisor:
Prof. Mónica Mendes Ferreira, Invited Assistant Professor of the Marketing, Operations and General Management Department, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa – ISCTE-IUL.

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BUSINESS SCHOOL

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Abstract

Sports popularity is undeniable, being one of human's main leisure activities. Its evolution does not go unnoticed, with eSports figuring as the latest upgrade, which has been generating much controversy, with some categorizing it as just an activity while others defend the competitive gaming as a proper sport. Disputes aside, eSports are here to stay, with an on-going growth all over the world, presenting disruptive events and engaging its audience, mainly, in new media platforms.

Therefore, this dissertation will review the sports evolution panorama, incorporating the role of eSports in Portugal, and consequently, how digital evolution leveraged new habits of media consumption. With that in mind, parasocial interactions topics were reviewed and related-data was analysed, being clear that in both types of platforms, enjoyment, attachment and social interaction seem to positively influence the user experience. Lastly, the experience in sports environment came under scrutiny, embedding the recent SARS-COV2 pandemic impact in the research, trying to elaborate on the main behaviours and emotions felt by sports-enthusiast population.

To do all that, primary research was conducted where respondents were asked to self-evaluate themselves regarding their experience while watching sports in both Traditional and Digital platforms. One of the main conclusions drawn from this research indicated that Digital platforms are predilect for eSports enthusiasts. On the other side, conventional sports fans still prefer Traditional media, however, the discrepancy between platforms preference is less notorious. It also became clear that sports absence was much noted, with people urging to get back to live events.

Resumo

A popularidade do desporto é inegável, sendo considerado uma das principais atividades de lazer para o ser humano. A sua evolução não passa despercebida, com os eSports em destaque, no momento, o que tem vindo a gerar controvérsia, com investigadores categorizando-os como apenas uma atividade, enquanto outros defendem-nos, afirmando tratar-se de um desporto propriamente dito. Disputas à parte, os eSports vieram para ficar, experienciando um crescimento global contínuo, apresentando eventos disruptivos e atraindo o público, principalmente, em plataformas digitais.

Portanto, esta dissertação analisará o panorama da evolução do desporto, centrando-se nos eSports em Portugal e, consequentemente, perceber como a evolução digital potenciou novos hábitos de consumo de media. Com isso em mente, o papel das interações parassociais foi escrutinado, e pode-se concluir que em ambos os tipos de plataformas, tanto a satisfação, a ligação e interação social influenciam positivamente a experiência do espectador. Finalmente, também a experiência em contexto desportivo foi averiguada, incorporando o recente impacto provocado pela pandemia de SARS-COV2, numa tentativa de aprofundar os principais comportamentos e emoções demonstradas pelos adeptos de desporto.

Consequentemente, foi realizada uma pesquisa primária onde os entrevistados puderam fazer uma autoavaliação, tendo em conta a experiência pessoal de assistir a desporto, tanto em plataformas tradicionais como digitais. Uma das principais conclusões desta pesquisa indicou que as plataformas digitais são as prediletas, por larga margem, para os entusiastas de eSports. Contrariamente, os fãs de desporto convencional, preferem plataformas tradicionais, porém, a discrepância entre as preferências de plataforma é menos notória. Ficou ainda claro que a ausência de desporto foi sentida pelo público, principalmente as experiências ao vivo.

Palavras-chave: Desporto, eSports, Marketing Relacional, Interações parassociais, COVID-19.

JEL Classification System: M310 & Z210

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Acronym Glossary

AR – Augmented Reality

CRM – Customer Relationship Marketing

ExPros – Experience Providers

MLB – Major League Baseball

MLS – Major League Soccer

NBC – National Broadcasting Company

NFL – National Football League

NHL – National Hockey League

OTT – Over-the-top

PSI – Parasocial Interaction

PSR – Parasocial Relationship

SEMs – Strategic Experiential Modules

VBC – Virtual Brand Community

VoD – Video on Demand

VR – Virtual Reality

WHO – World Health Organization

1. Introduction

Sports have been always part of humans' quotidian, stimulating and enabling the development of personal characteristics, behaviours, and attitudes, while allows individuals to compete towards a singular goal. Besides that, sports, have been supporting humans to overcome their personal barriers, surpass challenges and most important of all, have made people dream!

Its popularity has risen over the years, leading to a development of the economic impact and sociocultural importance in people's lives, spread throughout several communities, allowing sector brands to flourish, and stimulated researchers to pay more attention to such doctrine. Researchers have reached the conclusion the marketing value of sport and the sport industry has been growing exponentially over the past decades and Manoli (2018: p.2), believes that *"with new technological advances introduced and adopted by the sport industry almost unceasingly, the progress and study of sport marketing is not expected to decelerate in the near future."*

Nevertheless, sport entities face unpredictable environmental factors, such as pandemics, strained business relations and others, that influence the sports industries, meaning that is crucial for entities to develop a continuous monitoring of the market so that they can strive for greatness.

One cannot deny that information-spreading rate is increasing, with individuals accessing and consuming content over multiple platforms and devices, leading customers to become more informed and aware of its surrounding, resulting in customer's behaviour alterations. According to Jain and Yadav (2017, p.49) *"companies are no longer in charge of the communication process, their brand message and even their pricing models at times. Technology has given way to the rise of the conscious consumer."* Moreover, the industry is reflecting the influences of the digital world that we are living in. As a result, today's era athletes are content creators and have the power and tools to gather fans towards a purpose; technology and new media means will change the way we are entertained and how we interact with the action on and off the field. In addition, eSports are taking over the world, being commercially incorporated into the existing global industries and over-the-top platforms are competing fiercely with traditional broadcaster (Delloite, 2019).

The virtual panorama is thriving, owing to the massive expenditure allocated to eSports and its consequential development across continent, with an increasing number of players, spectators, and events. The platforms architecture and features are responsible for fans expression of parasocial relationships, fostering enjoyment, social interaction, and leading to an attachment to those media portals (Kim & Kim, 2019). As such, it is relevant to testimony the effect of those consequences in virtual brand communities (VBCs) and its effect on the relationship with both Traditional and Digital platforms, understanding individuals' opinions and preferences. Moreover, this thesis also pretends to explore the sports watching habits of sports fans before and after the quarantine imposed by the quick spreading of coronavirus and understand in more detail the inherent behaviours associated to both publics, seeking to elaborate differences or compile resemblances between the two.

2. Sports Evolution

The definition of sports marketing has been discussed throughout time, yet the core activities have remained untouched. In the early beginnings, ancient roman governors were pursuing the acceptance by the public, by providing citizens leisure activities and entertainment, however, those recreation actions are in constant evolution and mutation. Sports are nowadays contemplating activities that do not require physical skills nor physicality but still figure as competitive, organized, and institutionalized (Pizzo, Baker, Na, Lee, Kim & Funk, 2018), just like any ordinary sport. The new branch goes by the name of eSports, and reflects the overall panorama the world is experiencing, with offline clashes being replaced by online disputes - DOTA 2 and League of Legends are gaining relevance over American football and football at an incredible fast pace. Nonetheless, its connotation has been subject of discussion, with some arguing that eSports are not sports due to its lack of direct physicality and real-world outcomes (Jenny, Manning, Keiper & Olrich, 2016; Parry, 2019).

2.1. Marketing in Sports

Sport industry develops nowadays marketing-driven approaches to perceive fan's needs accurately and gather an even bigger legion of devoted individuals, with eSports in major expansion. Currently, and more than ever sport business was crafted into entertainment in which financial success responds as a central figure in sports (Da Silva & Las Casas, 2017). Also, mobile technologies grout enabled fans to extend their fanatism: accessing news, find updated information, results, highlights, but also facilitating the ticketing purchase process, club membership services, not forgetting interactive games or fantasy leagues and mobile television (Hutchins, 2014), indispensable activities to maintain team's monetary wellbeing and public engagement.

There is no doubt that the possibilities are vast, and no matter where the fans are watching their favourite team to play, marketers are focused on customizing and finding new ways to enhance the experience and develop fan interaction by the mean of technology (Meng, Stavros & Westberg, 2015). Technological developments impacted sports marketing, mainly with the generalization of social media platforms. Due to this "epidemic", sport sponsorship, fan engagement and sport brands communication started to be considered, in order to understand and verify social media hub's potential (Vale & Fernandes, 2018).

In addition, new technologies opened the horizon for brands deliver their content and interact with their audience, shaping social behaviour and facilitating the creation and knowledge diffusion through digital tools, leading sports companies and brands to adapt and re-shape their way of interacting with a passionate and demanding audience. Sparked by those behaviours, scholars investigated towards mobile channel developments how they have changed retailing business models, retail mix plans and shopper behaviour (Marino & Lo Presti, 2019) leading brands to adapt their communication and develop tailored options, improving sport's availability and experience. Consequently, sport has great spectator appeal, which gives sport a chance to gain revenues from many sources like ticket sale, media rights, sponsorships, licensing of products (da Silva & Las Casas, 2017: 46).

2.1.1. Sponsorship

Companies and industries use sponsorship as a marketing communication tool, expecting that the positive feelings associated to an event, team or player may be transferred to sponsoring brand (Lin & Bruning, 2020). This activity is already part of the business landscape, mainly when talking about the sports industry (Chadwick, Widdop & Burton, 2020).

Many literature has been dedicated to this topic, showing the academy sponsorship's altruistic power (Toscani & Prendergast, 2018) by supporting community relations and other corporate social responsible activities, yet, others demonstrate the commercial motive and potential of sports sponsorship, that may be used to gain commercial advantage (Woisetschlager, Backhaus & Cornwell, 2017).

In *CSR in sport sponsorship consumers' perceptions of a sponsoring brand's CSR*, Demirel (2019: 381) provides empirical evidences that sponsoring *"professional sport teams contribute to consumers' socially responsible perceptions of a sponsoring brand"*. Meaning that, sponsorship highly influence customer's perceptions towards a brand, elevating it to a different level than someone who has never contacted with it. Consequently, the consumer's intention to purchase the product and positive word-of-mouth is leveraged.

2.1.2. Media Rights

Indisputably, sports coverage rights market rivalry intensified between operators across geographies (Argyle-Robinson, 2017; Hutchins, Li & Rowe, 2019) like 21st Century Fox

and ESPN, both American, Qatar's beIN Sports, British Eleven Sports and SkySports or the Portuguese SportTV, in an attempt to attract audiences, advertisers and of course, profits. Supporting Lotz's (2017) findings on shifting regarding sports coverage rights ownership.

With sports rooted across society, there is no surprise that the sports rights market is a big business and a profitable one (Statista, 2019). Market competition became fierce, with traditional broadcasters rivalling against over-the-top (OTT) service providers (Accenture, 2016), with the latter adapting more accurately to the audience needs, providing Internet and mobile video streaming services to homes. Consequently, rights price increase and spectators have a broader variety of options at their reach.

Exponentiated by the its popularity, eSports revenue from media rights will reach almost the 400 million dollar mark, tripling the revenue from the same source in 2017 (Newzoo, 2020), with North America leading the way, signing content deals for major leagues and tournaments, such as the Overwatch League, NA LCS, and ELEAGUE.

On the gaming industry the majority of the platforms display content for free, with great results, sparking traditional broadcasters curiosity, with ESPN investing huge amounts in the coverage of eSports and BBC that broadcasted in 2015 the League of Legends World Championship quarter-finals (Llorens, 2017).

2.1.3. Merchandise & Tickets

Dionísio, Leal and Moutinho (2008: 222), learned that "*one of the ways of expressing the "we-ness" of a community is through consumption*". Devoted fans care deeply about symbols and rituals, as well as players, and so to feel they belong to a community of supporters they reveal purchasing behaviours.

Obviously, that is the desirable scenario for team owners and general managers which objectives are to maximize revenue at the same time the team performs well, improving winning percentage. However, we should notice that a winning streak affects positively events attendance, with tickets and merchandise sales following the same pattern (Li, Liu, Wang, Scott & Stokowski, 2019).

Despite not being the major source of income to leagues and sports teams, merchandise and crowded venues elevating organization's brand name, leveraging other source of income more profitable like media rights.

2.1.4. Digital platforms

In times of increasing use of social media marketing, companies are trying innovative ways to acquire and interact to their customers. One of them is *tryvertising campaigns*, in which brands can provide information about new products and select pre-defined consumers to use the product and spread their experience after (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009). Enjoying the benefits of product sampling combined with the power of social networks (Baum, Span, Füller & Thürridl, 2019), obtaining consumer reviews quicker, and accelerating the spread of information about product features and characteristics (Dellarocas, 2003).

Streaming and other over-the-top platforms are no different, giving the opportunity for non-subscribers to use the service for a limited period without costs with the chance for them to turn to paid subscribers after that period. This allows opinions and feedback of first-hand experiences that have tried the product sample, revealing details about the new product.

In platforms like Twitch or Mixer, streamers and channels earn money from greeting, paid subscriptions, and donations, however, it is not mandatory and spectators to whether pay or not.

3. eSports

eSports, commonly recognized as electronic sports, cybersports or competitive gaming is a form of competition between internauts in online video games. Hamari and Sjöblom (2017: 211) put it as "*competitive (pro and amateur) video gaming that is often coordinated by different leagues, ladders and tournaments, and where players customarily belong to teams or other "sporting" organizations which are sponsored by various business organizations*". In addition, one cannot deny that eSports are impacting society at different levels and research has been conducted across fields of studies: business, sports science, cognitive science, informatics, law, media studies, and sociology (Reitman, Anderson-Coto, Wu, Lee & Steinkuehler, 2019).

It all started in the 1990's with the introduction to the broadband Internet, however, only recently has been gaining increased attention and followers, leveraged by digitization and media globalization (Scholz, 2020).

Likewise, any other conventional sport, eSports gather a wide variety of sub-cultures within it, and its players and fans are organized in five specific genres, with the most common being multiplayer online battle arenas (e.g. League of Legends, Dota 2), fighting games (e.g. Street Fighter IV), first-person shooters (e.g. Counter-Strike: Global Offensive), real time strategy (e.g. Age of Empires), and sports games (e.g. FIFA, NBA 2K) as Funk, Pizzo and Baker (2018) revealed. Therefore, fans started to gather in online forums dedicated to the options of their choice, and those meetings moved from written to spoken words, with voice suppliers software companies providing the mechanism for gamers to chat amongst them and play at the same time (e.g. TeamSpeak).

Accompanying the evolution, online streaming platforms like Twitch and YouTube Gaming showed up, allowing gamers to display live video streaming of their videogame performances (Reitman et al., 2019), becoming hotspots for watching, sharing and discuss eSports content. Unsurprisingly, Facebook joined the party and is now the third gaming platform most watched globally. The ecosystem formed by the eSports industry is unique and was created and crafted to satisfy their own needs after being denied by traditional media operators, like television. The industry became creative and made TV consuming trivial in what concerns eSports transmissions, helped largely by the change in media consumption habits (Scholz, 2020).

Despite its enormous viewership, the industry is still infant. Yet, demonstrates huge potential, as Jeffrey Glass (2018), cofounder and investor in Team NRG, a leading eSports organization, confessed to April White *"eSports is the most gigantic industry that nobody's ever heard of"*, mainly due to its success around younger population and for being a quite recent phenomenon.

The continuous development drove eSports towards its professionalization and commercialization, functioning more and more like a traditional sport: filling up arenas, monetary prizes for winners, teams and rosters, expensive sponsorships, and media rights, gathering millions in front of the TV and computer (Jenny, Keiper, Taylor, Williams, Gawrysiak, Manning, Tutka, 2018). Spread all over the news are comparisons between League of Legends Finals and the Super Bowl Finals, once the eSports event managed to surpass by a million views the most notorious American football contest, in 2019 (Pei, 2019). In addition, professional traditional sports teams' owners and technological brands are considering acquiring or partnering with professional eSports teams in order to expand their business range into digital dimensions (Jenny et al., 2018).

Undoubtedly, its popularity has been on the rise in this decade, with an increasing and non-stopping number of spectators and viewers worldwide, leading to an obvious revenue growth. The Asia-Pacific region registers the highest number of players, around 1506 million, in a total population of 2,7 billion people, which represents 55% of global gamers and remains the fastest-growing region (Newzoo, 2020).
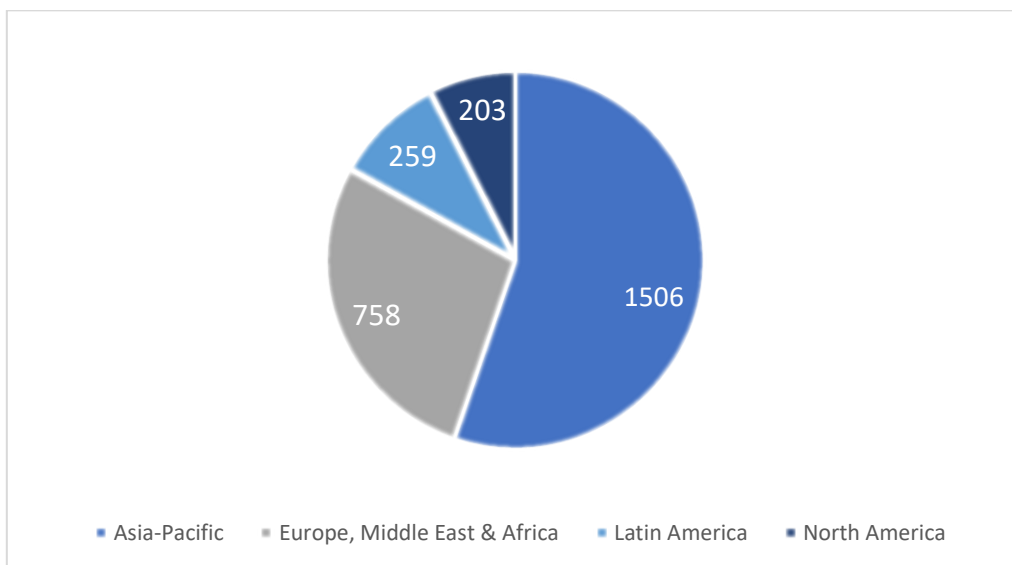
Figure 3. 1: 2020 Global Gamers per region (in millions)

3.1. eSports in Portugal

Historically, Portugal uses to "go with the flow" in what concerns entertainment, and eSports was no different. The current panorama has begun in 2000 under the XL Party event, the first national meeting dedicated to competitive gaming. Later, the event was sponsored by Moche, a young branch of one of Portugal's major telecommunication companies.

Tiago Justo, vice-president of the Portuguese eSports Federation, claims to be surprised with the eSports evolution in Portugal, exceeding expectations in number of fans, players, and events, but warns that there are still a long way to travel when comparing the national territory to other geographies.

Despite the delay in incorporating this new sport in the Portuguese society, organizations from different field are aware of developments in such field, investing and fostering gaming mentality inside borders.

Worten, an electronic and home appliance retail brand, market leader in its sector, understood that the gaming sector was growing significantly in other European markets and gifted Portugal with Worten Games Week, a national event that joins streamers, YouTubers, fans in an arena strictly decorated, plus videogame tournaments, prize money and competitive games between Portuguese eSports teams. The community is coming together, and the gaming segment experienced a turnover increase of 21%, in 2018, being now one of the most important sectors for the company.

The Portuguese national broadcaster (RTP) took a bold move when in 2018 decided to broadcast live tournaments of Counter Strike: GO, League of Legends and FIFA to the all nation, an historical mark for the sport, that for the first time in history had its airtime. Thus, RTP created an online platform dedicated exclusively to videogames and gaming, named RTP Arena, a must in the Portuguese audience.

Conventional sports teams are also jumping into the industry, many big names of the Portuguese sports like Sporting Clube de Portugal, Sporting Clube de Braga, Rio Ave, Boavista FC, among others, created eSports squads to dispute eSports competitions. Certainly, it will take much work and investment for them to be disputing big stages, yet

the foundation stone is placed, and it is expected that other teams may follow these in a near future, introducing and driving fans to a new leisure activity (Gantz & Lewis, 2014). That said, sports consumption habits are expected to suffer an impact, with an increasing adoption of digital devices and platforms (Lopez-Gonzalez, Stavros & Smith, 2018).

4. Media Consumption Habits

Putting into perspective the developments that have impacted society the most, one cannot deny the fact that technology has changed the way individuals interact, behave, and form social ties. The media industry is facing an unprecedented transformation, disruptive innovations are conquering the audience, endured by world's digitization and the convergence with Internet possibilities. Since the year 2000 the number of Internet users has grown by an estimated 1167%, accounting now for more than 4.5 billion users worldwide (Internet World Stats, 2019), implying a higher usage of mobile devices and services.

In addition to that, television have come a long way, screen size has increased, image quality improved, new interactive functionalities and gadgets were presented alongside, enabling sports spectators to take advantage of the device full capabilities (Rowe, 2014). Consequently, people have at their disposal a more interactive and tailored media, in which its contents and the way they are produced and commercialized also evolved. Pérez, Oñate and Camussetti (2018) explore the aforementioned situations, paying special attention to young adults, a public that look at such changes as a natural cycle. In a nutshell, as some affirm *"the convergence of communications, commerce, information and computing has also changed the way people access and consume media"* (Tana, Eirola & Nylund, 2019: 109). Moreover, scholars found evidence that under certain conditions viewers may experience enjoyment boost by accessing social media on a second screen while performing other activities (Kramer, Winter, Benninghoff & Gallus, 2015).

May be still unfair to characterize traditional media as obsolete (Jin, 2018), however, it is noticeable that newer media is taking over, and last decade's results prove it. Traditional media providers are facing growing competition (Burroughs, 2018), with video streaming platforms like Netflix, HBO and Amazon Prime experiencing increasing visualization and subscriber' numbers. These services are commonly known as OTT media or video-on-demand (VoD) and are changing the old media consumption habits.

In *Exploring Online Video Watching Behaviors*, Bentley, Silverman and Bica (2019), pointed out three major alterations in media consumption. Short-form content reveals to be very appealing and more popular than traditional TV or reality shows; viewers can select the most appropriate time to watch their favourite shows, unleashing themselves

from pre-defined schedules; enrichment of website experience to prioritize content to be watched, facilitating the user search for results.

Patterns of sports consumption have been changing rapidly; screens are evolving and depicting higher quality image (4k resolution), accompanied by a development in the emitter equipment and the surrounding gadgets that enable viewers to obtain an immersive experience (Schäfer, Kauff, Skupin, Sánchez & Weißig, 2017), in the commodity of a home. Additionality, television functionalities have been evolving as well, viewers can record content that will be available to be consumed at any time of convenience, and shows can be stopped and rewound so that they do not miss a detail of the action. On the other side, streaming platforms like Twitch enable streamers to save videos, creating an online library available throughout.

Consumer tastes are shifting and that is undeniable, especially due to the regeneration of the consumer group, with comprised ages oscillating between 18 and 34 years old. OTT providers are aware of the updated habits, with younger viewers spending more hours consuming digital video content per day than any other age group in 2014, according to Accenture.

Connectivity is mandatory in today's society, individuals need and search for networks on a regular basis to be connected to their peers and relatives, allowing them to be always updated. With the world becoming more and more connected, mobile service operators are updating their offers to consumer's needs, enabling them to get access to news and entertainment media content anywhere at any time, through wireless technology (Hutchins, 2014). 3G and 4G networks are already a reality and opens a window for users who starve for up-to-moment results and follow live events through different applications or web tabs, delivering it fast without stops and displaying tailored content and activities to keep them engaged with sports occurrences (Gantz & Lewis, 2014: Tamir, 2019).

4.1. Media Consumption in Sports

Yorke and Greenwood (2014: 2) made it clear, *"fans are not only searching more on mobile, but they're also searching during the game"*, a behavioural pattern that was occurring only after the final whistle, developed thanks to the evolution of mobile devices. For instance, the experience of watching sports on television is developing with the increasing number of screens, its functionalities, and interactive facilitated communication (Rowe, 2014). Thoughts and personal perspectives of gameplays are

often shared across social media, websites and blogs, rather than sports talk call-in shows, mainly because of the broader reach and free access to all (Gantz & Lewis, 2014).

In *The primacy of sports television: Olympic media, social networking services, and multi-screen viewing during the Rio 2016 games,* Hutchins and Sanderson (2017) found evidence that Olympic events coverage were being presented in multiple screens, both traditional, like television, and new means, using digital live streaming services accessible via mobile devices and offered to the public through certified applications or social networking services such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and in the case of eSports Twitch and YouTube Gaming.

In its essence, such portals give viewers the opportunity to enjoy sport in more devices, but it is not restricted to it, since the possibility of craft their watching tendencies across screens and interacting with genre-related communities are designated features (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012; Hutchins & Sanderson, 2017).

Live sport streaming importance in unquestionable for media broadcasts, and as the television industry is evolving, broadcasters are elaborating practices and strategies for how media sport can be accessed and curated (Lotz, 2017). Concerned about new OTT services (DAZN, Amazon Prime Video, Tencent Video, ESPN+, Twitch, Mixer) that took the market by storm, traditional broadcasters came up with similar options, trying to target millennials and younger viewers. CBS and NBC are just two examples of American broadcasters that offer OTT streaming news services to the ones who are not used to watch TV in the traditional manner or access daily news and content from apps or other streaming portals (Perez, 2019). Adding further contribution to the prior idea, Hutchins et al. (2019: 977), put sport as the central piece *"to the economic viability of both advertiser- and subscriber-supported television corporations under intense pressure from audience fragmentation and proliferating viewing options",* with viewers demonstrating increased interest and adoption to these services, enhancing the challenge for traditional means to keep up the pace of their rivals.

4.2. Streaming

Twenty-first century's sports enthusiasts can be considered privileged once technology enabled them to watch sports contests in suitable time across geographies by the mean of TV, smartphones, laptops, tablets and other similar mobile gadgets (Singer, 2017). This scenario, made telecommunication companies notice that marketing, advertising and

broadcasting potentiality could be explored, leading to a popularity rise over the last years, turning sports into a billion-dollar business. Video gaming streaming platforms are not excluded, platforms similar to Twitch revitalized the way as individuals watch sports.

There is evidence that OTT mechanisms are proliferating (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012; Gantz & Lewis, 2014; Hutchins, Li & Rowe, 2019) bringing commodity and more viewing options to users, validating the idea that live sport viewing behaviours are shifting (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012). Streaming services allow viewers to *"watch multiple live sports or events simultaneously on different screens, cutting between different events on the same screen in quick succession over the course of their duration, and accessing integrated live statistics, interactive features and online marketplaces during live mediated play"* (Hutchins et al., 2019: 979), yet we should not forget online chats, that are a powerful tool to interact with other viewers and the streamer (Wulf, Schneider & Beckert, 2018). Despite some functionalities be recognisable to be displayed in a TV, Lotz (2017) learned that online portals are better prepared and offer users more extensive and customisable properties than traditional media means.

Recapitulating, the growth of OTT service, as amply demonstrated here, *"is a major development in the distribution, transmission and consumption of global media sport"* (Hutchins et al., 2019: 975), changing and crafting the way individuals watch events and behave during transmissions.

4.2.1. Conventional Sports Streaming

Perhaps, the National Football League (NFL) and the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) were the pioneers in using online streams to transmit American football games via portable devices, serving as a supplement to television broadcasts.

Testifying the aforementioned idea, the newest panorama of sports watching was formally transformed in 2012, with the NFL decision to stream Super Bowl XLVI, live to mobile devices, for the first time in history. To be able to watch the match in an alternative way, fans had to be connected with the NFL Mobile app. The event is known as one of the biggest sports contests in the world, proved by astonishing audiences, reaching an estimated 111.3 million of viewers, according to Nielsen (2017).

In an industry ruled by established broadcasters, the entrance of mobile media operators became a risk, with great competition amongst them, fighting over commercial

sports coverage rights markets, with viewers benefiting from the digital expansion (Evens, Lefever, Valcke, Schuurman & De Marez, 2011).

Undoubtedly, sports popularity continued to grow and media's huge interest in broadcasting sports followed the trend (Tang & Cooper, 2012). The buzz and attention given to this entertainment sector did not go unnoticed, becoming *"a prominent form of popular culture"*, in which, *"media sport is embedded deeply within political, institutional, economic, and social relations"* (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012: 8).

The huge developments in the technological sector and the progressive mindset led to a television-fuelled globalisation of sport with some of the most dominant broadcast entities e.g. ESPN, beIN Sports, desiring to acquire sports rights from competitions all over the world (Hutchins, Li & Rowe, 2019). Leveraged by the opportunities brought by the new media, fans are recently consuming matches and experiencing interactive content and activities tailored to their preferences (Tamir, 2019). Additionally, Hutchins, Li and Rowe (2019), confirmed the burgeoning of live-streamed sport and television transmission during the 2018 FIFA World Cup held in Russia.

Despite TV watching behaviours are evolving, the effect in sports context have remained equal, with supporters preferring to follow the matches in front of the television in real-time. Such actions reveal the sense of a devout community, characterized by high levels of loyalty to sport television broadcasts when compared with any other televised genre (Tamir, 2019).

4.2.2. eSports Streaming

Online streaming was not the first option to diffuse and broadcast the sports, as previously mentioned, yet, due to constant negative answers from traditional mean providers the eSports industry turned to their original habitat, the world wide web. Even not being the first choice of each other, online streaming and eSports have coevolved mainly due to the increase success of the latter (Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017; Wulf et al., 2018). It was a winning bet, undoubtedly, reaching all four corners of the globe, with Twitch, the biggest gaming streaming platform registering 5 million monthly streamers, according to TwitchTracker (2020).

The live streaming content can range from professionally organized events to regular individuals streaming from their bedroom (Wohn & Freeman, 2019), giving to all the opportunity to be in the spotlight. From the spectator point of view, to watch a stream can

be gratifying in terms of affection and tension releasement, information seeking and to study the game, and in both personal and social integration in a community (Sjöblom, Torhonen, Hamari & Macey, 2017). Interestingly, in streaming services like Twitch, people are creating content and consuming other developed by colleagues, leveraging the community sense within it, and breaking the boundaries of media and entertainment (Scholz & Stein, 2017).

Be in front of a camera might not be an easy task, however, it may be seemed a source of income, with *"spending and gifting behaviors"* as an *"emerging phenomena"* in live streaming platforms *"including cheering, subscribing, or other ways of donations and giving"* (Wohn & Freeman, 2019) which is perceived as support to develop the community and the streamer's work. On the other side, streamers will offer exclusive emoticons and chatrooms and an ad-free experience.

4.3. Streaming Platforms

4.3.1. DAZN

"DAZN is a ground-breaking live and on demand sports streaming service, giving sports fans the control and flexibility to watch their sports, their way" (DAZN, 2020). While traditional telecommunication providers demand you to install cables or a satellite dish to watch their content, DAZN setup is fast and easy, to access it users only need to download the app and enjoy their favourite sports on multiple devices. It does not matter if you are at home or travelling, if you have Internet access you are ready to watch your desired sports.

In a nutshell, DAZN offers commodity along the process, cutting the inconvenience of technicians visiting your place at a reasonable price, with multiple features that keep fans always on-track. Its moto is all about putting sports fans first.

Da Zone (DAZN) was created in 2015, however, the buzz around it was heard more intensively in the past year. As such, due to its growing popularity, DAZN importance to academics also rose (Budzinski, Gaenssle & Kunz-Kaltenhäuser, 2019; Lindholm, 2019; Cardoso & Pinheiro, 2019; Hutchins et al., 2019), being even nicknamed as the "Netflix of Sports".

At this moment, DAZN is currently available in Brazil, Spain, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Canada, Italy, United States and Japan, but is preparing its expansion to more than 200 countries, and pretends to contribute for the globalization of sports

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consumption, by becoming *"the world's largest and most prominent sports streaming broadcaster"*, says Joe Markowski, Executive Vice President at DAZN.

To achieve the desired status DAZN's strategy involves "betting" in specific and most desirable events, in order to hit masses and gain relevance, trying to elaborate an extensive and content library of multiple sports worldwide (Hutchins et al., 2019).

The OTT platform expresses an aggressive mindset commercial wise, owning broadcasting rights of multiple sports. In the following table are highlighted the most relevant ones.

Football/Soccer	American Football	Basketball	Combat Sports	Baseball
Premier League, UEFA Champions League, La Liga, Serie A, Ligue 1, Copa del Rey, CONMEBOL Libertadores, CONMEBOL Sudamericana, MLS and J.League	NFL and NCAA	NBA, NCAA and Euroleague hold some regional rights. Liga ACB, Copa del Rey, Basketball Champions League and NBB.	UFC, Bellator, Golden Boy and other premium fights of renown fighters, such as, Alvarez and Gennadiy "GGG" Golovkin.	MLB and NPB

Figure 4. 1: Most relevant competitions of DAZN's media rights

Source: DAZN, 2020. Accessed on 25th of January, 2020. Retrieved from https://media.dazn.com/en/.

Such an emphatic strategy implies major costs and risks, supporting initially *"billions in losses buying sports rights until the customer base grows to a size to reach profitability"*, following the path made by Amazon and Netflix (Sweney, 2018, n.p.), by improving the content throughout the years and making it more affordable.

Undoubtedly, the strategy has been paying off. DAZN recorded 4 million subscribers in May 2019, while six months than the number of subscribers doubled, reaching 8 million. Sources close to the company reveal the growth was mainly driven by demand from boxing in the United States, and football in the remaining territories. The US only accounts for 10% in the number of subscribers (CNBC, 2019).

These numbers can be explained thanks to investment made in the Canelo Alvarez's fight, scheduled to May 2020, one of the biggest sports events in the year, attracting numerous of people and discussions around it.

But DAZN did not stop there. In December 2019, along with Amazon, they were able to conquer the rights to broadcast the UEFA Champions League in Germany from the long-time established broadcaster provider Comcast. This deal includes exclusive rights to stream the world's most important football tournament of clubs for three consecutive years, starting in 2021 (Hale, 2020).

Unfortunately, COVID-19 has ruined the plans for DAZN and the huge investments led by the company made them entering in survive mode. After reviewing all the hypothesis, DAZN communicated to leagues that will not pay for cancelled or postponed matches or without a resumption date (Novy-Williams, 2020). This puts the organization in a fragile position when investment is not available, which may lead the board to take some extreme measures.

4.3.2. ESPN+

Not much research has been dedicated to this brand, since the service only appeared in 2018, however, Hutchins et al. (2019) and Snyman and Gilliard (2019) address briefly to the sport streaming service.

As demystified previously, ESPN+ is an OTT streaming service, specialized in sports content that is available only in the United States and is owned by The Walt Disney Company. The service was launched on April 2018, and in less than a year passed the 2 million subscribers mark (Welch, 2019).

Unsurprisingly, ESPN+ is deeply attached to its "mother" channel ESPN, the worldwide leader in sports, allowing it to take advantage of its notoriety and marketing power, nurturing a symbiose between both; with the great majority of ESPN's rights deals involving ESPN+, holding the rights of more than 12000 live events every year (Ourand,

2019). The offer package available contains NHL (National Hockey League), MLB (Major League of Baseball), MLS (Major League of Soccer), multiple ATP and Grand Slam contests, boxing, PGA Tour Golf and many others (Welch, 2019).

Another weapon utilized by the sports subscription service is its original content, starring great sports figures. More Than an Athlete with Lebron James or the successful Detail series, developed by Kobe Bryant and considered as one of the breakouts shows for ESPN+. The unquestionable success led the program to evolve from basketball to other sports, counting with Peyton Manning, an ex-American football star, Nick Saban, a reputed college football coach, as well as Daniel Cormier, a UFC fighter. Additionally, users can also find ESPN films on the app.

ESPN+ was not designed to be a stand-alone streaming service, and to be able to access it and to enjoy a complete coverage, subscribers need to have a cable subscription or subscribe to other streaming service.

Russel Wolff, General Manager of ESPN+ confessed to the Sports Business Journal that the brand has "*a promotional window with ESPN linear television that is unique*" and they are gathering strengths and "*running parallel paths with direct-to-consumer and TV and linear. That approach is creating flexibility and control over our future*", co-existing and complementing each other (Ourand, 2019).

With the unprecedent breakthrough of the new coronavirus, and sports cancelled indefinitely, ESPN+ is planning in filling the programming with "30 for 30 documentaries" and eSports streaming, the new trend in sports that has been gathering fans and enthusiasts all over the globe (Sherman, 2020).

4.3.3. Twitch

Twitch claims to be the world's leading live streaming platform for gamers. The primarily focus of the platform is the livestream of videogames, eSports tournaments, players showcase, reviews of events and talk shows of a wide variety of games, enabling the creation of a unique ecosystem (Spilker, Ask & Hansen, 2018). The content can be watched live and on demand, allowing users to re-watch shows and to never miss a streaming session (Matsui, Sapienza & Ferrara, 2019).

The portal environment promotes a prosumer mindset, with streamers producing and consuming content from peers (Scholz & Stein, 2017). The content displayed to

spectators include the streamer, the videogame gameplay and also the chat commentaries activity, encouraging audience to interact with each other and forming a virtual community (Wulf, et al., 2018). Like any other community, there are rules and chat moderators, usually experienced members, to control crowd's words, yet, interactions are majorly positive and *"contribute to the direction of the stream suggesting in-game strategies and participating in polls about the future of the channel"* (Spilker et al., 2018).

Unquestionably, Twitch plays a fundamental role in the eSports growing popularity, fomenting gaming behaviour, and supporting the industry to thrive. In addition, scholars are exploring media enjoyment, and social interaction (Wulf et al., 2018) brought by live streaming and eSports playing (Wohn & Freeman, 2019). This vital contribution for the academia, will certainly help realizing how technological advances are contributing for community's formation and structuration, distinguishing virtual and real behaviours, providing valuable insights on behavioural and psychological repercussions concerning different aspects of eSports.

5. Relationship Marketing

The main goal of any brand or organization is to connect itself with their audience, addressing to their senses, needs, wants and desires to be successful. However, forming, maintaining, and nurturing a relationship can be challenging, mostly in big industries with notorious players. Ravald and Grönroos (1996), despite dated from the 90's the thought remains true up to this date, in order to secure a long-lasting relationship, customer loyalty should be created and most important, preserved. To do so, companies should provide added value to its customer, however, in an era marked by social and cultural shift the approach should be carefully elaborated (Reitman et al., 2019).

Apart from that, Relationship Marketing aims for expanding the business audience, by building a collaborative relationship via improved communication and interaction between organizations and their stakeholders (Grönroos, 2011). As a result, Relationship Marketing approach is seemed as a tool to facilitate business efforts to enhance intimacy, provide greater customer satisfaction, achieve improved customer retention, increase consumer loyalty, build long-term relationships, reduce marketing costs, and secure a long-term profit (Peppers & Rogers, 2011).

Today, it is believed the implementation of marketing technology assets can significantly change the activity of a company's marketing department influencing the relationships between corporations and customers (Baltes, 2017). In other words, traditional marketing techniques have evolved to incorporate new Digital Marketing capabilities, particularly, websites/social media platforms, e-mail blasts, blogs, SEO and Customer Relationship Management (CRM), allowing customers to be part of a more comprehensive experience. These current capabilities have revolutionized the mechanism of analysing customers purchasing habits and desires, congregating, and managing customer data, facilitating future strategy implementation according to the observed patterns (Schmidt, 2017).

Online relationships are distinguished from offline in what regards geographic distance, time independence, global availability of alternatives and anonymity throughout the path, yet in exchange of valuable data (Kozlenkova, Palmatier, Fang, Xiao & Huang, 2017). This constant exchange figures as a dominant process between customers and companies, but also between network content producers and their audience, cultivating online relationships mediated by virtual channels, that includes indicators such as

interaction, identification, attachment, among others (Steinhoff, Arli, Weaven & Kozlenkova, 2018), thereby, constituting an "interpersonal involvement".

5.1. Parasocial Interaction

Parasocial interaction (PSI) and Parasocial relationship (PSR) are concepts introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956), despite similar, PSI refers to a "*media user's reaction to a media performer such that the media user perceives the performer as an intimate conversational partner*" yet, restricted to the viewing episode, while PSR can transcend a single episode, forming a lasting partnership among the viewer and the performer, sparked by media consumption. If that was already acknowledgeable in the fifties, nowadays, with social platform's proliferation and the influencer or content creator roles importance also on the rise, many are the authors who contributed for the academia development with their related works in this field (Dibble, Hartman & Rosaen, 2015; Chen, 2016; Rihl & Wegener, 2017; Bérail, Guillon & Bungener, 2019; Tolbert & Drogos, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Parasocial relationships can be assembled using fictional characters or real people, like celebrities, politicians, spokespeople, and other with high levels of visibility. Dibble et al. (2015) the PSR close to real-life relationships concept, and many times, compensating the lack of real-life interactions. Perhaps, for that reason, the constructed self, created both by spectators and performers are crafted and perfected to fit into the online premises and online panorama (Chen, 2016). From that, arise online communities, with members engaging in bidirectional relationships as user add comments and discuss content, whereas media creators have the chance to reply to their messages and take part in the discussion, leveraged by functional properties of the digital world, in which enhanced interactivity is key (Labrecque, 2014; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Important here, however, is to notice that traditional means could not offer such interactions as they are constrained to be one-sided, incapable to address personally to their audience, even nowadays (Rihl & Wegener, 2017).

In short, and supported by the numerous studies, PSR thematic worth exploring further, as in the sports industry, it contributes to suspense by stimulating more rooting for one side. On the digital side, streaming platforms are acknowledged to value virtual friendship, respectful interest, and enjoyment (Wulf, Schneider & Beckert, 2018). Moreover, Lim, Choe, Zhang and Noh (2020: 3), go further, uttering that *"viewing live-*

streaming games facilitates the development of PSR development more than watching other types of content in digital media", with the streamer acknowledging the presence of audience, teasing and captivating them by doing a reference to the viewer. These digital content creators are empowered to communicate directly with their audience in real-time, unlike other passive entertainment consumption (Hou, 2018). Thus, forming virtual communities that defend and advocate for its favourite streamer or platform, just like an ambassador.

5.2. Virtual Brand Communities

Understanding how to improve Virtual Brand Communities (VBC) participation and enhance community sustainability is a major challenge for firms (Nambisan & Baron, 2009). With that challenge in mind, firms have built group platforms such as discussion forums to meet customers' needs for interaction and belongingness, and allowed members to build individualized personal spaces (homepages and blogs) to maintain customers' independent identities, and provide some room for critical opinions (Wang, Ma & Li, 2015). Almost a precise description of a digital streaming platform.

In addition, one cannot deny the fact that VBCs have demonstrated huge impact and the ability to influence choices on the different stages of the consumer journey, as searching information, buying and using the product/service or giving recommendations and feedback (Filo, Lock & Karg, 2015).

Furthermore, VBCs can facilitate the tasks of the marketing department, pathing the way towards the main marketing objectives, such as: enhancing customer relationships (Brodie, Ilic, Juric & Hollebeek, 2013), brand engagement (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001), purchase behaviour (Algesheimer, Dholakia & Herrmann 2005), new product ideas (Nambisan & Baron 2009), improved brand perception and brand commitment (Brodie et al., 2013) .

However, communities may show different engagement and interaction behaviours, as demonstrated by Popp and Woratschek (2016). Users of virtual brand communities associated with sporting events and sports teams revealed a stronger community bond than in others online communities. Those behaviours can be explained by the fact that community engagement was found to have a positive association with favourable community behaviours, in other words, helping community members, participating in joint activities to enhance value for oneself and others leading to a greater interaction,

interconnection amongst members and development of emotional bonds (Cova & Pace, 2006).

Those emotional bonds were strengthened, and teenagers are live streaming today part of their ordinary routines just to be in touch with their online crowd and spend time with his/her group of friends (Lottridge, et al., 2017). This way, fans feel more connected and part of a community, leading to an experience enhancement, empowered majorly to the constant interaction and engagement through chat functionalities, contributing for both viewer and streamer enjoyment (Wulf et al., 2018).

In *Social Media in Relationship Marketing: The Perspective of Professional Sport Managers in the MLB, NBA, NFL, and NHL*, Abeza O'Reilly and Seguin (2019), provide empirical evidences concerning social media opportunities and challenges as a Relationship Marketing Tool (Figure 3).

Resuming, VBC facilitate social interaction, sense of community, development of social skills in a familiar environment, entertainment, and learning, that can compensate any lack of personal support in real life, working as an escape from reality (Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017).

Opportunities	
Team Centred	**Fan Centred**
Knowledge of fans	Fan nations
Feeling the pulse	Content Delivery
Brand Humanization	Customer Service
Ongoing Dialogue	

Challenges		
Management Related	**Data Related**	**Actors Related**
Change Management	Actionable data	Influential opinion leaders
Operational Management	Lack of control over messages	Internal conflict of interest
		Anonymity/ True Online Customer

Figure 5. 1: Social Media platforms as relationship marketing tools

Source: Abeza et al., 2019.

5.3. Sports fans profile in the digital era

Sports related relationships tend to be unique and more intense, revealing particularities that must be accounted when targeting such crowd, in a nutshell, sport links people together across gender, race, religious and political affiliations it is seemed nowadays as a mandatory presence over media, with the public demanding sporty content.

Gantz (2012) observed interesting behaviours from sports enthusiasts that prefer to watch matches in the company of a mobile device so they can brag about their team, trash-talk with rival team supporters and share or discuss game plays and information over social media platforms and sports specialized forums. Always connected to the network and in contact with their peers. As such, fans are relying on secondary devices to have access to other matches results, highlights, or general information for upcoming contests (Billings, Qiao, Conlin & Nie, 2017)

Elliot and Urry (2010) underline the role of sport in the formation of emergent characteristics of social and media power in a fast and busy world. Consequently, sports organizations are leveraging technological innovations to connect and involve fans, creating new ways of engagement and opening the spectrum for an innovation driven mindset (Witkemper, Blaszka & Chung, 2014), especially around younger population that are tech and social media savvy. This mean that sports managers have the opportunity to explore the potentiality of social media in order to enhance relationships, driving passion, develop camaraderie amongst internauts and grow in their minds a spirit of joy and hope (Stavros, Meng, Westberg & Farrelly, 2014), helping to maintain and sustain a good

environment in the sports atmosphere. In addition, the use of technological platforms leads to a growth in fan interaction, making them eager to experience in-depth product and event information, team promotion to larger audiences and accelerates the rate in which news and game updates are spread (Gibbs, O'Reilly and Brunette, 2014; Norris, Wann & Zapalac, 2015).

Supported by the following statements, TV trends present nowadays a challenge for traditional sports, due to a diminution in ratings, combined with cord shaving, and cord cutting habits, that accounted for 10 million subscribers' disconnections in 2016, only in the US (Accenture, 2016). Despite of sports fans being different than traditional consumers, they are experiencing changes in their behaviour and in their habits (Leung & Chen, 2017), less time watching sports, giving preferences to highlights and concise information, and always accompanied by a mobile device. According to Robert Kraft, principal owner of the New England Patriots, an American football franchise: "Millennials do not watch TV, they do not have TVs or subscribe to cable. So, we have to bring that audience in". Brian Hughes, senior vice president of audience intelligence and strategy at MAGNA Global USA verified that the shifting panorama can be easily explained by the fact that current sports audience is now more interested in short-term videos and data, particularly stats and highlights, funnelling young viewers away from TV, since through a mobile device is more convenient and fast to access to the desired content. In addition to the idea presented before, Jeramie McPeek, former vice president of digital and brand strategy for the Phoenix Suns, affirms that "it is the smartphone and tablet usage by younger people who are on Snapchat or Instagram all day long and watching a lot of videos on YouTube and Netflix."

Therefore, the concern around the sports world is raising with many sports executives fearing the declining ratings in watching sports and the disengagement of millennials from live sports, especially because nowadays sports fans have a wide range of options of entertainment across several screens and devices (Leung & Cheng, 2017), leading them to watch fewer matches and consequently paying less attention to them (Singer, 2017).

6. Experiential Marketing in Sports Industry

Changes in media consumption habits are notorious, affecting the individual's behaviours while watching sports, leading to the rise of digital platforms to satisfy viewer's needs. Thus, the relationships were impacted as well, in an industry that is evolving at a fast pace and digital-focused, companies are adapting their communication and will certainly search for new ways to enrich spectator's experience. Therefore, is extremely important to determine how experience can be enhanced and leveraged in such a competitive and fast-paced industry.

Smilanksky's (2009: 5) defines experiential marketing as *"the process of identifying and satisfying customer needs and aspirations profitably, engaging them through two-way communications that bring brand personalities to life and add value to the target audience"* leading customers to a more enjoyable customer journey. With that in mind, the present section will present an experience characterization and present the outcomes that experiential marketing can bring into public-brand interactions.

6.1. Experience Characterization

Undoubtedly, experience is the main ingredient to formulate experiential marketing, and experience economy value has been recognized by researchers (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt, 1999; Smilansky, 2009; Chanavat & Bodet, 2014), revealing an increasing importance for managers nowadays, in an attempt to improve their service.

Pine & Gilmore (1998) observed that experiences can be segmented in two collaborative dimensions: 1) customer participation and 2) connection or environmental relationships with the surroundings. In what regards, participation it can be passive, if customers do not affect a performance, or active, when customers play a role and contribute for a different performance. On the second dimension, at one spectrum lies absorption, while at the other lie's immersion.

Such characteristics form what the authors labelled as *"the four realms of an experience"*. Watching a live stream goes by *entertainment*, in which viewers have lower levels of participation and tend to absorb more than be immersed. *Educational* events are characterized to display active participation, with customers more distanced from the action than immersed in it, like a football practice or a normal class. While *escapist* experiences combine an active participation and immersion, which can describe playing a videogame in VR glasses, making the player completely immersed in the game

environment. The fourth real, *aesthetic,* implies great levels of immersion but passive participation, such as watching someone playing a videogame with VR googles.

6.2. Experiential Modules

Schmitt (1999) contributed further to the field, expanding the understanding of consumers as rational and emotional beings in a constant search for pleasurable experiences. The author's *Experiential Marketing* article indicate that the experiential marketing framework lay under two essential concepts: strategic experiential modules (SEMs) and experience providers (ExPros).

The SEMs are used to create different kinds of experiences for customers, appealing to specific domains of the mind and englobe sensorial experiences (SENSE), emotional/affective experiences (FEEL), creative cognitive experiences (THINK), physical and behavioural experiences (ACT) and social-identity experiences (RELATE). Referring that such modules should be integrated into stores environment, brand's communication, packaging, packaging and more, while trying to incorporate the most modules they can in order to enrich the experience and engage deeply with customers. However, that incorporation should be done carefully to guarantee the best outcome.

Ten years later, Brakus, Schmitt, Zarantonello (2009) support the aforementioned idea, as define brand experience as *"subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments".*

6.3. Experiential Marketing in Sports events

The spectacularity of sports events is notorious and outstanding, arenas are crowded, and people wait anxiously in front of screens for contests to start. As previous studies demonstrated, experiential marketing influences participants' emotions, which shows to have consequences on spectators' satisfaction (Lee & Chang, 2012). Withal, participants' attitudes may differ according to their interpretation of utilitarian and hedonic perspective. However, it is unquestionable that their experiences are determinant for attending future games and in their recommendation to others (Biscaia, Correia, Rosado, Maroco & Ross, 2012). Recently, Yazıcı, Koçak and Altunsöz (2017), argued that sports marketer should develop experiences that fulfil the need of both utilitarian and hedonic

value, despite the hedonic perspective be more relevant, yet, alone is not sufficient for a complete sport event experience.

6.3.1. Sportainment

Desbordes and Richelieu (2012: 29) approach experiences in sportive contexts and stressed about the transformation in sports. "*In fact, sports seem to be merging more and more with the entertainment and communication industries to become recognized as 'sportainment'"* and compares it to Walt Disney amusement parks or Cirque du Soleil in size as in marketing activity, with a global reach, growing day by day.

Oh, Park and Oh (2018) findings reveal that *sportainment* influences positively sports enthusiast's intention to participate in sports events. Consequently, huge dimension sporting events are being integrated with cultural and entertaining experience, like the Super Bowl (the annual championship game of the National Football League in USA), globally known for its half-time show, that involves performances of the most popular musicians and a highly desired advertising space (Radosinska, 2018). That mindset was already integrated in the eSports world, however, more developed technology-wise. For example, in 2017, the opening ceremony featured a swooping dragon flying down from the heavens above. One year later it was an Augmented Reality South Korean band and in 2019, Paris was gifted with a show displaying League of Legends characters in four Holonets (holographic projection screens), giving the effect of being a hologram, alongside with a hip-hop collective (Ringrose, 2019).

Notwithstanding, technology developments opened the spectrum for portraying sports figures and organizations on the preparation for upcoming events. Given that, and the eager for team's content, clubs are more condescending and are providing audience back-stage details even before the match or during the week e.g. training sessions, players' daily routines, coaches reactions, etc., showing evidence that sports events are starting nowadays on mobile devices, and continue even after " the final whistle", promoting interaction and stimulating engagement with fans (Das Silva & Las Casas, 2017). Those apparent "details" may increase a sporting event's attractiveness significantly (Radosinska, 2018), with individuals seeking for special and unique content from the background. Netflix's documentary *The Last Dance*, released in April 2020, was based on that premise, unravelling myths about Michael Jordan's career and showing unseen footages inside Bull's locker room. This perfect example of *sportainment* inspires, evokes pride and hope, provokes emotional reactions, with amazing footages and

commentaries from the time and thrilling music sequences. Thus, star athletes are reaching a global status as cult figures and *sportainment* ambassadors (Desbordes & Richelieu, 2012; Radosinska, 2018).

The role of the audience must not be omitted as they represent a major part on sports. Besides consuming it, spectators' behaviour contributes for event's attractiveness, generating memorable experiences and emotional sensations (Waskowski, 2017). It is the human frame, the chants, the silences, and the social strand that embellish sports events and make them notorious. Moreover, there are already studies evidencing that the incorporation of Artificial Intelligence and Internet of Things in digital marketing actions, and surely, for an enhanced experience will be crucial in a near future (García, Lizcano, Ramos & Matos, 2019).

With Super Bowl or League of Legends finals as the pinnacle of *sportainment*, and apart from the big stars on the pitch or the virtual arenas, are the spectators who provide the energy to them. However, in late 2019 a new coronavirus strain (COVID-19) emerged, and a global pandemic began, defying cultural procedures, processes, and overall societal aspects, leading to a rearrangement in sports industry.

6.3.2. Sports Experience in Lockdown

In a pandemic with such a widespread presence with no regard for geographies, governments had to apply confinement measures, to soften the infection rate, and to stop the disease spreading, as mass agglomerations were find guilty to the spread of virus COVID-19. Thereby sports, cultural and entertainment events were cancelled, and people had to remain in quarantine.

For such a dynamic industry the sudden stop had a huge impact. Games, championships, tournaments and even the Olympics are being cancelled or postponed. Curiously the 2020 summer had scheduled two major events, the EURO 2020 men's international tournament located across 12 European cities and, the Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo, Japan (Parnell, Widdop, Bond & Wilson, 2020). The decision made by governments led sponsors, TV and streaming rights holders, to cut payments until the leagues and events return.

With the sports shutdown sports broadcasters started to fill their programming grid with past matches from their national teams, or the most emblematic sports contests in their respective country (e.g. Canal 11, in Portugal, Movistar Deportes, in Spain). In

addition, some subscription-based channels allowed users to use their services during the lockdown at no expense, and suspended the payment for already existing users, such as Eleven Sports and Sport TV (Lusa, 2020). Despite the strong efforts the reach of TV sports channels abruptly declined due to events cancellation. Sweden has recorded some fascinating falls, with Eurosport spectators declining from 99 thousand (in week 9 of 2020) to 28 thousand (in week 17 of 2020), with the competitor Sportkanalen recording a drop of 80 thousand daily viewers in the same period (Statista, 2020).

On the other side, eSports has been experiencing the opposite. Stay-at-home regulations have increased consumption of online gaming and the consumption of digital entertainment (Perez, 2019). According to the author, Steam, a leading game marketplace broke its former record and overcome the 20 million concurrent active users. Moreover, YouTube Gaming and Twitch viewership was also on the rise with increases of 15% and 10% accordingly (Stephen, 2020). Up to now, the World Health Organization (WHO) has been supporting gaming industry with their social media campaign #PlayApartTogether´, encouraging online gaming and informing players about prevention guidelines, trying to stimulate interaction and stress release actions. However, WHO (2020) also recommends balanced screen time and gaming, aligned with King, Delfabbro, Billieux and Potenza's (2020: 2) findings that *"balanced and effective approaches to gaming during the COVID-19 pandemic to support physical and psychological wellbeing"*. The World Health Organization (2020) learned that COVID-19 pandemic has considerable impacted the sports world, including events, social behaviours, but more important on physical and mental well-being. On that sense, federations and governments are trying to provide guidance to teams and leagues, both professional and amateurs, in order to sports to return (WHO, 2020).

Despite the distinct behaviours displayed between conventional sports and eSports, as part of the society, organizations should be prepared to play without fans/supporters for a while, yet maintaining interaction and create new valuable experiences, prepare for more outbreaks and get a contingency plan ready, rebuild relationships with sponsors and broadcasters, and most important the crisis should be used to evolve (Delloite, 2020). Recently, Majumdara and Naha (2020) argue that fans should be empowered, making user-generated content something ordinary from now on, and broadcast partners may adopt more creative ways to display the events, using Spidercams or capture more before the match moments.

7. Research Framework

After a comprehensive research it became clear that sports are a fundamental part of society, besides keeping our body and mind sharpened and healthy it also represents a form of entertainment that bring individuals together (Gilat & Cole, 2020; WHO, 2020). Undoubtedly, the sports watching panorama is shifting, with an increasing number of portals (Lotz, 2017), that facilitate spectators' interaction and enhance the watching experience (Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017; Wulf et al., 2018; Hutchins et al., 2019), providing evidences that suggest an erosion of structural integrity of national televisual systems that are being facing new platforms competition, that offers audience different features.

Besides that, 2020 is being a challenging year for society. COVID-19 is already modifying world's behaviours and practices, defying human social patterns, weakening economies, and confining people to their homes. Similarly to the majority of industries, traditional sports took a big hit due to events cancellations, cuts in broadcasting rights and drawbacks in sponsorship deals, however, eSports experienced the opposite effect, records were broke and streaming platforms experienced unequalled numbers of visualizations (Perez, 2020). Consequently, it became clear that investigating further on sports watching habits could be extremely relevant especially due to new society norm and the lack of research in non-medical areas regarding coronavirus influence.

Voorveld, Noort, Muntinga and Bronner (2018) explored engagement levels in different social media platforms, evaluating entertainment, negative emotions related to the platform and the content shared on it, stimulation, pastime activity, practical use, social interactions, innovation, topicality and empowerment. Wulf et al. (2018) added further contributions, emphasizing social characteristics on media that contribute to enjoyment towards parasocial relationships in gaming platforms. On top of that, Wohn and Freeman (2019) expanded their knowledge in eSports context, evaluating aspects such attachment to streamers and streamers valuation. As such, some dimensions will be adapted to the study's framework, aiming to access engagement differences between eSports viewers and traditional sports die-hard watchers.

Despite the variety of literature regarding emergent spectator's behaviours in sports there is still room for improvement in the comparison of cyber sports and traditional sports. In an attempt to contribute for the sector development, the following framework is proposed.
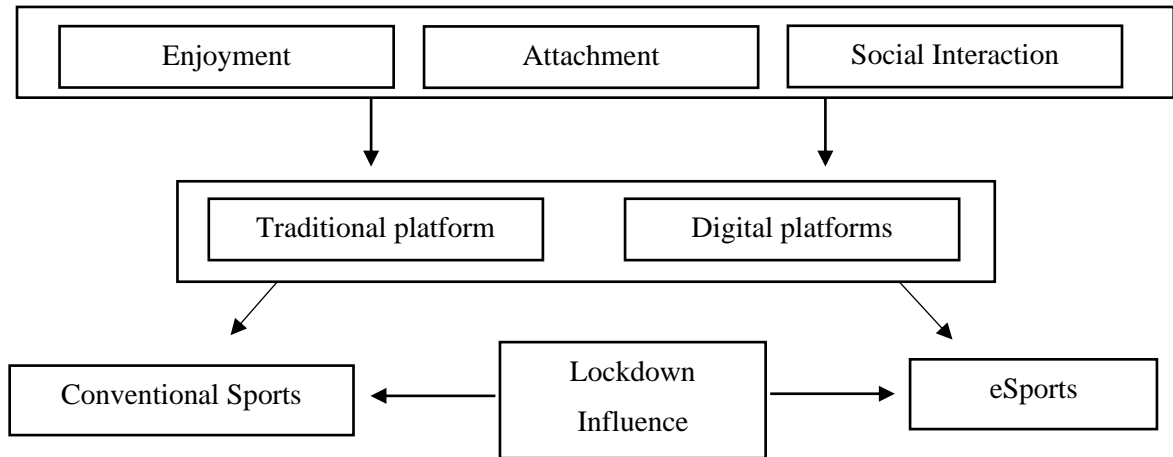
Figure 7. 1: The influence of Parassocial Dimensions and Lockdown in sports consumption

Source: Author's elaboration based on Wohn & Freeman (2020); Wulf et al., (2018); Voorveld, Noort, Muntinga and Bronner (2018)

7.1. Research Questions

This dissertation seeks to understand the new dynamics in sports watching behaviours and to assess the main differences from eSports and traditional sports spectators. With that in mind, and in accordance with the framework previously presented, supported by the academical contributions made by each one of the referred authors, research queries were elaborated. In its essence, the purpose is to understand spectators' motivations for watching sports online (both eSports and conventional ones), trying to deceive differences in the digital experience. Furthermore, it might be interesting to evaluate the impact of sports events cancellations and mandatory confinement measures amongst sports spectators, in comparison to the impact in the eSports enthusiasts, aiming to understand if conventional sports fans would have turned to eSports if such were being displayed in traditional means, like the TV.

RQ1: Which of the three experiential dimensions contribute more for an enhanced experience in…

- RQ1.1: Traditional platforms?
- RQ1.2: Digital platforms?

RQ2: Which type of platform is preferred by…

- RQ2.1: Conventional sports consumers?
- RQ2.2: eSports consumers?

RQ3: Did lockdown influenced sport watching behaviours in…

- RQ3.1: eSports?
- RQ3.2: Conventional sports?

7.2. Hypothesis Development

The study will be underpinned by the research questions presented above. According to previous studies, from Wohn and Freeman (2019) and Wulf et al. (2018) digital platforms, like Twitch, embody a socially enjoyable experience, forming a space of interaction, where community share common interests and demonstrate different behaviours, which boost enjoyment. The models developed by the formerly mentioned authors were fundamental for the thesis framework elaboration, combining fundamental dimensions for the reader understand in which ways eSports and conventional sports diverge or relate. Voorveld et al. (2018) argued that digital engagement is highly dependent on the platform and each digital platform is experienced singularly. Therefore, is expected that digital platforms show higher levels of engagement when compared to traditional means. With this in mind, the two first hypothesis of this study are:

H1: Each of the experiential dimensions enhance experience in traditional platforms.

H1.1: Enjoyment enhances traditional platform experience.

H1.2: Attachment enhances traditional platform experience.

H1.3: Social Interaction enhances traditional experience.

H2: Each of the experiential dimensions enhance experience in digital platforms.

H2.1: Enjoyment enhances digital platform experience.

H2.2: Attachment enhances digital platform experience.

H2.3: Social Interaction enhances digital platform experience.

Additionally, it is relevant to understand which type of platform does each public enjoy the most. Based on the literature review, and particularly on the scholars accounted for the framework development, was possible to acknowledge that the sample gathered by the authors comprehended mainly young adults, which represents eSports main audience. This may already predict higher values regarding the experiential dimensions to digital platforms from the younger part of the sample, in contrast with the possible preference of

a mature audience towards conventional sports and traditional platforms, which guides to the third and fourth hypothesis of the study:

H3: Which kind of platform is preferred by conventional sports enthusiasts?

> *H3.1: Traditional platforms are preferred by conventional sports enthusiasts.*

> *H3.2: Digital platforms are preferred by conventional sports enthusiasts.*

H4: Which kind of platform is preferred by eSports enthusiasts?

> *H4.1: Traditional platforms are preferred by eSports enthusiasts.*

> *H4.2: Digital platforms are preferred by eSports enthusiasts.*

Late in 2019, COVID-19, "*a severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), highly infectious through human interaction*" (Parnell et al., 2020: 1) took the world by storm, defying all the processes and society values built along centuries. Unsurprisingly, sports events were impacted, with online gaming experiencing increases in number of players and augmented online traffic (King et al. 2020), while conventional sports were cancelled and postponed to prior dates, under restrictive measures (Parnell et al. 2020). Therefore, due to the importance and its impact on sports events, it is fundamental to perceive the two-final hypothesis:

H5: Lockdown changed conventional sports watching behaviours.

H6: Lockdown changed eSports watching behaviours.

8. Methodological Approach

The framework developed was developed having in mind the work of different scholars, fostering a common symbiosis among all. Some of the authors had already tested some dimensions this dissertation has chosen to focus and for that reason a Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was adopted and adjusted to the current research. In order to leverage the dissertation value, was also added a post-coronavirus section, unique until this date, in which was used the same 5-point scale. With a view to verify the hypothesis, highlighting the analysis of current trends, a questionnaire was used as a form of quantitative research.

The survey was divided in 3 different sectors of study, while the first one focused on the experience regarding the type of platforms used to watch sports (Wulf et al. 2018 Wohn & Freeman, 2019, Voorveld et al. 2018), the second dealt with the sports genre preference and frequency of watching, in order to correlate the information gathered previously according to sports genre preference. The last research section, but not least important mind about possible changes in sports watching behaviours brought by coronavirus and the obligatory lockdown imposed by governments. The questions elaborated for the latter section encompass the theoretical contributions made by Leng and Phua (2020), and also Drewes, Daumann and Follert (2020) on the COVID-19 thematic.

To conclude, the participants were presented with demographic questions concerning gender, age, academic qualifications and country of residence. You may find the English version questionnaire in Appendix A, however, Portuguese-speaking respondents also had the opportunity to answer the survey in their mother tongue.

8.1 Sample

The data was collected during the initial week of October 2020 and in total 250 individuals participated in the study, yet the number of valid answers account for 204, figuring as the final sample. As the study was aimed to sports followers who watch sports regularly, a screening question checked whether participants were regular sports followers. The questionnaire length was determined based on the type of platforms used to watch sports. On average, 6 minutes were required for questionnaire completion. The survey was shared via social media platforms, namely, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram.

8.2 Scales and Measurements

There is a wide range of literature dedicated to conventional sports and also eSports, more recently. Yet, more than ever, relationships are being moulded and are evolving into different dimensions, with digital means overtaking traditional ones – meaning a crescent focus by researchers on platform's engagement, enjoyment, and human behaviours in such environments. Thanks to the rapidly evolving world and the increasing demand for accurate and up to date information, Voorveld et al. (2018), Wulf et al. (2018) and Wohn and Freeman (2019) works served as grounds for the scale and measures selected.

Considering now the framework part aligned with the Lockdown and COVID-19 restrictions, there are few studies in social science covering its impact on spectators and on sports events, as well. For that reason, it was difficult to "benchmark" other studies and adapt the scale to the current one.

The survey was built using a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1-Strongly Disagree to 5-Strongly Agree. Thus, participants were asked to evaluate their level of identification towards the sentences presented throughout. The questions used had to be translated to Portuguese in order address the majority of target, yet they remained unaltered or just slightly adapted for English respondents. The final version of the survey can be accessed in Appendix A.

9. Data Analysis

This section aims to retrieve information from the data collected by identifying significant patterns and trends, presenting those findings in a meaningful manner. To do so, SPSS 27, a statistical software platform was used to analyse questionnaire answers collected from Qualtrics. Initially, a socio-demographic characterization will be presented in order to illustrate the respondent's collection. Afterwards, the answers regarding Traditional and Digital platforms will be scrutinised, in a pursuit to distinguish different patterns among them and to understand the preferences associated to both eSports and conventional sports fans. Lastly, the COVID-19 impact in sport's related environments will be analysed, testing the hypothesis mentioned previously, assisted by a Principal Components Analysis and a Multiple Linear Regression.

9.1. Data Reliability

Before moving forward to the result's analysis an internal consistency analysis was conducted, in order to access the reliability of the items under analysis, and consequently, retrieve relevant conclusions. Cronbach's alpha, that ranges from 0 to 1, allow researchers to understand how closely related a set of items are as a group. Commonly, to be accepted as reliable or consistent the alpha needs to exceed the 0,7 value (Pallant, 2013). In the current study were obtained three Cronbach's Alphas, one for Traditional platform items, other for Digital platforms items and lastly, for post-quarantine and the absence of sports items. Such situation occurs due to the survey design, in which people would answer questions according to the platforms they are using to watch sports, i.e. if X only watch sports on Digital platforms, he will not answer questions regarding Traditional platforms.

The indicator obtained regarding Traditional platforms was 0,856, suggesting that items under analysis have relatively high internal consistency, similarly to what was perceived in the Digital platform's items, in which the Cronbach's alpha indicated a 0,855 consistency. Both values allow the data analysis continuation, with the certainty of reliability and consistency.

By interpreting the initial score in what concerns the absence of sports due to the coronavirus, the initial Cronbach alpha recorded a value of 0,718. Despite lower than the previously obtained alphas, the value is considered acceptable for continuing the analysis.

9.2. Sample Characterization

Considering the conditions to answer the survey and non-valid data, the valid number of responses ascends to 204. From the sample gathered, 187 (91,7%) respondents identified themselves as males, with the remaining 17 (8,3%) participants being females, revealing a more massive participation from men, which can be explained by the overall interest in sports watching contests by men and women. Regarding age, the majority of respondents (48,5%) are aged between 18 and 24 years old, followed by the participants with age comprehended between 25 and 34 years old (37,7%). Furthermore, the sample is consisted, in its great majority (68,1%) by educated individuals, with 139 having completed at least a bachelor's degree. In addition, 94,1% of respondents reside in Portugal, which may indicate, from the beginning, a preference towards conventional sports.

In what matters the use of platforms to watch sports, Digital are overtaking the Traditional platforms, with 159 answers displaying their use of Digital platforms in

contrast with 135 using Traditional means, yet, from those answers it was possible to conclude that 90 respondents use both Digital and Traditional platforms to watch sports.

Moreover, conventional sport recorded more answers (201) than eSports (151), as previously expected. Interestingly, by cross tabulating information regarding the type of sports already watched or that still watch and follow, 50 revealed to enjoy both sports types. By analysing the sports watching habits, it was verified that conventional sports present a more regular audience with almost 64,2% of respondents stating they watch conventional sports every week and 25,5% confessing their daily watching habits. On other hand, eSports watchers showed to be less regular, 27,5% watching eSports once or twice a month, and 25,4% on festive events.

9.2.1. Traditional Platforms experience

Firstly, questionnaire's respondents were required to select which platforms they use to watch sports. Then, and according to their answers, participants were asked to make a self-evaluation having in mind their own sports consumption habits, regarding three distinct factors: enjoyment, attachment, and social interaction.

In table 9.1 the results are shown and reveal that respondent's privilege more the enjoyment factor that Traditional platforms gives them, while tend to be less attached to it. However, it can be said that people find Traditional platform experience satisfactory, with the lowest score averaging 3,42 out of 5.

Table 9.1: Scores obtained for Traditional Platform Experience

	Enjoyment	Attachment	Social Interaction
Mean	3,81	3,42	3,96

Traditional Platforms are intrinsically connected with conventional sports. According to the results obtained, around 52% of the respondents answered they prefer to use Traditional Platforms to watch conventional sports, however, it is also notorious that Digital Platforms are a fine competitor on this strand, as you may observe in detail Table 9.2. Consequently, conclusions to hypothesis 3 can be made.

Table 9.2: Crosstabulation between preferred platform to watch conventional sports and the frequency of watching conventional sports.

		Preferred platform to watch Conventional Sports		
		Traditional	Digital	Total
Conventional sports watching frequency	Every day	30	22	52
	Every week	67	64	131
	Once or twice a month	9	9	18
	Never	1	2	3
	Total	**107**	**97**	**204**

9.2.2. Digital Platforms experience

In what concerns Digital platforms (see Table 9.3), the scenario does change slightly. It is observed that in what concerns enjoyment, digital platforms show higher values, yet, in what comes to social interaction, Digital Platforms are rated below Traditional.

Table 9. 3: Scores obtained for Digital Platform Experience

	Enjoyment	Attachment	Social Interaction
Mean	4,04	3,60	3,89

Unsurprisingly, by reviewing the survey data there is a clear corroboration that Digital Platforms are the predilect choice to watch eSports. From the total sample, 183 respondents say they prefer/would prefer to watch eSports in Digital Platforms rather than utilize Traditional means. Therefore, it is safe to say that eSports are rooted to the Digital environment, even for those who have never watched eSports in their life. Having said that, and based on Table 9.4, hypothesis 4 can be answered.

Table 9.4: Crosstabulation between preferred platform to watch eSports and the frequency of watching eSports.

		Preferred platform to watch eSports		
		Traditional	Digital	Total
eSports watching frequency	Every day	3	13	16
	Every week	0	27	27
	Once or twice a month	2	54	56
	Only on festive events	3	49	52
	Never	13	40	53
	Total	**21**	**183**	**204**

9.2.3. COVID-19 consequences in sports watching behaviour and consumption

Additionally, it was asked to all 204 participants to appraise their sports watching behaviours and emotional impact that sports absence may have caused in their daily life, in a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), in which 3 was the measure to utilize if the behaviours or feelings had remained unchanged.

According to the obtained results, in general, watching sports frequency was barely unshaken, with a mean of 3,30. However, it was noted that conventional sports (3,43) demonstrated little advantage when opposed to eSports (3,18) frequency of watching, which can be explained by the audience gathered for the study, that in its majority resides in Portugal, where eSports has still much to conquer.

By perceiving the emotional aspects, in average, people graded 4,18 to the question "I have missing sports a lot", and 3,89, to "During sports absence, I missed the tension, the fear, and the release that sport used to give me". Despite quite slightly, it shows that emotionally people missed a good sports contest and the thrill that comes with it.

Moreover, and perhaps, the most interesting and revealing indicators are linked to sports watching behaviours. It is easily identifiable that sports spectators perceive sports without fans less satisfying (4,44), a consequence brought by coronavirus and the social measure distancing imposed by governments and sports federations. On the opposite axis,

it seems that players/team's social media numbers were not impacted by COVID-19 (2,77), being the only activity under scrutiny scoring under 3.

Table 9.5: Scores obtained for sports watching activities

	Mean
I've missing sports a lot.	4,18
During sports absence I missed the tension, the pain, the fear and the release that sports used to give me.	3,89
Sport's absence has reaffirmed my love for it.	3,78
I miss the routine of going to games with my family/friends.	4,02
I miss the experience of watching live sport in crowds.	4,11
Watching sports without fans is less satisfying.	4,44
I miss discussing sports with my friends and relatives.	3,79
I started to follow more players/teams on social media during the lockdown.	2,77

9.3. Factor Analysis

Using the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) allow researchers to reduce the number of variables of a data set, while preserving as much information as possible. In order to conduct the analysis mentioned before it is required first to access the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) indicator and guarantee that the value is higher than 0,6 to fulfil the assumption and be acceptable to perform a PCA. Secondly, the Bartlett's test, used to measure the correlation amongst variables, assuring there are pairs of variables significantly correlated. To be able to conduct a PCA the null hypothesis must be rejected. Besides that, a minimum of 65% of the variance of the initial variables should be accounted to extract a principal component (PC).

Table 9.6: Principal Components Analysis for Traditional Platform Dimensions

	Traditional platforms Enjoyment	Traditional platforms Attachment	Traditional platform Social Interaction
KMO	0,707	0,634	0,750
Bartlett's	0,0	0,0	0,0
Variance Explained	46,25	70,071	65,293

Observing Table X, one can notice that both Attachment and Social Interaction fulfil all the assumptions previously presented. Therefore, those can be categorized as one component, showing correlations amongst the items that compose them. Despite fulfilling the two initial conditions, the Enjoyment factor variance only explains 46,25%, not enough to be considered a PC. In order to demystify the value given before, it was developed another PCA, this time for the fixed number of only one component. By doing it, it was possible to understand that the item "Using Traditional Platforms makes me forget everything for a moment" shows low levels of correlation ($< 0,6$) towards the other items, being the main responsible for the value above. Another aspect is undoubtedly the number of items inside the Enjoyment element, 5 in total, which may difficult the identification of only one component.

Table 9.7: Principal Components Analysis for Digital Platform Dimensions

	Digital platforms Enjoyment	Digital platforms Attachment	Digital platform Social Interaction
KMO	0,746	0,545	0,700
Bartlett's	0,0	0,0	0,0
Variance Explained	48,614	63,371	56,693

Moving forward, Table 9.7, shows that both Enjoyment and Social Interaction have satisfactory KMO indicators, despite the variance explained do not meet the criteria to extract one component. The opposite scenario can be seen looking at the attachment factor, not complying with the KMO standards to advance towards a PCA, since the value does not surpass 0,6, however, as the measure appear to not be much distant, and both Bartlett's test as the Variance Explained meet the criteria to conduct a PCA the Digital platforms Attachment will be accounted for further analysis. Certainly, the values are not ideal, and, for that reason, future conclusions should consider this factor as it may have an impact on results.

Table 9.8: Principal Components Analysis for Sports Absence

	Lockdown impact	
	Emotional	Behavioural
KMO	0,654	0,706
Bartlett's	0,0	0,0
Variance Explained	61,615	48,578

Lockdown impact (Table. 9.8) is composed by 10 indicators, evaluating different situations that may have occurred due to sports interruption, divided into 2 distinct strands. Both indicators reveal a KMO above 60%, despite the variance explained by them do not go beyond the 65% mark. As a consequence, the conclusion drawn from the analysis conducted in the following chapter will have this in mind.

9.4. Linear Regression Analysis

Following the logical steps, a linear regression analysis will be conducted, helping to answer to some of the questions under research. The aim of conducting such method is to evaluate if there are any positive or negative associations between each one of the three Parasocial dimensions that compose the framework and the experience that fans have in Traditional and Digital platforms. Therefore, two separate regression analysis will be developed, one for each type of platform, in order to answer correctly to the first hypothesis under analysis.

9.4.1. Linear Regression Analysis – Traditional Platforms

The next tables are dedicated exclusively to evaluate the Traditional Platform experience, and the impact of the three Parasocial dimensions on it. The independent variable list is composed by Platform's Enjoyment, Attachment and Social Interaction, whilst the dependent variable will be represented by the score for Platform Experience. The adjusted R square is used to compare the impact of the explanatory variables in the dependable variable, unravelling that 48,8% can be explained by them.

Table 9.9: Linear Regression Analysis - Model Summary

Dependent Variable: Traditional Experience Score; Independent Variables: Enjoyment, Attachment and Social Interaction Score

Model Summary				
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate	Durbin-Watson
0,699	0,488	0,476	0,869	1,925

Table 9.10: Linear Regression Analysis Coefficients

Dependent Variable: Traditional Experience Score; Independent Variables: Enjoyment, Attachment and Social Interaction Score

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig
Constant	0,661	0,635		1,040	0,300
Enjoyment Score	0,198	0,040	0,394	4,905	0
Attachment Score	0,108	0,046	0,183	2,375	0,019
Social Interaction Score	0,130	0,029	0,305	4,546	0

From the table above, there is clear evidence that all p values are not higher than 0,05, providing foundations that prove the variables in the model are useful to explain the Traditional Platform experience. Therefore, by exploring this model, one can formulate the equation for the Traditional Platform experience, and it is represented using the following formula:

*Traditional Platform Experience = 0,198 * Enjoyment + 0,108 * Attachment + 0,130 Social Interaction*

From the above equation it is perceptible that all the explanatory variables are positively related with Traditional Platform Experience. Enjoyment reveals to be the one to have a bigger impact, followed by Social Interaction, while the Attachment variable

seems to be the less significant variable, despite the reduced difference among them. As such, there is enough evidence that support the statements ahead:

- A unit increase in the Enjoyment variable leads to an increase of 0,198 in the Traditional Platform Experience.
- A unit increase in the Attachment variable leads to an increase of 0,108 in the Traditional Platform Experience.
- A unit increase in the Social Interaction variable leads to an increase of 0,130 in the Traditional Platform Experience.

By gathering the information above, it is now possible to assess the validity of the first hypothesis (H1) elaborated in this dissertation. It was expected that each one of the variables under analysis would have a positive impact on the experience one has in utilizing Traditional Platforms to watch or follow sports.

9.4.2. Linear Regression Analysis – Digital Platforms

The next table pretends to understand the relationships between the Parasocial dimensions, and the experience brought by Digital Platforms. With that in mind, and having evidence that all the assumptions are fulfilled, the sample may be considered adequate in the context of the study. Reiterating, the adjusted R square pretends to unveil the influence of the explanatory variables in the dependent one, being perceptible that 41,2% of the model is explain by those.

Table 9.11: Linear Regression Analysis - Model Summary

Dependent Variable: Digital Experience Score; Independent Variables: Enjoyment, Attachment and Social Interaction Score

Model Summary				
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate	Durbin-Watson
0,641	0,412	0,400	0,90189	2,175

Table 9.12: Linear Regression Analysis Coefficients

Dependent Variable: Digital Experience Score; Independent Variables: Enjoyment, Attachment and Social Interaction Score

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig
Constant	2,720	0,606		4,487	0
Enjoyment Score	0,074	0,035	0,162	2,116	0,036
Attachment Score	0,236	0,047	0,407	4,991	0
Social Interaction Score	0,083	0,033	0,188	2,541	0,012

All the Sig. values are lower than 0,05, supporting the idea that every explanatory variable is useful and should be kept in the model to explain the Digital Platform experience. For that reason, it is possible to elaborate the equation for Digital Platform experience, and it is represented as the following:

Digital Platform Experience =2,720 + 0,074 * Enjoyment + 0,236 * Attachment + 0,083* Social Interaction

After careful examination, it can be said that, once more there is positive impact from all the three variables in the explanation of Digital Platform Experience. Curiously, the variable Attachment, that scored the lowest in Traditional Platform Experience, is, at the light of this model, the one scoring the highest, with a considerable gap to the two remain. As such, Social Interaction and Enjoyment have similar influence in the Digital Platform Experience. The following statements aim to help the reader to better understand the impact of the different variables in the model:

- A unit increase in the Enjoyment variable leads to an increase of 0,074 in the Digital Platform Experience.
- A unit increase in the Attachment variable leads to an increase of 0,236 in the Digital Platform Experience.
- A unit increase in the Social Interaction variable leads to an increase of 0,083 in the Digital Platform Experience.

Similarly, to what have happened before, all the three explanatory variables have a positive impact in explaining the Experience in Digital Platforms, this means that each

one can enhance the experience. Consequently, this analysis provides evidence that support the second hypothesis (H2).

9.4.3. Linear Regression Analysis – Lockdown impact on conventional sports watching behaviours

In table X it is represented the model summary, whilst Table X+1, reveals the linear regression analysis coefficients. Providing a closer look to the table under it can be observed that 17,2% of the variability of Frequency of conventional sports consumption is explained by the explanatory variables present in the model.

Table 9.13: Linear Regression Analysis - Model Summary

Dependent Variable: Frequency of conventional sports consumption after the lockdown;

Independent Variables: Quarantine Emotional Score, Quarantine Behavioural Score

Model Summary				
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate	Durbin-Watson
0,415	0,172	0,164	1,580	1,866

Table 9.14: Linear Regression Analysis Coefficients

Dependent Variable: Frequency of conventional sports consumption after the lockdown;

Independent Variables: Quarantine Emotional Score, Quarantine Behavioural Score

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig
Constant	-0,04	0,639		-0,06	0,995
Quarantine Emotional Score	0,101	0,025	0,288	4,709	0
Quarantine Behavioural Score	0,103	0,036	0,202	2,871	0

*Frequency of conventional sports consumption = 0,101 * Quarantine Emotional Score + 0,103 * Quarantine Behavioural Score*

Therefore, based on the results obtained from the statistical analysis one can notice that both variables positively impact the frequency of conventional sports consumption, with both displaying similar values. With that in mind, and based on the prior equation:

- A unit increase in the Quarantine Emotional Score translates to an increase of 0,101 in the Frequency of conventional sports consumption.
- A unit increase in the Quarantine Behavioural Score translates to an increase of 0,103 in the Frequency of conventional sports consumption.

9.4.4. Linear Regression Analysis – Lockdown impact on eSports watching behaviours

Similarly, in table X it is represented the model summary, whilst Table X+1, reveals the linear regression analysis coefficients. By analysing the values present there, it is possible to state that 11% of the variability of Frequency of eSports consumption is demonstrated by the explanatory variables present in the model.

Table 9.15: Linear Regression Analysis - Model Summary

Dependent Variable: Frequency of eSports consumption after the lockdown; Independent Variables: Quarantine Emotional Score, Quarantine Behavioural Score

Model Summary				
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate	Durbin-Watson
0,332	0,110	0,101	1,920	2,309

Table 9. 16: Linear Regression Analysis Coefficients

Dependent Variable: Frequency of eSports consumption after the lockdown; Independent Variables: Quarantine Emotional Score, Quarantine Behavioural Score

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig
Constant	0,015	0,776		0,019	0,985
Quarantine Emotional Score	-0,068	0,030	-0,165	-2,263	0,025

Quarantine Behavioural Score	0,217	0,044	0,364	4,981	0

From the data presented in the table above both explanatory variables are useful for the analysis, helping to explain the Frequency of eSports consumption after the lockdown imposed by governments which led to sports events cancelation. Therefore, the equation of the fitted regression model is:

Frequency of eSports consumption = -0,068 * Quarantine Emotional Score + 0,217 * Quarantine Behavioural Score

This implies that the explanatory variable, Quarantine Emotional Score, have a negative impact on the Frequency of conventional sports consumption, while the Quarantine Behavioural factor reveals a positive impact. Consequently, based on the previously equation, it is possible to state that:

- A unit increase in the Quarantine Emotional Score translates to a decrease of 0,068 in the Frequency of eSports consumption.
- A unit increase in the Quarantine Behavioural Score translates to an increase of 0,217 in the Frequency of eSports consumption.

10. Conclusions

After finishing the statistical analysis, all conditions are met to draw conclusions and useful insights. In this chapter, with the help of Table 10.1, the main conclusions are presented in a concise manner, to facilitate the interpretation of the hypothesis results. Furthermore, the chapter will also include contributions for the academic and managerial fields, not neglecting the limitations experienced while developing the research, that must be taken into account when reading the conclusion, and also future indications that media industry and even sports industry should consider for the future.

Table 10. 1: Hypothesis tested and conclusions drawn

Hypothesis	Conclusions
H1.1: Enjoyment enhances traditional platform experience.	Partially validated - It was found a statistically significant and positive relationship. However, the PCA for the score for Enjoyment in Traditional platforms did not fulfil every assumption.
H1.2: Attachment enhances traditional platform experience.	Validated
H1.3: Social Interaction enhances traditional experience.	Validated
H2.1: Enjoyment enhances digital platform experience.	Partially validated - It was found a statistically significant and positive relationship. However, the PCA for the score for Enjoyment in Digital platforms did not fulfil every assumption.
H2.2: Attachment enhances digital platform experience.	Partially validated - It was found a statistically significant and positive relationship. However, the PCA for the score for Attachment in digital platforms did not fulfil every assumption.
H2.3: Social Interaction enhances digital experience.	Partially validated - It was found a statistically significant and positive relationship. However, the PCA for the score for Social Interaction in digital platforms did not fulfil every assumption.
H3.1: Traditional platforms are preferred by conventional sports enthusiasts.	Validated
H3.2: Digital platforms are preferred by conventional sports enthusiasts.	Not validated

H4.1: Traditional platforms are preferred by eSports enthusiasts.	Not validated
H4.2: Digital platforms are preferred by eSports enthusiasts.	Validated
H5: Lockdown changed conventional sports watching frequency.	Partially validated - It was found a statistically significant and positive relationship. However, the PCA for the score for the *Emotional* and *Behavioural* factors did not fulfil every assumption.
H6: Lockdown changed eSports watching frequency.	Partially validated - The PCA for the score for *Emotional* and *Behavioural* factors did not fulfil every assumption. Note that was found a statistically significant and positive relationship for the *Behavioural* score, in its turn, the *Emotional* factor demonstrated a negative impact on the model.

10.1. Major findings

The aim of this research was to examine the effects of Parasocial Interactions in sports broadcast platforms, both Traditional and Digital, also assessing the preferences of conventional and eSports enthusiasts.

For as much as the hypothesis are concerned, data demonstrates that all variables related to Parasocial influence on platforms are validated or partially validated. This indicates that spectators experience is heavily influenced by the enjoyment, the attachment and social interaction that Traditional and Digital platforms may offer, powering engagement and contributing for an enhanced experience. In line with the literature utilized as base for the development of this dissertation (Wulf et al. 2018, Wohn & Freeman, 2019).

Continuing to explore the platform's landscape, became clear that conventional sports fans are more linked to Traditional platforms, while the Digital option is preferred to broadcast eSports events. This finding seems not to surprise anyone as eSports are just a rising modality in Portugal, having few airtimes in national television and pay-per-view channels. Therefore, eSports enthusiasts rely heavily on digital alternatives to access their favourite content. Contrariwise, conventional sports programmes and channels have been "flooding" the Portuguese Traditional platforms, inducing the public choice.

Furthermore, this dissertation explored the impact that the lockdown imposed by national governments, due to the recent coronavirus, had on the emotional and behavioural routines of sports spectators. In what concerns conventional sports watching frequency, both variables, emotional and behavioural, contributed positively the model. Perhaps, this result may be an insightful indicator that reflects the sport starvation that spectators were facing, and still are due to the restrictive measures applied to live events. Moreover, the same variables were utilized to evaluate the frequency of watching eSports, with the behavioural aspect increasing spectatorship time, whereas the emotional factor evidenced the opposite.

10.2. Academic Implications

The main aim of this research was to study the effect of Parasocial indicators on traditional and digital platforms, retrieving similarities and disparities among them, and evaluating their watching experience. Over the years, many were the authors who contributed with their findings on sports watching behaviours and Parasocial interaction, however, there are few who look further and combined both areas of interest. Besides that, the coronavirus pandemic caught everyone by surprise, and as previously mentioned, due to the recent context there is a strong potential to be investigated in the social science scope englobing the effects brought by the virus.

Therefore, this investigation contributes to the literature as it relates conventional sports and eSports, demonstrating sportsmanship between the two. Past contributions were most of the times trying to prove what is considered sports, while the present approach gives conclusions regarding the watching panorama attached to both worlds. The major contribution this paper provides relates to the entertainment contribution that sports contest offers to their public, evidencing that enjoyment, attachment and social interaction are three important influencers on the watching experience, proving the findings of Voorverld et al. (2018), Wulf et al. (2018) and Wohn and Freeman (2019).

The elaboration of this thesis contributed to fight the scarcity in COVID-19 themes, especially in what concerns the impact on sports, mainly because the remaining studies in this area tend to be, at this stage, merely theoretical, not englobing a relevant data analysis. Having said this, a comparative exercise was carried out between the eSport watching frequency and the frequency of watching conventional sports, bringing together disclosures regarding customer's perception, based on the personal opinion and

experience, that sports fans felt during the lockdown. Undoubtedly, the item rated with bigger preponderance was missing the routine of attending live matches, reinforcing the role and importance of these kind of entertainment shows in the society quotidian.

10.3. Managerial Implications

It is undisputed that any academic research offers practical benefits to the business ecosystem, in the sense that it presents reliable and current information on relevant topics, with no exception in this study.

For broadcasting companies, mostly the sports related, this dissertation will certainly help them to depict in more detail the portuguese panorama in terms of platforms utilized and to better perceive customer's preferences when talking about conventional sports and eSports, contributing for an enhanced experience. Particularly, in the eSports branch, there is clear evidences from the literature review, as well as from the data analysis, that digital is the way to go when talking about competitive gaming. Therefore, being a trailblazer in this process can boost the company value, following the example of ESPN and online platforms like Twitch, mentioned throughout the work. In this way, entities must align their strategic objectives with the satisfaction and needs of stakeholders, trying to expand the brand's coverage, and in the future reap the fruits from the current labor. An important note should figure as, at least in Portugal, Traditional platforms still play a predominant role, and managers should be aware of that.

With that in mind, sports broadcasters should be also aware of the most impacting parasocial variables according to the type of platform, so that their strategy could be developed and design with rigor and detail.

Another important aspect covered by the dissertation is the COVID-19 impact on sports, regarding their behaviors and emotions. As such, this research can be a starting point for sport businesses to evaluate this impact and finding new ways to interact with their audience that are in need of sports. Moreover, the findings may be useful later on, in case of a new pandemic, figuring as a benchmark by understanding customer's needs.

10.4. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations have to be noted for future research. First, this paper draws insights from prior literature, utilizing also scales to measure the results obtained from the survey,

which turns to lead general results in line with the conclusions retrieved by the authors. Though, some scales were adapted to better fit in the study context. Second, the theoretical conceptualization, in which PSRs contribute for the understanding of the existing relationship that sport's spectators have been nurturing with media platforms, needs a remark. By definition, a PSR would assume *"that only the viewers think they interact with the media persona"* (Wulf et al., 2018: 341), while on the other side, media platforms would not address to single viewers. However, that might be considered a challenging task, having in mind the audience extent that both traditional and digital platforms possess.

Having said that, could be compelling for further research explore the engagement extent amongst different audiences and across platforms, englobing other constructs and measurements useful for a clearer investigation. This is particularly important, as the sports industry, following the path of the entertainment industry, have been crafting their experience into the digital world, with consumers having at their reach several platforms to choose from.

Another difficulty faced during this work elaboration was the recent COVID-19 breakthrough. Therefore, by implementing hypothesis that consider the impact of the disease in the sports spectating panorama gives an update charisma to the research, yet, on the other side, the dedicated literature to the topic in the sports and media industry are still reduced, not allowing to establish a benchmark to other authors nor validating the ideas explored. In addition to that, the time frame in which the survey was shared may be also considered as a limitation, since the survey was made available on October 2020, and by that time the main competitions were already ongoing. This may imply a weakening on the emotional aspects demonstrated by respondents, situation that would not occur if the survey had been shared throughout the lockdown.

As previously outlined, research on the impact of COVID-19 in sports is rather limited resulting in multiple research opportunities. First, this dissertation has been conducted from the audience perspective and how the pandemic affected their sports watching habits, however, the broadcaster's point of view and their insights must be considered in further research. Second, a more comprehensive analysis should be developed when there is available supplementary literature, as other viewpoints related to the impact of coronavirus in sports may be considered.

There is also some remarks to point out in what concerns the sample size of 204 respondents, in which the majority resides in Portugal and seem not to display a close relationship with eSports, therefore, impeding the research to draw general recommendations and failing to understand the scenarios experienced in other territories. In future research, it would be interesting to analyse a broader and representative sample enabling to compare the situation in different countries, or across continents and draw similarities or differentiating factors amongst them.

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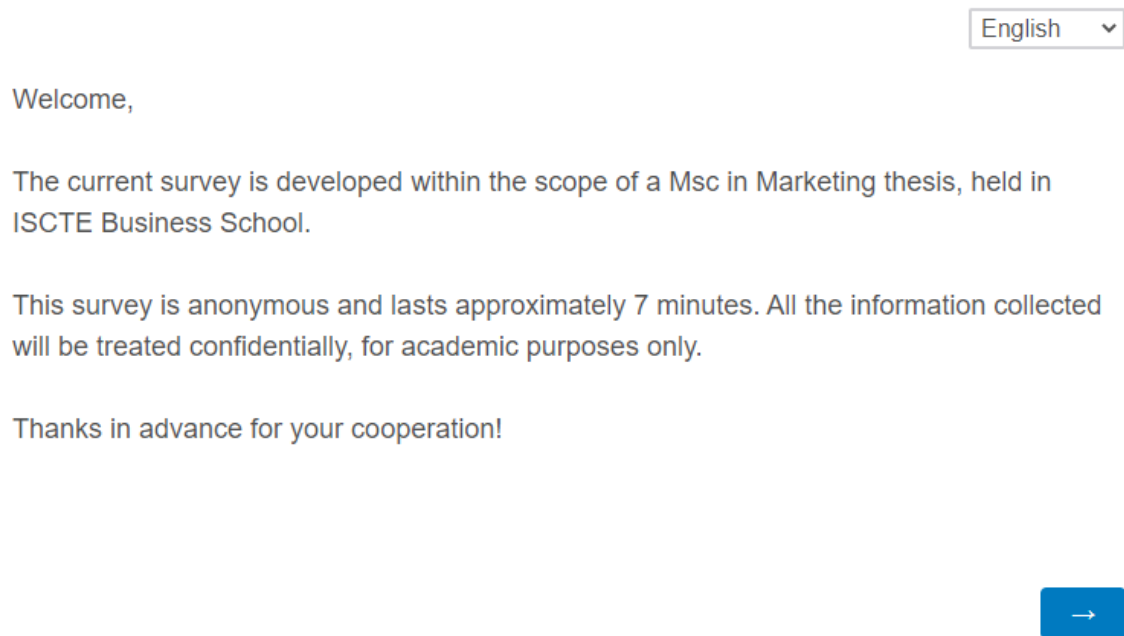
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12. Appendices

12.1. Appendix A – Online Questionnaire

Figure 12.1: Online questionnaire page 1

English ⌄

Welcome,
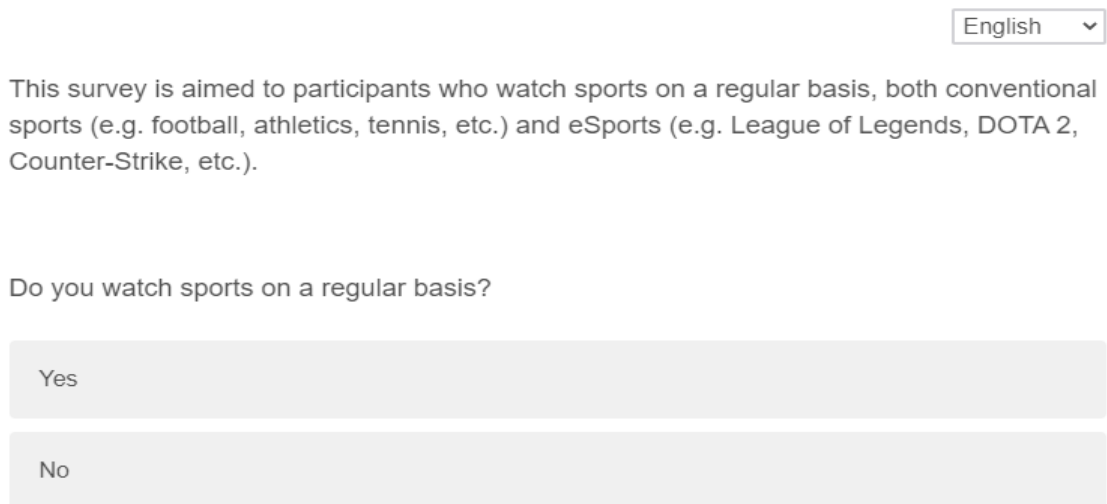
The current survey is developed within the scope of a Msc in Marketing thesis, held in ISCTE Business School.

This survey is anonymous and lasts approximately 7 minutes. All the information collected will be treated confidentially, for academic purposes only.

Thanks in advance for your cooperation!

→

Figure 12.2: Online questionnaire page 2

English ⌄

This survey is aimed to participants who watch sports on a regular basis, both conventional sports (e.g. football, athletics, tennis, etc.) and eSports (e.g. League of Legends, DOTA 2, Counter-Strike, etc.).

Do you watch sports on a regular basis?

Yes
No

Figure 12.3: Online questionnaire page 3

How often do you watch conventional sports?

Every day

Every week

Once or twice a month

Only on festive events

Never

How often do you watch eSports?

Every day

Every week

Once or twice a month

Only on festive events

Never

Figure 12.4: Online questionnaire page 4

Sports can be watched in multiple places and different occasions, however, I would like you to focus on the platforms you used to watch/follow sports. Please consider two types of platforms: the traditional and the digital ones.

By traditional means you must consider television, radio, newspapers and magazines. On the other side, digital platforms include: social media and streaming (e.g. Twitch, YouTube Gaming) or over-the-top services (e.g. DAZN, NBA League Pass, SPORTTV Online).

Please consider now the platforms that you use to watch sports (if you use both options, please select both).

Traditional platforms

Digital platforms

Figure 12.5: Online questionnaire page 5

The following questions focus specifically on sports watching behaviours on traditional platforms. Please respond to each question using the scale below (for each question, select the number that best reflects your behaviour). Please answer open and honestly, there are no right or wrong answers.

Please evaluate your enjoyment by watching sports in Traditional platforms (1- Strongly disagree; 5- Strongly Agree).

	1	2	3	4	5
Using Traditional Platforms to watch sports is fun.	○	○	○	○	○
I enjoy using Tradtional Platforms.	○	○	○	○	○
It is a pleasure to use Traditional Platforms.	○	○	○	○	○
Using Traditional platforms is entertaining.	○	○	○	○	○
Using Traditional platforms makes me forget everything for a moment.	○	○	○	○	○

Please evaluate the level of attachment established between you and Traditional platform (1- Strongly disagree; 5- Strongly Agree).

	1	2	3	4	5
I feel a strong emotional tie with traditional sports platforms.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a feeling of closeness with Traditional platforms.	○	○	○	○	○
Seeing my favorite sport on traditional platform makes me feel good.	○	○	○	○	○

Please evaluate now Traditional platform's role on social interaction (1- Strongly disagree; 5- Strongly Agree).

	1	2	3	4	5
Enable me to do or share something with others.	○	○	○	○	○
Makes sure I am in contact with others	○	○	○	○	○
Gives subject of conversation.	○	○	○	○	○
Enable me to gain knowledge of other's opinions.	○	○	○	○	○

Evaluate your satisfaction regarding the Traditional Platform experience (1- Strongly disagree; 5- Strongly Agree).

	1	2	3	4	5
I am satisfied with Traditional Platforms and with all the experiences provided by them.	○	○	○	○	○
Watching sports in Traditional Platforms is the right choice.	○	○	○	○	○

Figure 12.6: Online questionnaire page 6

The following questions focus specifically on sports watching behaviours on digital platforms. Please respond to each question using the scale below (for each question, select the number that best reflects your behaviour). Please answer open and honestly, there are no right or wrong answers.

Please evaluate your enjoyment by watching sports in Digital platforms (1- Strongly disagree; 5- Strongly Agree).

	1	2	3	4	5
Using Digital Platforms to watch sports is fun.	○	○	○	○	○
I enjoy using Digital Platforms.	○	○	○	○	○
It is a pleasure to use Digital Platforms.	○	○	○	○	○
Using Digital platforms is entertaining.	○	○	○	○	○
Using Digital platforms makes me forget everything for a moment.	○	○	○	○	○

Please evaluate the level of attachment established between you and your favourite Digital platform (1- Strongly disagree; 5- Strongly Agree).

	1	2	3	4	5
I feel a strong emotional tie with Digital platform.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a feeling of closeness with Digital platform.	○	○	○	○	○
Watching eSports in Digital platform makes me feel good.	○	○	○	○	○

Please evaluate now Digital platform's role on social interaction (1- Strongly disagree; 5- Strongly Agree).

	1	2	3	4	5
Enable me to do or share something with others.	O	O	O	O	O
Makes sure I am in contact with others	O	O	O	O	O
Gives subject of conversation.	O	O	O	O	O
Enable me to gain knowledge of the opinions of others.	O	O	O	O	O

Evaluate your satisfaction regarding the Digital Platform experience (1- Strongly disagree; 5- Strongly Agree).

	1	2	3	4	5
I am satisfied with Digital Platforms and with all the experiences provided by them.	O	O	O	O	O
Watching sports in Digital Platforms is the right choice.	O	O	O	O	O

Figure 12. 7: Online questionnaire page 7

Still having in mind the type of platforms, which is your preferred platform to watch conventional sports?

Traditional platforms

Digital platforms

Still having in mind the type of platforms, which is your preferred platform to watch eSports?

Traditional platforms

Digital platforms

Figure 12.8: Online questionnaire page 8

As you are aware, COVID-19 deeply impacted our societal norms and behaviours. In sports, events were cancelled or postponed to prevent agglomerates of people, however, online gaming activities recorded an increase in playing and watching time.

As such, this section will mind about possible changes brought by coronavirus and the obligatory lockdown imposed by governments and how those impacted the sports industry.

Please evaluate now different emotional aspects inherent to sport watching habits (1- Strongly disagree, 5- Strongly Agree).

	1	2	3	4	5
I've missing sports a lot.	○	○	○	○	○
During sports absence I missed the tension, the pain, the fear and the release that sports used to give me.	○	○	○	○	○
Sport's absence has reaffirmed my love for it.	○	○	○	○	○

Please evaluate the following behavioural aspects related to sports watching activities (1-Strongly disagree, 5- Strongly Agree).

	1	2	3	4	5
I miss the routine of going to games with my family/friends.	○	○	○	○	○
I miss the experience of watching live sport in crowds.	○	○	○	○	○
Watching sports without fans is less satisfying.	○	○	○	○	○
I miss discussing sports with my friends and relatives.	○	○	○	○	○
I started to follow more players/teams on social media during the lockdown.	○	○	○	○	○

Evaluate the frequency of your sports watching behaviours after the quarantine (1- Strongly disagree, 5- Strongly Agree).

	1	2	3	4	5
I watch more conventional sports now than I used to watch before the quarantine.	○	○	○	○	○
I watch more eSports now than I used to watch before the quarantine.	○	○	○	○	○

Figure 12.9: Online questionnaire page 9

What is your gender?

Male

Female

Other

80

What is your age?

Less than 18

18-24 years old

25-34 years old

35-44 years old

45-54 years old

More than 55 years old

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received.

No schooling complete

Basic education

High-school or equivalent

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Doctorate degree

Other

In which country do you currently reside?