

The Future of Sports marketing: Engaging fans Through Metaverse strategies

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ABSTRACT,

The metaverse, an upcoming digital environment where people interact, work, shop with each other in three-dimensional worlds, gained interest across various industries, including sports. This study explores the potential of metaverse marketing strategies within the sports sector, focusing on fan engagement and business outcomes. Despite the growing popularity of the metaverse, there is limited understanding about it. Through qualitative research involving interviews with professionals and experts in the sports industry, this study identifies and analyzes the most effective metaverse marketing strategies. The findings reveal that while traditional methods remain valuable, there is a potential of the metaverse to change ways fans can engage. Strategies such as, virtual merchandise, augmented reality games, virtual reality stadiums. It also provides businesses with new ways to reach their audiences, foster a sense of community among fans, create new revenue streams and for businesses to maintain a competitive edge. The research highlights the importance of a cautious yet proactive approach to consider and integrate metaverse technologies.

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Keywords

Metaverse, Sports marketing, Digital marketing strategies, Fan engagement, Virtual Reality (VR), Virtual environments.

1. INTRODUCTION

The metaverse, a term first shared in Neal Stephenson's 1992 book called "Snow Crash" refers to a collective virtual shared space, created by the integration of virtually enhanced physical reality, including virtual worlds, augmented reality, and the internet (Stephenson, 1992). The metaverse is a loosely defined term referring to virtual worlds in which users represented by avatars interact, usually in 3D and usually focused on social and economic connection (Cho et al., 2023). It has ever since become an emergent digital environment where people can play, interact, work and shop in three-dimensional worlds. The ability of the metaverse to deliver new consumer experiences has created massive interest in various worlds industries, including and specifically the sports industry.

Recent studies highlight the metaverses growing impact on sports marketing. For instance, a study by Momentum Worldwide, (2024) found that 81% of sports fans are willing to pay to watch live sporting events in the metaverse. Additionally experts suggest that the metaverse offers new opportunities for brands to connect with their consumers through immersive experiences such as virtual reality stadiums and interactive fan zones (Tech Xplore, 2024)

In the sports market, the metaverse offers unique opportunities for fan engagement and marketing. With augmented reality (AR) games and virtual reality (VR) stadiums the way fans engage with sports are poised to change (Solomon, 2022). AR is defined as a real-time direct or indirect view of a physical real-world environment that has been enhanced/augmented by adding virtual computer-generated information to it. AR is both interactive and registered in 3D as well as combines real and virtual objects (Carmigniani & Furht, 2011). VR is more and more used in various fields since 2015. VR offers a sense of "being there", fulfilling the "oldest dream of journalists"—to give audiences the perception of "being present at distant, newsworthy locations and events" (Tribusean, 2020). This trend is not only changing how fans consume sports content but also how businesses market their products and services.

The rise of the metaverse in sports is shown by initiatives like in the NBA, where they partnered with virtual platforms as Meta and Xtadium to stream live games in VR, offering fans a 360-degree view of the action from the comfort of their homes (NBA, 2024). Similarly, Formula 1 took action into the metaverse with virtual races, allowing fans to engage with the sport in interactive, innovative ways (Formula 1, 2021). As well as different teams and tracks in F1 who take F1 to the metaverse. Williams Racing announced in 2022 to create fan engagement like never before. You can hear every radio message, have a clear knowledge of each race strategy, virtually attend the social gatherings, and travel onboard with a 34-year-old Max Verstappen, who attempts to hold off the up-and-coming, young hotshot in the principality (Hardy, E. 2022) These developments signify a shift towards immersive digital experiences, highlighting the metaverse's

potential to transform traditional sports marketing strategies.

Given this information, it is important to understand how businesses can use metaverse marketing strategies in their advances in the sports market. The intersection of innovation in the digital world and engagement of sports fans in the metaverse creates new opportunities for research, particularly in identifying and analyzing the strategies that are most effectively with the consumers in these virtual environments. Thus, this study aims to explore the following research question: What are the most effective marketing strategies for fan engagement for companies operating within virtual environments? How do these strategies differ from traditional marketing approaches in the sports industry, and what factors contribute to their success in engaging consumers in the metaverse?

The exploration of the metaverse and its application within the sports industry has been somewhat limited, finding a significant research gap in understanding specific marketing strategies that businesses can apply within these virtual environments. Existing research primarily dives into the technological aspects of the metaverse or fan engagement, with not enough attention given to how businesses can efficiently market their products and services in these digital realms.

With the metaverse on the rise, the strategies and engagement with consumers needs to evolve. Traditional marketing would likely not be as impactful in the metaverse, with consumers able to engage and spend time with the brands in a far more engaging and interactive manner than is possible at present. Therefore, there is a necessity for research that not only identifies successful marketing strategies in the metaverse but also contrast them with traditional real world approaches. in order to identify unique opportunities and challenges of this new world.

Moreover, the sports industry is a particularly intriguing context for this research. Sports fans are famous for their passion and involvement, and the metaverse provides novel paths to utilize this engagement. Nonetheless, there is limited knowledge about what is a successful marketing strategy in this setting. Enhancing the understanding could assist sports businesses in better engaging their fans, enhancing brand loyalty, and ultimately boosting revenue in the metaverse.

Consequently, this study is crucial to bridge these knowledge gaps and offer valuable insights for businesses operating in the sports sector, who plan to head into the metaverse. By pinpointing and evaluating the most effective metaverse marketing strategies to enhance fan engagement, this research has the potential to steer businesses in their marketing attempts and contribute to a broader understanding of the consumer behavior in virtual environments.

This research will be conducted as a qualitative study within the field of sports marketing in the metaverse.

The qualitative approach is chosen due to its inherent strength in exploring complex phenomena and providing rich, detailed insights, which are particularly suited for this study given the novelty and complexity of the metaverse and its marketing strategies.

This study will mainly involve interviews with business who are operating within the sports market in the metaverse. The interviews will be conducted with marketing managers, digital strategists and other professionals working in the metaverse on marketing strategies. These interviews will provide insights into marketing strategies that are most effective for fan engagement in the virtual world, the challenges and the factors that are contributing to their successes.

The data gathered from these interviews and case studies will be subjected to thematic analysis. This involves identifying, analyzing, and documenting themes within the data, while avoiding excessive pattern usage and maintaining a humanistic approach. This method will facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the marketing strategies employed in the metaverse's sports market, their divergence from traditional marketing methods, and the elements driving their success.

By adopting a qualitative approach within this specific field, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of marketing strategies in the metaverse's sports market. This endeavor seeks to bridge the identified research gap, contributing significantly to both scholarly discourse and practical applications in this rapidly evolving field.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The concept of the metaverse and its impact on sports marketing

According to Cho, Dieck, and Jung (2023), the metaverse is a digital realm that provides users with a shared, instantaneous experience that is altering the way sports fans interact with sports. Their connection with sports companies and the way they show their passion are changing as a result (Cho et al, 2023). According to Altman Solon (2022) this development is leading to a gradual transformation in sports marketing by presenting new and innovative chances to interact with fans and add revenue. An early understanding of the concept of the metaverse can be found in Stephenson's novel "Snow Crash" (Stephenson, 1992). Our understanding of virtual realities and their potential impact on a range of industries, including sports, has been greatly influenced by his definition of the metaverse (Stephenson, 1992).

In addition to Stephenson's work, other sources have also contributed to our understanding of the metaverse and its impact on sports marketing. For instance, a study from marketing agency Momentum Worldwide found that a significant percentage of sports fans would pay to watch a real life sporting event in the metaverse (Momentum Worldwide, 2023). This indicates the potential of the metaverse

as a new platform for fan engagement and revenue generation (Momentum Worldwide, 2023).

Moreover, sports teams, companies, federations, and broadcasters are actively exploring the utility of the metaverse in the sports industry (Sports Industry Group, 2023). The adoption of the metaverse aims to increase fan engagement, appeal to a younger, more "techy" audience, and create an additional revenue stream in the digital realm (Sports Industry Group, 2023).

In a study conducted by Hollensen, Kotler & Opresnik (2022), they further elaborate the concept of the metaverse as a new universe where marketing is also needed. They discuss the "building blocks" of the metaverse and how they function. As an example they use the Nike-Roblox case, this case provides additional insights in how the metaverse is revolutionizing the sports industry by enhancing fan engagement, virtual training, ticketing and seating in the metaverse.

In conclusion, the metaverse is evolving the sports industry by providing enhanced fan engagement, virtual training, ticketing and seating, and virtual reality and augmented reality in broadcasting (Hollensen et al, 2022). It also allows professional sport teams and leagues to host virtual and remote events, allowing fans worldwide to attend (Sports Industry Group, 2023). As such the metaverse is assured to bring a big shift in sports marketing (Cho et al, 2023; Altman Solon, 2022).

2.2 The use of AR/VR technologies in sports marketing

The emergence of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies has brought about a significant transformation in the realm of sports marketing. These innovative technologies provide immersive experiences, thereby enhancing fan engagement and creating new opportunities for revenue generation (Altman Solon, 2022). Carmigniani & Furht (2011) present a comprehensive overview of augmented reality, discussing its potential applications and implications. They propose that AR, with its close ties to the metaverse, holds the potential to reshape sports marketing by offering fans immersive and interactive experiences. A real-world demonstration of the application of virtual realities in sports is provided by Formula 1 (2021). Their decision to reimplement the Virtual Grands Prix following a year of record breaking successes highlights the growing acceptance and popularity of these technologies among sports enthusiasts. Moise et al (2023) discuss the future of how marketing in the metaverse can be sustainable, which could be linked to the use of VR and AR technologies in sports marketing. They highlight the role of AI and how attractive the virtual universes are. This can be used to discuss how VR and AR technologies contribute to sustainable marketing in the metaverse

In conclusion, the upcoming of AR and VR technologies is revolutionizing sports marketing by enhancing fan engagement. It creates new revenue

streams and provides immersive experiences that bring fans closer to the action.

2.3 Case studies of successful marketing strategies in the metaverse sports market

In the rapidly evolving metaverse sports market, several businesses have successfully implemented marketing strategies. As for example in the Formula 1, where the use of virtual reality to enhance fan experiences. Hardy (2022) provides an insight into this strategy, highlighting the Williams teams plan to bring fans into the garage and more via virtual reality. This strategy exemplifies how sports teams can leverage the metaverse to offer unique and immersive experiences to their fans.

Furthermore, Chohan & Schmidt-Devlin (2023) discuss the concept of sports fandom in the metaverse and its marketing implications. They suggest that sports brands should engage their fans in the metaverse by offering exclusive experiences that strengthen the fans identification as a fan. This could involve facilitating opportunities for fans to demonstrate their fandom and reinforce their association with the fan community. Additionally, fostering immersive experiences that enable fans to interact with each other and the sports brand is another strategy suggested by Chohan & Schmidt-Devlin (2023).

In addition to these strategies, sports brands can also consider offering virtual sports competitions that fans can attend from anywhere in the world. As an example what is happening in the Netherlands right now where they created a replica of the official football competition “Eredivisie” in EA FC 24, where fans compete which each other to represent their favourite football club to ultimately compete against other “fans” in this replica competition called the “KPN eDivisie” (De KPN eDivisie, n.d.) This can be seen as an extension of the exclusive experiences suggested by Chohan & Schmidt-Devlin (2023). Moreover, the creation of a community in the metaverse by offering immersive, virtual experiences for fans to interact with each other, the sports brand, and athletes is another strategy that sports brands can consider.

In conclusion, the metaverse offers a wide range of opportunities for sports brands to engage their fans in unique and immersive ways. By leveraging these strategies, sports brands can not only enhance their fan engagement but also create a strong and loyal fan community in the metaverse.

2.4 Identifying gap in research

Despite the metaverse getting more known to the people and its implications within the sports marketing, it still leaves several research gaps. Cho et al. (2023) highlights the need for further research to fully understand the metaverse in various sectors, including sports. They argue that there is need for more empirical studies, in order to validate the theoretical constructs associated with the metaverse and its impact on consumer behavior. Tribusean (2020) discusses the use of VR in journalism, providing a view from a different perspective on the

potential application of these technologies. His work highlights the need for cross-disciplinary research to explore the endless list of applications of the metaverse and related technologies.

2.5 Categorization of metaverse marketing strategies in the sports market

To generalize how marketing strategies are utilized within the metaverse for the sports market, a framework was taken that would categorize the strategies as belonging to the following distinct categories, and each category would generalize how the business utilizes the metaverse to interact with the target audience and hence meet the marketing objectives.

Table 1. Categories of marketing strategies

Nr.	Categories of Marketing Strategies
1	Virtual Merchandise and Sales
2	Immersive Fan Engagement
3	Interactive Sponsorships and Advertising
4	Virtual Events and Competitions
5	Community Building and Social Interaction
6	Virtual Training and Events
7	Augmented Reality (AR) Game Integration

2.5.1 Framework explanation and application

Virtual merchandise and sales: This category focuses on creating and selling virtual sports products. For example, virtual sneakers, jerseys, and other gear can be designed and sold within the metaverse. As well as selling tangible products, such as tickets and real merchandise.

Immersive Fan Engagement: This involves using VR and AR technologies to create engaging and immersive experiences for fans. Examples include virtual stadiums where fans can watch games of their favorite sports teams or interactive fan zones where they can meet avatars of their favorite players.

Interactive Sponsorships and Advertising: These include any interaction that content users have with any sponsored material developed for the virtual environment for sports, right from the textured virtual billboards to the branded in-game experiences.

Virtual Events and Competitions: : Host virtual sports events and competitions where fans can compete or watch and spectate from around the globe from the comfort of their homes. Think about virtual marathons, e-sporting events and augmented virtual reality racing events

Personalized Marketing Experiences: Utilizing data and AI to create personalized marketing messages

and experiences personalized to individual fans based on their preferences and behaviors within the metaverse.

Community Building and Social Interaction: Creating virtual spaces where fans can gather, interact with each other, and engage with their favorite sports teams and athletes. This creates a community and deepens fan loyalty.

Virtual Training and Coaching: Offering virtual training sessions and programs for fans, providing them with the opportunity to engage if not able to in the real world.

Augmented Reality (AR) Game Integration: incorporating games that allow fans to interact with sports in a playful manner, such as AR treasure hunts or viewing experiences with an AR value-add.

3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research was to find and analyze the most successful marketing strategies for business who operate within the metaverse, specifically in the sports industry emphasizing on fan engagement. This section of the paper outlines the research design and methods that have been used to achieve this objective.

3.1 Research design

A qualitative research design was used in this study in order to fully understand the issue. Considering the novelty and complexity of the metaverse and its marketing method, the qualitative approach is best suited because of its intrinsic strengths in studying complicated phenomena and offering rich, comprehensive insights.

Research was conducted using mainly interviews. The interviews have been conducted with organizations that operate within the metaverse and have share in the sports market. These organizations have been identified and have been asked to participate in the interviews for this study. These interviews highlight the marketing strategies they have implemented, the reactions of their respective consumers, and the overall impact on their business.

The samples for this study are businesses who operate within the metaverse and have a share in the sports market, see below table 2. The selection of the interviews and case studies will be determined with guides as the innovativeness of the marketing strategies, the degree of consumer engagement and their relevance to the sports market.

Table 2. Criteria for sample selection

Criteria	Description
Link to a sport organization	The participant is or is linked to an sport organization, ensuring relevance to the sports market
Future in the metaverse	The participant has plans or is currently exploring within the metaverse
Use of innovative	The participant employs or is planning to employ

Criteria	Description
marketing strategies	innovative marketing strategies, ensuring insights into cutting-edge marketing practices

3.2 Data collection

Data collection has been carried out through structured interviews with marketing managers, digital strategies and other professionals working in the metaverse and/or general marketing strategies. These interviews will highlight marketing strategies that are most effective for fan engagement in the virtual world, the challenges and the factors that contribute to their successes. The collection of data began on the 22nd of April and had been continued until sufficient data is collected. The data gathered from these interviews and case studies have been carefully analyzed by comparing the strategies and plans of the interviewed organizations with existing successful cases. The aim is to identify which methods are most successful for companies operating within the virtual environment related to the sports market, and how these differ from traditional marketing approaches in terms of enhancing consumer engagement. This methodology will provide a comprehensive framework for further research and understanding the marketing strategies in the metaverse's sports market. It is designed to give business who operate in the sports sector who plan to head into the metaverse valuable insights.

4. RESULTS

The following section will be used to discuss the results obtained through the interviews. The aim of these interviews is to gather insights into the current and potential use of metaverse marketing strategies in the sports industry, focusing on fan engagement and business outcome.

4.1 Virtual merchandise and sales

During the interviews, the potential for having virtual merchandise and its connection to identity and expression to these sport organizations was explored. However there is no current link to the metaverse, but there is openness to adapting if the demand for it is right. WeMessage mentioned *“we offer a variety of ways for Go Ahead Eagles to earn money, with sales of merchandise, season tickets and seasonal actions for supporters. This is not linked to the metaverse yet, but if there is demand for it in the future, we can certainly do it.”* Go Ahead Eagles also noted the potential of making it commercially viable: *“We want to use the online world mainly as a communication stream. First for engagement to get more out of it besides football matches, but secondly in the future, earn some money from it which I think should be very well possible there.”* These quotes highlight the opportunities the metaverse brings to go beyond engagement and earn money with it. The interviews also revealed a practical approach toward the implementation towards virtual merchandise, as long as there is demand for it they can do it. WeMessage also stated that *“if we see any added value for their clients, we will propose it. If it results in more business and customer reach, we will present*

a plan detailing all the costs and benefits it brings with it." This shows it has to come from within and the extra value has to be seen, if its there and the costs/revenue picture is right, it is very much possible.

4.2 Immersive fan engagement

From all the interviews there was a indication that we should be cautious with approaching towards adopting immersive technologies like the metaverse. As WeMessage noted, "Currently, we do not use the metaverse in our marketing strategies. If it becomes necessary to achieve our clients goals, we will integrate it. But for now, traditional methods suffice." This cautiousness reflects a broader sentiment, where the readiness of the market is critical. Basic-Fit confirmed this sentiment, stating, "While we think the metaverse offers exciting opportunities, the market is not really quite ready yet for a full scale integration." Moreover, WeMessage and FC Twente talked about the acceptance of the new technology by people with a higher age. WeMessage observed, "Older people do not have the feeling towards this new technology, making it harder to get them involved." This was said in the context that the most final decisions are made by higher ups in the organizations who are usually of higher age. Similarly, FC Twente mentioned the acceptance of elders when integrating a metaverse, and why they plan to do it for children. "older people and parents of children find it more difficult. They do not know what is happening, for them there is no visibility and often find it scary." Contrary to this Go Ahead Eagles mentioned to methods they have used in the past to integrate it he stated. "I agree that the football world is quite conservative. However, four years ago we chose to make the season tickets digital. And yes it raised some question marks, but after some time it did work." This positive example of Go Ahead Eagles demonstrates that with time and proper introduction, new technologies can gain acceptance even in conservative groups. Lastly, a caution of WeMessage where he highlighted the potential of impact of the metaverse on social life. "Smartphones have already reduced physical interactions. The metaverse could further this trend, making it a challenge to maintain real-life connections." His statement shows that there is somewhat of a concern that it may replace real-life connections and we need to make sure that does not fade away.

4.3 Interactive sponsorships and advertising

The future of advertisement in the metaverse was seen as very personal and interactive. WeMessage illustrated this by saying, "with the advancement of new technologies like VR headsets, we can envision more interactive advertising. For instance, playing a game and seeing an ad for comfortable chairs you use to sit on while being in VR." According to Basic-Fit, the personalization for advertisements has a significant aspect of future metaverse strategies. "The metaverse offers unique opportunities for personalized marketing, as each person has his own view on which we can adjust what kind of ads they see." These vision highlight the unique opportunities of personalized and interactive marketing the

metaverse has to offer. However, marketing agencies do not look into this yet as there is a low readiness to adapt. While there is some readiness to adapt, the current lack of adaptation of VR limits this. WeMessage expressed this by saying, "if such technologies become mainstream and clients demand it, we will adopt these strategies. But for now, the infrastructure is not there yet." WeMessage indicates here that maybe some time in the future there is a mainstream adaptation of it but not yet.

4.4 Virtual events and competitions

According to all interviewees there is an huge potential for virtual events in the sports industry, with some existing examples as precursor for more advanced implementations. WeMessage said, "The NBA's use of virtual fans during the recent pandemic is an early example of adoption. Future developments could include holograms for a more realistic experience." Changes like these could enhance the sport experience for both fans and athletes. Similarly, Basic-Fit shared their current implementation, "We have virtual cycling exercise where there are multiple bicycles in front of a screen, and you bike through mountains and difficult terrain." This highlights the existing virtual events where participants engage in an realistic and immersive way.

Moreover, FC Twente highlighted the strategic importance of virtual events, "Another added value is that the metaverse can offer is reaching new target groups. I think that there are many young children who game and want to be active in the metaverse but do not necessarily want to go to the stadium. But through an FC Twente Metaverse with fun content and games they can develop a bond with FC Twente. This can help bind new supporters to the club." In addition to this FC Twente discussed the role of the e-divisie, a current virtual event that is an esports league associated with the Eredivisie (De KPN eDivisie, n.d.). "I have seen some results of the eDivisie. Although it is not super successful yet, it is a start to something. It can certainly evolved further." Additionally, Go Ahead Eagles added an possible event where real-world activities combine with digital world results: "Lets say you run 10 kilometers every day and at the end of the week, if you ran enough kilometers, your metaverse character gets rewards which you can eventually trade in for meeting with players or merchandise." These current events and ideas for events highlight how the organizations are already using it and also thinking forward about what they can do with it in the future.

4.5 Community building and social interaction

The metaverse presents both challenges and opportunities for social interaction, with a potential shift in how communities are created and engage with each other. As said in 4.2, where it has an impact on social interactions, WeMessage stated, "Smartphones have already reduced physical interactions. The metaverse could further this trend, making it a challenge to maintain real-life connections, but it also offers new ways to connect, like experiencing the live events virtually." Also

privacy concerns were made by Go Ahead Eagles stating *"We find it difficult because we actually want to be the owner of the data. Currently, for example through Instagram, we know nothing of you, we prefer to have the people on our own platform."* However there are efforts being made to maintain a sense of community in virtual worlds, as Basic-Fit mentioned with Basic Fits virtual lessons, *"We try to make virtual lessons feel more realistic by having real persons talking to you, even if it is prerecorded."* Similarly, FC Twente was exploring a way to create virtual meeting spaces for fans where they can interact and engage with the club. *"We want to create a virtual meeting space for our fans to interact, chat, and play games, enhancing their connection with FC Twente."* He also added some more ways to increase engagement as, *"For example, by having a FC Twente player walk around in the metaverse once in a while making him available to chat and play games with the fans."* These innovation initiatives show that there is a aim to enhance fan engagement and foster a deep connection between fans and the organizations through the metaverse.

4.6 Virtual training and events

The metaverse has potential to make training and events more inclusive. WeMessage noted, *"there are 3 million people in the Netherlands with disabilities who cannot attend events. The metaverse can help these people to attend this from their houses while getting the same experience."* This highlights the potential for inclusivity. Basic-Fit shared their current offerings, stating *"We provide virtual group lessons where participants can do multiple group exercises like cardio or HIT, guided by a prerecorded or live instructor."* These examples show the current implications and the potential for expansion.

4.7 Augmented Reality (AR) game integration

The integration of AR/VR technologies present both opportunities and challenges. The current barriers include high costs and the adoption by society as noted by WeMessage *"the current cost and adoption rate of AR/VR headsets are the barriers. As these technologies become more affordable and widespread, their integration will be more feasible."* Practical challenges of the AR game integration in physical environments like gyms were noted. Basic-Fit mentioned that: *"the use of AR in gyms with VR headsets is very difficult due to the costs and practicality, we are not a gym asking high subscription fees from our members. So therefore, to offer metaverse in our gym is going to be really difficult. However I think potential marketing campaigns can take place in the metaverse."* This indicates a need for affordable solutions and other approaches to integrate AR/VR. Additionally the potential use of AR/VR highlighted by FC Twente about offering a way to interact with the club, especially for younger fans. *"We see potential in using AR for engaging younger fans and creating more interactive experiences."* Shows the importance of how to integrate these new technologies, starting by a target audience that is more receptive to these new technologies.

5. DISCUSSION

Integrating metaverse technology does involve challenges, particularly when it comes to the readiness of markets and infrastructure technologies. Concerns over what current technology is capable of and how these new technologies will be accepted by the older generations are vocalized by many. Equally important but far less visible are the sociological implications of the metaverse for our relationships and our connection to our lives. Combining digital experiences for fans alongside providing physical platforms is key for inclusive sports marketing strategies.

5.1 Limitations

Several limitations of this study must be considered. On one hand, the use of qualitative evidence alone based on a small number of interviews has shortcomings in capturing the full range of views within the sector. Although the thoughts of these few participants are interesting, they are relatively few in the broader spectrum of the sports marketing industry. Also, metaverse technologies are rapidly changing and information could be out of date quickly. With new technologies coming up and existing ones evolving, it will be interesting to revisit these strategies and insights from this study.

Moreover, the fact that sports organizations are the main focus, and especially in the Dutch context, might restrict the external validity of the results to other countries, sectors, and industries. They also noted that because this is a cross-sectional study comparing two different markets there may be some differences in technological adoption and consumer readiness, which could limit the generalizability of the findings. The current infrastructure or market readiness, and particularly that among older generations, will make it challenging for the technology to reach acceptance. This requires substantial financial investment and changing the mindset of the organization, something that not all sports organizations can do.

Finally, this study does not consider the potential long-term effects of metaverse implementation on fan engagement and organizational performance. For this, there is a need for more longitudinal investigations to track the development of these trends and how the metaverse impacts sports marketing longitudinally.

6. CONCLUSION

The metaverse is a big leap forward for sports in the digital space and presents sports organizations with unique possibilities in connecting with fans cross-platform through immersive and interactivity. Virtual merchandise, immersive fan experiences and virtual events are all key strategies to increasing fan engagement and growing revenue in the metaverse as this study demonstrates. By taking advantage of the inherent benefits of the metaverse, these strategies engage fans in more targeted, different ways, increasing both brand loyalty and customer satisfaction.

However, the uptake of these technologies is in its infancy, and a range of barriers, including those relating to market-readiness, technology

infrastructure, and social impact need to be overcome. Enter sports organizations, whose implementation strategies of such marketing in the metaverse warrant a second conviction with a careful ear as not to hasten its course of action and evade appealing results.

The cautious approach of sports organizations when it comes to integrating metaverse technologies indicates that there is need for further research and development. As the technology normalizes and improves, and gets into the hand of more and more people, the transition to growing metaverse based marketing strategies will speed up, opening all sorts of new opportunities to fans and businesses. The metaverse is an ongoing process, as it will inevitably evolve, it will allow sports organizations to be ahead of their competitors and keep up with their fanbase.

6.1 Future work

Future research should include a larger and more varied sample of sports organizations and metaverse experts in different territories and disciplines. Quantitative studies might also confirm the qualitative results and elucidate more widely generalizable aspects. These studies may use surveys and experiments to investigate how different kinds of metaverse marketing strategies can lead to different fan engagement and organization performance effects.

Longitudinal studies may track the adoption and impact of the metaverse technologies over time. Representative studies like this can give clues to the benefits and challenges of using metaverse technologies within sports marketing over the long term. They can also uncover trend and phenomena that can help inform future strategies and decision-making

Progression toward advancements in technology such as low-cost AR/VR hardware and efficient virtual platforms requires further research. Future research might explore the cognitive and social impact of engaging in the metaverse for fans themselves (e.g., less physical interactions that make it easier to socialize). These impacts need to be understood, to enable organizations to develop strategies that strike a balance between digital and physical fan engagement and to guarantee a complete and satisfying fan experience.

6.2 Recommendations

Sports organizations need to start incorporating metaverse technologies into their marketing strategies, initially by launching pilot projects to measure their efficiency and gather useful insights. This gradual change provides organizations with the opportunity to effectively pilot their strategies before extensive rolling out, meaning less risk and scope for successful adoption is greater.

Fans and organization stakeholders need to learn and understand to become more accepting and prepared. Publish workshops, seminars, and informational campaigns on metaverse technologies and sports marketing to create awareness and deeper understanding of the tools and resources that are available. This education drive will work to define the metaverse and its potential benefits, hopefully fostering wider adoption and excitement.

Organizations that want to implement metaverse strategies must invest in the proper technology foundation. This entails buying AR/VR devices, and setting up secure virtual platforms. Organizations may also want to partner with technology providers to gain access to cutting-edge technologies and their know-how. These partnerships can offer deep insights and tech support to keep organizations at the front of the metaverse front.

Working with industries that have embedded metaverse technologies will provide a rich understanding and help speed up the adoption by our industries. These partnerships enable organizations to use the expertise of their partners to help inform successful metaverse marketing strategies. By working together, organizations can benefit from the lessons learned and the mistakes made by those who came before them, increasing their likelihood of success.

Since today's youth tend to be more receptive to virtual technologies, it would be a good idea to target this demographic first and develop partnerships with them in order to establish a solid base of engagement and support. Organizations can build enduring loyalty and brand advocacy with their new, young fans, by developing exciting, interactive experiences that appeal to a younger audience. At the same time, reaching younger audiences now can lay the foundation for a loyal base that will engage with the organization's metaverse efforts in the future.

Finally, the need in the sector to create a balance between digital and physical fan engagement is crucial, ensuring that metaverse experiences serve to enhance, rather than replace, real-life connections. By blending metaverse technologies with current marketing techniques, businesses can potentially foster a delightful fan experience. The integrated nature of this strategy ensures fans receive a fully rounded engagement, fusing the thrill of the virtual with physical events so they are left with both the best of both worlds into their hearts.

The following recommendations are designed to help sports organizations navigate the new digital world and implement the metaverse so that they can establish new fan connections on a long-term basis and grow their business. Using a considered strategy, brands will be able to capitalize on the potential marketing opportunities available to them in the metaverse.

7. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Robin Effing, for supervising me throughout the entire process of this bachelor thesis and providing me with feedback. I would also like to thank the interview participants for providing me with very valuable firsthand knowledge and insights. Their participation in this research has contributed significantly to the depth and richness of the findings. Finally, I want to thank my fellow students from the bachelor thesis circle for the collaboration during the circle meetings

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9. APPENDIX

Appendix A - Interview Guide

Introduction:

1. Welcome and introduction

- Introduce yourself and Dr. Robin Effing.
- Briefly explain the purpose of the interview.
 1. The purpose of the interview we are collecting data about the insights of [ORGANIZATION NAME] [INTERVIEWEE NAME] on metaverse strategies and they ways these have been implement
- Assure confidentiality and explain that the data will be used for academic research.
- Obtain verbal consent to record the interview (if applicable).

2. Overview of the research

- Explain the goals of the research.
 1. The goal of the research is to determine which marketing strategies are most effective for sports organizations who operate or have a future in the metaverse.
- Mention the benefits of participating, such as early access to findings and networking opportunities.
 1. Detailed report of results that may be useful to [ORGANIZATION NAME]

Interview questions:

Section 1: Background information

1. Can you tell us about your role within the organization?
2. How long have you been working in this field and with this organization?

Section 2: Metaverse marketing strategies

3. How does your organization currently utilize the metaverse for marketing purposes?

4. What specific marketing strategies have you implemented in the metaverse?
5. Can you provide examples of successful metaverse marketing campaigns your organization has conducted?

Section 3: Goals and objectives

6. What are the primary goals of your metaverse marketing campaigns?

7. How do these goals differ from your traditional marketing objectives?

Section 4: Implementation and tools

8. What tools and technologies do you use to implement your metaverse marketing strategies?

9. How do you measure the success of these strategies?

10. What challenges have you encountered in implementing metaverse marketing campaigns?

Section 5: Consumer engagement 11. How do you engage with consumers in the metaverse?

12. What techniques do you use to enhance consumer interaction and participation?

13. Can you share any data or insights on consumer reactions to your metaverse marketing efforts?

Section 6: Comparative analysis 14. How do your metaverse marketing strategies compare to traditional marketing strategies in terms of effectiveness and consumer engagement?

15. What unique opportunities does the metaverse offer that traditional marketing channels do not?

Section 7: Future directions 16. What are your future plans for metaverse marketing?

17. How do you foresee the role of the metaverse evolving in the sports industry?

Section 8: Additional insights 18. Are there any other insights or experiences related to metaverse marketing that you would like to share?

19. Do you have any advice for other organizations looking to enter the metaverse for marketing purposes?

Closing: 20. Thank the participant for their time and valuable insights.

21. Inform them about the next steps, including how they can receive the research findings.

1. Within [DATE] you will receive results of the research which you can use in the future for [ORGANIZATION NAME] marketing strategies.

22. Confirm their contact details for any follow-up questions.

1. Am I allowed to text, email, call [ORGANIZATION NAME] [INTERVIEWEE NAME] if I still have any questions

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