

Sports marketing: keys and global perspectives from a systematic review

Marketing deportivo: claves y perspectivas globales desde una revisión sistemática

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the key characteristics that define marketing within the contemporary sports industry, considering their impact on brand management, sponsorships, products, and the emotional relationship with consumers. To this end, a qualitative methodology based on a systematic literature review was employed, following the PRISMA approach. In this process, a search was conducted in the Scielo, Web of Science, and Scopus databases, applying specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. Finally, 40 articles published between 2019 and 2024 that aligned with the research objectives were selected. The results reveal that the most effective strategies in sports marketing are those that integrate brand positioning, digital marketing, consumer loyalty, and experience management. Likewise, elements such as sponsorship, content personalization, social media presence, and leveraging the emotional bond between sports and its fans have proven to be key to growth and differentiation in the market. In conclusion, it is established that sports marketing has ceased to be a simple means of promotion and has become a structural pillar of the business model of sports organizations. However, the current environment demands the development of innovative strategies, adapted to the digital ecosystem, capable of interpreting changes in consumer behavior and generating long-term sustainable value.

Keywords: sports marketing, digital sponsorship, brand positioning.

Resumen

El presente estudio tiene como objetivo analizar las características clave que definen el *marketing* dentro de la industria deportiva contemporánea, considerando su impacto en la gestión de marcas, patrocinios, productos y la relación emocional con los consumidores. Para ello, se empleó una metodología cualitativa basada en una revisión bibliográfica sistemática, siguiendo el enfoque PRISMA. En este proceso, se realizó una búsqueda en las bases de datos Scielo, Web of Science y Scopus, aplicando criterios específicos de inclusión y exclusión. Finalmente, se seleccionaron 40 artículos publicados entre 2019 y 2024 que se alineaban con los objetivos de la investigación. Los resultados revelan que las estrategias más efectivas en *marketing* deportivo son aquellas que integran el posicionamiento de marca, el *marketing* digital, la fidelización del consumidor y la gestión de experiencias. Asimismo, elementos como el patrocinio, la personalización del contenido, la presencia en redes sociales y la explotación del vínculo emocional entre el deporte y sus aficionados han demostrado ser claves para el crecimiento y la diferenciación en el mercado. Como conclusión, se establece que el *marketing* deportivo ha dejado de ser un simple medio de promoción para convertirse en un eje estructural dentro del modelo de negocio de las organizaciones deportivas. Sin embargo, el entorno actual exige el desarrollo de estrategias innovadoras, adaptadas al ecosistema digital, que sean capaces de interpretar los cambios en el comportamiento del consumidor y generar valor sostenible a largo plazo.

Palabras clave: *marketing* deportivo, patrocinio digital, posicionamiento de marca.

Introduction

Sports marketing, inextricably linked to social evolution shaped by habits and technology, is currently regarded as one of the most effective "indirect" and "non-conventional" marketing tools for reaching customers, followers, and potential consumers, respectively. However, due to its nature, it generates controversies that can provoke debates around issues such as ethics, legality, and the creativity of the campaigns developed.

In this regard, a shift towards a sales-oriented mindset, coupled with new digital initiatives focused on marketing and customer engagement, underscores the importance of listening to the consumer's voice and addressing their demand for truthful, transparent, and consistent information.

In an environment characterized by dynamism, increasing competitiveness, and accelerated decision-making, organizations have been compelled to redefine their strategies to attract and retain increasingly discerning consumers. This scenario has driven the adoption of comprehensive approaches, such as cross-marketing, an interdisciplinary tool that combines various techniques and resources from traditional and digital marketing. According to González et al. (2021), this strategy aims to create unique and emotionally significant purchasing experiences through the establishment of shared reference frameworks that enhance communicative, commercial, and creative differentiation among brands.

In this context of strategic transformation, sports marketing has undergone constant evolution, solidifying its status as one of the most dynamic areas of contemporary marketing. Mullin et al. (2020) emphasize that this form of marketing is based on creating emotional bonds between consumers and sports, enabling major sports industries to promote products, franchises, sponsorships, and brands through multiple communication channels, ranging from visual and written media to digital platforms.

In the 21st century, sports marketing has ceased to be merely a promotional support and has become a fundamental pillar of the sports industry. Maya Guindi (2023) underscores that sports are no longer perceived solely as entertainment but as a marketing object with strong symbolic and social capacity. Its power lies in generating hedonistic experiences—such as satisfaction, enjoyment, and identification—that reinforce its value as a tool for promoting products and services in an increasingly consumer-experience-oriented market.

In light of the information presented, the question arises: What are the fundamental attributes that define marketing within the sports industry? Therefore, the general objective of this study is to identify and analyze in detail the primary characteristics that distinguish marketing in the sports domain. In this context, it is crucial to understand that marketing in the sports industry not only involves the promotion of sports products or services but also encompasses brand management, sponsorships, events, fan experiences, and the creation of a community around a sports brand. Furthermore, sports marketing is characterized by its dynamism and constant adaptation to market trends, as well as its ability to leverage the emotion and passion that sports evoke in individuals.

Methodology

This research is conducted through a qualitative bibliographic review focused on the characteristics of marketing in the sports industry, employing the PRISMA method. Rigorous criteria were established for the search and selection of relevant studies, allowing for the identification of emerging patterns and trends from the synthesis of collected data, along with a comprehensive evaluation of the methodological quality of the included articles. This systematic approach not only facilitates the collection of detailed information on sports marketing but also enables a critical and structured perspective that significantly contributes to advancing knowledge in this specific field.

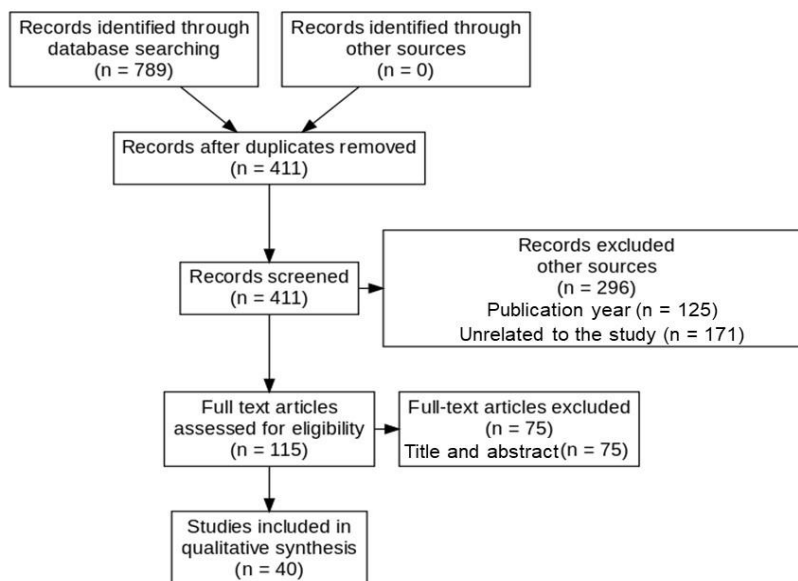
For article selection, searches were conducted across various databases, including Scielo, Web of Science, and Scopus. During this process, keywords such as "sport marketing," "modern sports marketing," and "football marketing" were used, considering only articles published between 2019 and 2024. In Scopus, the search was conducted using the following pathway: *TITLE-ABS-KEY (sports AND marketing) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "BUSI")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Marketing") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Sport") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Sports")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English") OR LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "Spanish"))*. In Web of Science, the following pathway was used: *TITLE-ABS-KEY (FOOTBALL AND marketing) AND (LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Marketing") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Sport")*. Finally, in Scielo, the following pathway was applied: *TITLE-ABS-KEY (SOCCER AND MARKETING) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "BUSI")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Marketing")*.

Regarding exclusion criteria, articles published before 2018, those with closed access, and those not addressing the research questions or objectives were discarded. Conversely, inclusion criteria considered articles published between 2019 and 2024 that were relevant to the study's focus and provided pertinent information on concepts related to sports marketing.

During the selection process, an initial identification of 789 articles from the three aforementioned databases was made. After removing duplicates, the sample was reduced to 411 unique records. Subsequently, criteria related to the study's objective were applied, and a detailed review of abstracts was conducted, resulting in the selection of 115 relevant articles, distributed as follows: 35 from Scielo, 20 from Web of Science, and 60 from Scopus. Finally, after a thorough evaluation based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, and eliminating redundant studies or those misaligned with the research objectives, a final sample of 40 articles was obtained for analysis.

Figure 1

Flowchart of the article selection process using the PRISMA method



Results

The results obtained from the comprehensive bibliographic review on sports marketing provide a detailed overview of the main characteristics and trends in the sports industry. In particular, these findings offer deep insights into key aspects such as sports sponsorship, merchandising, and branding, thereby enhancing our understanding of how these strategies impact the emotional connection between fans and sports brands.

Thanks to the methodology applied and the rigorous selection of analyzed articles from recognized databases, emerging patterns and trends were identified that significantly contribute to advancing knowledge in the field of sports marketing. Below are the key results extracted from this study.

Table 1

Selected sample in Scopus for analysis

N°	Author	Key results
1	Dwyer et al.	Sports betting has significantly increased with the use of the internet, resulting in a steady rise in revenues. However, the level of commitment fans show when choosing a betting house largely depends on the promotions offered and the events organized to attract and maintain their interest.
2	King & Wiltshire	Digital marketing has transformed how companies sponsor products in the sports industry, generating a large audience among users and attracting various followers.
3	Monteiro et al.	The goal of sports marketing is to foster fan loyalty by utilizing various media, both visual and written, where promoted products appeal to followers' emotions.
4	Jones & Byon	Management within sports organizations is crucial, as it enables the development of various models that integrate fans with the organization's positioning.
5	Jankovic & Jaksic	A sports company's brand is essential for attracting new fans and engaging them in institutional customs and rituals.
6	Mackreth & Bond	National championships promote competition at all levels of sport, creating a climate of commitment to institutions and fostering a sports culture.
7	Scola & Gordon	Sports marketing aims to promote institutions, athletes, and brands.
8	Mazzei et al.	Sports generate various income sources. Through sporting events, companies sell numerous products while also promoting non-sport-related products such as beverages, food, and hotel rentals.
9	Stegmann et al.	Currently, sports companies use social media to promote product diversification, thereby generating more fans and increased economic revenues.
10	Webb & Orr	Sports companies aim to foster fan loyalty through marketing by engaging their emotions and affective processes. Therefore, it is common for media and sporting events to promote and highlight these attitudes.
11	Moital et al.	Sporting events should prioritize users' behavioral attitudes, such as campaigning against racism and violence.

12	Oshiro et al.	Sporting events manage significant economic sums; furthermore, each event generates substantial revenues for small businesses, such as tourism, hospitality, and leisure.
13	Ireland et al.	Sports companies typically sell products dedicated to sports, with the main buyers being individuals engaged in a discipline. However, with technological advances, many non-sport companies utilize sports marketing to promote their products, which can be harmful to users.
14	Kramer et al.	With the advent of the internet, a more expansive marketing approach has developed, allowing advertising to reach every corner of the world. In this context, sports marketing particularly focuses on social media, where each user indirectly views advertisements and may become a potential customer in the future.
15	Finch et al.	In the sports world, various disciplines exist; as a result, private organizations have been created to advocate for athletes' qualities, as well as the norms and policies followed by clubs. However, within each discipline, management departments are responsible for sports segmentation.
16	Cheong et al.	Fans are increasingly interested in new championships organized by private sports organizations. For example, in football, FIFA constantly organizes international competitions that generate a strong emotional impact on followers and contribute to increasing revenue.
17	Chen & Wu	Currently, the sports industry has become more profitable. As such, companies constantly seek to innovate in their product sales; through digital marketing, they aim to encourage gift purchases during sports broadcasts.
18	Winemiller et al.	The Men's World Cup attracts numerous fans, making football and the countless companies linked to it highly profitable. Consequently, football organizations have modified the traditional tournament structure to allow more countries to participate, thereby increasing product sales and achieving greater profitability.
19	Cleland et al.	The sports industry increasingly generates product options for fans to feel represented by their teams. In this regard, fans purchase merchandise of their sports idols regardless of cost, material, or wealth distribution.
20	Huang et al.	Extreme sports attract a growing number of fans due to factors such as danger levels, adrenaline, novelty, and the variety of settings in which they are practiced. This new sensation has captivated many fans, supported by various companies seeking to position themselves as pioneers in organizing such sports events.
21	In & Trongjitpituk	Fostering fan loyalty is a highly competitive tool, as it allows sports teams to maintain relevance, ensure their image is recognized, and, most importantly, generate public loyalty. This type of marketing should be the fundamental pillar for any sports team's growth.
22	Romero-Jara et al.	Digital marketing has greatly benefited the sports industry, as it has facilitated the development of various advertisements, promotional campaigns, customer acquisition strategies, product sales, and brand positioning. In this sense, the digital realm has become an essential tool for the economic growth of clubs.

23	Proctor et al.	With the increase in economic growth and the consolidation of well-known brands with millions of fans, sports companies are increasingly opting to establish franchises across various continents. This strategy allows them to expand their audience, enhance competitiveness, and gain presence in households around the world.
24	Dowsett et al.	Thanks to the digital world and social media, many sports companies offer virtual training programs, enabling users to participate comfortably and satisfactorily. These tools, supported by digital marketing, promote the emergence of new enterprises in the sector.
25	Kopanidis	Clubs, aiming to attract and retain more users, implement various strategies, among which active fan participation stands out. Fans can access infrastructures, venues, and sports fields, and may even participate in some club decisions. However, this participation is often contingent upon the payment of a membership fee.
26	Abdolmaleki et al.	Sponsorships from companies generate economic income that is primarily allocated to the payment of athletes and employees. It is noteworthy that many of these sponsors belong to the sports apparel sector, directly linking product purchases with fan support.
27	Kopplin	Currently, companies in the sports sector continually innovate their products, using fashion as a tool to create novelty and stay ahead of the competition. Additionally, these products must be sustainable to contribute positively to the ecosystem.
28	Cocco et al.	Personal branding is crucial for developing a sports image. Promoting athletes at various events and recognizing their achievements and awards is also a way to advertise the club, which in turn attracts more sponsors.
29	Kian y Zimmerman	The sports world is experiencing generational changes. Therefore, efforts are being made to encourage youth participation through new techniques, competitions, and opportunities for developing new talents.
30	Moharana et al.	Sponsorship is a key element in the sports industry, as it incentivizes clubs to pursue their institutional objectives and goals. Similarly, sponsoring companies seek to generate new customers through brand exposure.
31	Beek et al.	During UEFA 2020, the level of sponsorship reached millions, and the event was viewed worldwide. This is the type of recognition companies aspire to achieve by applying sports marketing strategies to position their brands globally.
32	Herold & Breuer	In the sports world, even when results favor one team over another, the true winners are ultimately the fans and companies, as there is always a group of supporters who purchase, directly or indirectly, products from sponsors regardless of the outcome.
33	Pepur et al.	In today's context of respect for social conditions, it is increasingly common for football to honor the beliefs of clubs and fans. Consequently, organizations have adapted football to align with the beliefs, backgrounds, lifestyles, and customs of their followers; similarly, sponsoring companies play a comparable role.

34	Fischer	In China, sports marketing has been implemented effectively. The audience increasingly prefers internationally significant sports, and with the support of public and private enterprises, many athletes excel in disciplines such as the Olympics, rowing, skating, and others.
35	Sotiriadou et al.	Social media serves as an effective tool for publicizing various sporting events and making them viral. These digital marketing techniques have gained significant relevance, as they facilitate the sale of various sports-related products and promote training techniques. Moreover, this medium is used to highlight outstanding athletes, honoring their successes.
36	Mainka et al.	Currently, companies worldwide are establishing policies to be socially responsible. In this regard, sports companies are developing products that benefit the ecosystem, while clubs promote the consumption of products that provide societal benefits through various channels.

Table 2
Selected sample in Web of Science for analysis

N°	Author	Key results
37	Schönberner & Woratschek	Sports clubs generate weekly events and sports products aimed at fostering fan identification with the club, encouraging product purchases, and keeping fans engaged with team results.
38	Richelieu & Webb	Sports marketing has consistently innovated, especially since the advent of social media. Today, sports spectacles permeate all digital platforms, contributing to increased sales, user loyalty, and brand enhancement.

Table 3
Selected sample in Scielo for analysis

N°	Author	Key results
39	Jayakumar & Grover	The sports world is becoming increasingly lucrative due to the substantial investments made by sponsoring companies. In this context, the creation of a super league comprised of the most powerful teams from the most competitive leagues will generate a tournament recognized globally as the most prestigious, backed by million-dollar investments and sponsorships from major multinationals.
40	García-Lavernia Gil	To analyze why sports companies are successful, one can point to their sales strategies, marketing, sponsorship, and the brand equity they generate. However, these growth levels are primarily reflected in the recognition the club receives upon achieving desired objectives.

The findings indicate that the most effective sports marketing strategies are those that combine positioning, digitization, effective communication, and robust brand management. Despite the ongoing challenges, such as inequality in access to technological tools and content saturation, organizations that adopt comprehensive and adaptive approaches succeed in enhancing their reach and strengthening their relationships with consumers.

Discussion

Sports marketing has established itself as a key strategic tool in managing brands, products, services, and events related to the sports domain. Its effectiveness lies in the ability to create value and meet market demands

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through specific promotion and positioning techniques. As Analuisa (2023) points out, one context where this effectiveness is clearly evidenced is in trade fairs, where the marketing strategies implemented by brands, focused on attracting and retaining consumers, significantly contribute to strengthening the bond between brand and customer.

In this context, brand positioning emerges as a central component of any marketing strategy. Macías et al. (2023) assert that positioning a brand involves defining its place in the consumer's mind relative to other brands in the sector, through differentiating attributes such as quality, price, or functionality. This positioning is particularly decisive in sports competitions that, despite their high media visibility, face structural or financial limitations. In such cases, brand recognition, both locally and internationally, becomes an essential asset for the sustainability of clubs and leagues. For example, international competitions facilitate the transfer of brand and product knowledge to new audiences, thus fostering global consolidation.

Moreover, digital marketing has revolutionized how sports organizations interact with their audiences. Rengel et al. (2022) argue that it is an indispensable component in defining contemporary strategies, due to its capacity for amplification, segmentation, and adaptation in virtual environments. The digitization of content and its distribution through multiple digital channels has exponentially increased the potential for brand recognition and positioning. However, the authors caution that this evolution has not been uniform, with significant differences in implementation and outcomes depending on both internal and external factors affecting organizations.

Additionally, the role of media remains crucial in sports marketing. As Colomer Martínez (2023) highlights, television and its associated digital platforms are key agents in disseminating sports events and promoting related products. Today, discussing media involves not only traditional broadcasting but also digital presence, where social media, streaming, and interactive content allow for a more direct and continuous connection with consumers. Many sports have undergone substantial transformation thanks to this media visibility, reaffirming the necessity of integrating media as a strategic axis of sports marketing.

Currently, social media has transformed how consumers interact not only with one another but also with sports clubs, brands, and athletes. Campos et al. (2021) emphasize that these platforms have fostered bidirectional communication that enhances the visibility of messages and the emotional connection between sports organizations and their audiences. With over 3.5 billion active social media users in 2019—approximately 45% of the global population at that time—its influence has grown exponentially, with a 158% increase between 2010 and 2019. This phenomenon not only diversified promotional channels but also segmented audiences by generations: Generation Z tends to favor platforms like Instagram and Snapchat; millennials prefer Facebook and Twitter; while Generation X predominantly opts for Facebook and LinkedIn.

This digital behavior reinforces the need to deeply understand the sports consumer, whose decision-making and consumption patterns are as rational and complex as those in any other sector. Tenorio et al. (2023) argue that, while there is a tendency to view the sports market as a particular or "atypical" environment, this perception is misguided. The consumer of sports products and services possesses a level of self-determination comparable to that of consumers in other sectors, making it imperative to study their behavior with equal rigor. Furthermore, the constant expansion of the sports offering—across products, services, experiences, and content—demands more specialized marketing strategies capable of adapting to a changing and highly competitive environment.

In this regard, Choque Huamán & Quispe Cuela (2024) warn that sports marketing is in a state of constant transformation, influenced by social dynamism, technological advances, and evolving consumption habits. In this context, continuing to apply traditional strategies without adaptive adjustments may prove not only ineffective but even counterproductive. Given this scenario, marketing departments must rely on rigorous market analysis and commercial intelligence that allow for precise segmentation of target audiences, thereby optimizing campaigns and communication actions.

Together, the contributions analyzed reinforce the idea that the success of contemporary sports marketing lies in its ability to adapt to the digital environment, its deep understanding of the consumer, and its skill in integrating appropriate media, platforms, and languages for each audience. This entails designing more personalized, innovative strategies grounded in real data, which enhance brand positioning and strengthen the emotional connection with consumers, beyond the sports product itself.

Conclusions

Sports marketing has evolved into a fundamental productive factor, capable of differentiating and positioning commercial brands in front of an increasingly demanding and aware consumer. In this context, as a result of the convergence between consumer economics and attention economics, clubs and leagues have

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diversified their funding sources. Thus, they have adapted and renewed traditional business models related to sports to respond to current needs, generating new opportunities for companies and brands seeking to enhance their visibility to target audiences and increase their appeal to consumers.

However, the results of this research indicate an oversaturated sector filled with competitors who have developed a variety of innovative elements to differentiate themselves. In this sense, new business models have moved beyond traditional revenue sources, which revolved primarily around television rights. Currently, various income sources are observed, notably the compensations clubs and leagues receive for advertising, as well as sales of associated products. Nonetheless, while these means are useful for attracting greater attention, it is essential to emphasize that their effectiveness depends on being aligned with a coherent and well-structured commercial strategy.

Therefore, looking to the future, it is imperative to continue analyzing the progressive development of digital platforms in the sports domain, as well as the various advertising branches and the changing profiles of consumers. Only by doing so will it be possible to design new successful strategies that incorporate technological innovation and respond to a dynamic and ever-evolving environment.

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