

The Key-Attributes That Influence the Fans' Perceptions of the Corinthians' Ecosystem

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Abstract

Objective: This article aims to understand and analyse which fans' attributes most influence in their view concerning the sports ecosystem of the Sport Club Corinthians for sporting events. **Methodology:** an exploratory research was carried out consisting 78 topics using the Likert scale to be administered to 180 sports fans in 3 matches between February and March 2017. The analysis procedure followed three steps: (i) calculating the chi-square test cross tables; (ii) selecting the topics which achieved less than 5% significance; (iii) and identifying that group of fans' attributes that are most similar and most divergent. **Findings:** monthly salary is the most critical fan attribute; monthly attendance is the second fan attribute most divergent. Fans understand that the stadium as well as partnerships and sponsorships as the critical dimensions of the Corinthians' ecosystem. **Conclusion:** Therefore, 2 out of 3 hypotheses were confirmed. Besides, issue as to gender is not a critical fans' attributes for the Corinthians' marketers.

Keywords: sports ecosystem, sports marketing, sports club, sport club corinthians, sports fans

1. Introduction

It has been observed by Maltese & Danglade (2014), that sport and entertainment converge. While the commercial dynamics of sport and entertainment have always overlapped, the two are now closer than ever before (Ratten, 2016). For Storm, Wagner & Nielsen (2004), in many cases, sporting entertainment and commercial success are now seen as two sides of the same coin. According to Clark (2015), sport and entertainment events are increasingly being staged together, as a way to enhance the overall experience and extend the length of events and therefore the time that fans and viewers stay. There are a few points which are relevant to sports marketing.

- Emerging sport markets in Brazil, Russia, India, China and the Middle East offer a scope for the development of new commercial opportunities in these territories for both domestic and international sporting events (Burden & Li, 2009);
- As sponsors allocate increasing amounts of money to sport, there will be intense pressure for far more sophisticated measurement techniques to demonstrate the return on that investment (Chadwick & Thwaites, 2005);
- Sporting bodies and associations are increasingly seeking to introduce new regulations in an attempt to control the cost base and levels of debts in their sports and leave a sustainable business model for future generations;
- All sporting bodies are walking a tightrope, as they attempt to balance increased commercial demands on their sports, with the often conflicting need to maintain the integrity and unpredictability that make sporting competitions so exciting and appealing to their fans (Giroux, Pons & Maltese, 2017).

Notwithstanding, for creating a marketing strategies model is important to overhaul the existing business model of a non-profit sports club organisation and transform this into a business marketing-oriented model of a sports ecosystem capable of delivering results against the following five axes (Collignon & Sultan, 2014; Collignon, Sultan & Santander, 2011; Leopkey & Parent, 2009): structuring marketing channels networks (members and actors); professionalising the sports club (business managers); establishing good relationship with stakeholders; dealing with actors to get resources; and managing sports brand reputation, targeting audiences through the use of various media.

Every sports club is involved in a sports ecosystem, alongside its partnerships, sponsorships, suppliers and fans (as customers). The sports club operates in a sports ecosystem with a limited number of stakeholders to aggregate and coordinate relevant

resources to enhance the value proposition of the sports club (Amorim & Almeida, 2015). In general, a performance of a sports ecosystem consists of multiple independent organisations and individuals interacting with each other to pursue shared goals such as fan, sports organisation and media (McHugh, Bronson & Watters, 2015). But, 'how the sports ecosystem of the Sport Club Corinthians is organised for a sports event, according to its fans' attributes'? This paper aims to understand and analyse which fans' attributes most infer their point of view concerning of the sports ecosystem of the Sport Club Corinthians (from the S ão Paulo city, Brazil) to organise sports events. Corinthians is the most popular football team in the State of S ão Paulo and, the second in Brazil, behind Flamengo from Rio de Janeiro. Fans' details such as monthly salary, the form of transport, monthly attendance and gender were the four attributes used for understanding and analysing the Corinthians' ecosystem. These authors prepared a Table 1 below to introduce the Sport Club Corinthians.

Table 1. Descriptions and achievements of corinthians

Descriptions and Achievements	Corinthians
Foundation	1910
Location or Area	East area of S ão Paulo city
Stadium	Corinthians Arena, 20 kilometres from downtown
Number of Fans in Brazil	27.3 million
Brazil Leagues	Champions (6)
S ão Paulo Tournaments	Champions (28)
Brazil Cups	Winners (3)
Libertadores Cups (like Champions League)	Winner (1)
Sudamericana Cups (like UEFA League)	Winner (0)
Club World Cups	Winners (2)
Attendance at Stadium per Match in 2017, so far.	29,548
Uniform Sponsorship	Nike
Profit in 2016	US \$ 108 Million

Sources: Corinthians (2017); ESPN Brasil (2017); Globo Esporte (2017); Lance & IBOPE (2017).

2. Background and Literature

2.1 The Role of Sports Ecosystems

Rundh and Gottfridsson (2015) believe that in delivering the sports event, there is a complex set of actors who must interact with each other to produce the expected offering. This is clearly in line with the network view in which one of the central thoughts is that a great deal of today's value creating is done between diverse business areas and companies and consumers. For Norris, Wann & Zapalac (2014), the sharing and combining of resources from several firms create new opportunities for delivering value to the fan. Who those actors are, what they bring to the network and what they gain from it depends on whether one considers the network from a non-commercial sport point of view or from the business side of the network. In addition, as explain Clemes, Brush & Collins (2011), in a professional sport, there are difficulties associated with seeing these actors-above-act alone as professional sport has become a business, i.e., the team and the sports event, where the team which is participating in the sport has become a big business. This situation has encouraged the sports clubs to become more professional with respect to marketing strategies.

Under these circumstances, the sports ecosystems reveal an actors' network which marketers need to understand for the purpose of mobilising these organisations for fitting offers-product and/or from sports clubs-to target audiences-fans and/or spectators (Bradbury & O'Boyle, 2017). Then, a sports ecosystem should be designed as well as lined up to the sports management in a sports club. The sports management comprises people, activities, business and organisation in producing, facilitating, promoting or organising any product-goods, services, people, places or ideas-for a demand of sports fans (McHugh, Bronson & Watters, 2015). By and large, a sports ecosystem focuses on four components: fan interfaces, strategic heart, strategic resources and value chain (Collignon & Sultan, 2014). The sports ecosystem aims to propose a typology based on business and marketing using stakeholder's skills for designing a sports event addressed to the entertainment and fan perspectives for undertaking new products and services (Shilbury & Rentschler, 2007).

Maltese and Danglade (2014) introduce a sports ecosystem based on analysing of sport as an entertainment. The sports ecosystem constitutes axes of a business action plan for designing, developing and delivering an offer to market made by fans. These authors see, for instance, a league as a big event comprising matches, which are small events. For Bouchet et al (2011), sports are entertainments, since, as events, sports matches are a sort of collective celebration which brings fans together to take

part in and enjoy a sport and cultural spectacle in one place. In addition, sport as entertainment involves mobilising and allocating tangible and intangible resources to meet goals and objectives. Thereby, according to Shilbury (2009), a league or a match is product and/or service which is produced, sold and delivered for a group of fans in an organised way to make them happy, cheerful and satisfied about paying for something where they can share their feeling and passion for a team. However, to deliver product and/or service to fans, a sports club requires stakeholders to deliver these in an efficient manner.

Therefore, a sports ecosystem aims to guide marketers to propose, design and operate a marketing plan with the purpose of obtaining several sources of financial funding for undertaking new business strategies for their sports club (Foster, O'Reilly & Dávila, 2016). In summary, the sports ecosystems presented in this study aim to guide marketers to propose, design and operate a marketing plan with the purpose of obtaining several sources of financial funding for undertaking new business strategies for the sports club. Indeed, sports clubs use marketing strategies for offering benefits to fans, but for producing products and/or services marketers need to select and apply strategic resources to produce expected outcomes in an effective way (Maltese & Danglade, 2014). Then, marketing proposes involving stakeholders' competence for adding value to activities chain for promoting and handing out the best products and services to fans (Piipponen, 2011). In general, a sports ecosystem proposes a typology based on resources level considering all stakeholders and the nature interdependence among them for preparing sports events using entertainment as a concept and considering fans as consumers.

2.2 Sports Ecosystems: Some Proposals

Four sports ecosystems were analysed to design our sports ecosystem model. The first sports ecosystem was designed by Collignon and Sultan (2014), aiming at a good cash flow management for a sports club. Their inspirations and references came from American sports, European football leagues and Grand Slam tennis championships, as Wimbledon in London, England. For them, a sports club plays a relevant role in the sports ecosystem because clubs understand the need to pay special attention to five elements: (i) fans expectations: spending their money, (ii) media: buying rights to broadcast matches for an audience of fans, (iii) brands in the sports area: selecting the right partner clubs, leagues and athletes, (iv) leagues: organising the seasons and they play an intermediary role in flowing revenues to clubs, (v) clubs: getting revenues and profits from ticketing, selling licensed products, sponsorships and media rights.

The second sports ecosystem was presented in a report published by KPMG. The sports ecosystem created by KPMG (2014) focuses on two aspects: sports transparency and professionalism coupled with growing awareness of all stakeholders within and across various segments; and producing a winning sports team. Bearing in mind the transparency, professionalism and a winning team, as the three key objectives of KPMG's sports ecosystem, seven axes were designed for achieving these goals: sports governance; talent scouting & training of players; sports infrastructures; training of trainers; sports equipment (goods); leagues and tournaments; and performance incentives.

The third sports ecosystem was organised by Rundth and Gottfridsson (2015). By and large, these authors created a sports ecosystem which aims to deliver a sports event using actors for intervening and interacting with each other to produce an expected offer based on entertainment, leisure and experience concepts. They understand that the actors' network is the key, the challenge and the opportunity to create a value proposition for a sports event, because sports clubs have no skills to deal with business, marketing and consumers, as sports and non-sports companies do. Thus, Rundth and Gottfridsson structured their sports ecosystem from ten dimensions: sports fans, partners & sponsors, business suppliers, the communities (managing the external infrastructure around the stadium), tv broadcasting and media, federation and confederation, the volunteers (to assist and guide fans), sports club, the stadium, and athletes.

The last sports ecosystem was schemed by Maltese and Danglade (2014). The sports ecosystem designed by them aims to analyse sports as entertainment to introduce business and marketing perspectives required for planning sports event. They transposed to the business environment the ecological notion of an ecosystem, which is formed by two elements interacting with the environment (biotope) and the living beings that occupy it (biocenosis). They attempted to operationalise the concepts of networks, alliance, and virtual enterprise. On the one hand, biotope may be characterised by an event venue, i.e., stadium, arena, natural spaces and fans; and on the other hand, biocenosis means stakeholders, i.e., athletes, sports institutions, sponsor of a stadium -naming rights-, partners, suppliers and media.

For us, a sports ecosystem should have business and marketing concepts embedded into it to ensure fan satisfaction, revenues, and profits to a sports club. Sport is inspiring, engaging, immersive, emotion evoking and rapidly growing the revenues and profits; however, through a platform of market and customer orientation, it is possible to go further. Capturing the essence of understanding sport as an event, introduced by Maltese and Danglade (2014); the sense of professionalism showed by KPMG Reports (2014) related to organisation standard; the concerns about actors' network depicted by Rundth and Gottfridsson (2015); observing the sport as an opportunity for a sports club to make money, as presented by Collignon and Sultan (2014); and, still, analysing the Brazilian context regarding the football culture, sports club organisation, fans and media, we have decided to line up a sports ecosystem in which it was possible to take advantage of each value proposition showed by every

author above. Therefore, our sports ecosystem aims to encourage a sports professional to design a sports event in synergy with stakeholders to offer an enjoyable sports experience taking into consideration the customer orientation principles to provide revenues and profit for the sports club. Thus, seven axes were designed to achieve these goals, see Figure 1 and Table 2.

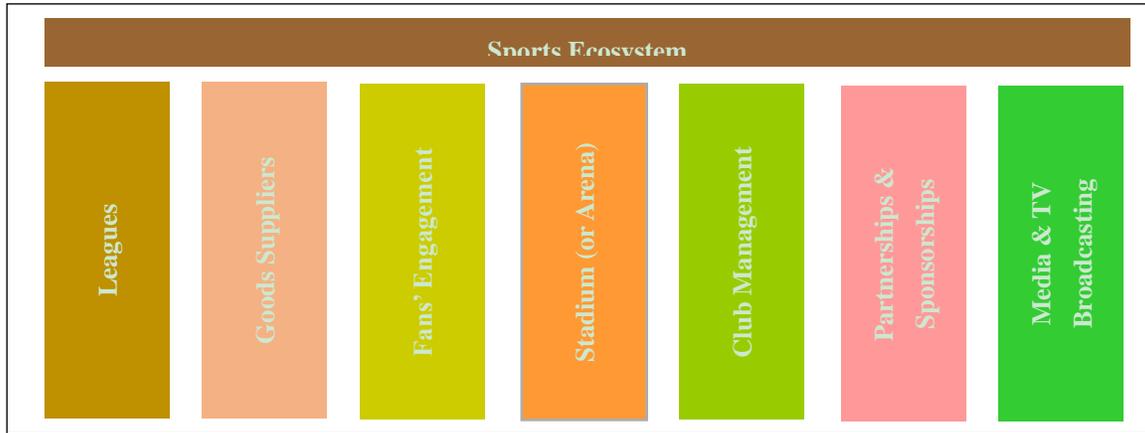


Figure 1. Sports ecosystem dimensions

Source: Authors

Table 2. Sports ecosystem dimensions

Dimensions	Descriptions
Leagues (Confederations or Federations)	Responsible for organising the seasons, leagues and tournaments. However, in most cases they also play an intermediary role in flowing revenues to clubs, particularly the media rights money; then, the leagues perform three relevant functions: organising competitions, creating valuable events, and structuring media rights tenders (Bradbury & O'Boyle, 2017; Shilbury, 2009; Storm, Wagner & Nielsen, 2017);
Goods Suppliers	On the one hand, they are investors who put money into the business for promoting their brand, images or products and services through a sports club. On the other hand, they may, also, associate their brands with a sports club and provide uniforms and sports goods for them, as t-shirts, shorts, shoes, cap, jacket, etc, and non-sports goods: foods, drinks, toys, etc (Fullerton & Merz, 2008; Giroux, Pons & Maltese, 2017);
Fans' Engagement	Sports clubs should create a customer-oriented strategy to transfer their excitations and passions for spending their money to buy packages of pay-tv, tickets for games, products and services associated with sports club, and to become a member (Norris, Wann & Zapalac, 2014; Piipponen, 2011; Yoshida & James, 2010; Yoshida, 2017);
Stadium (or Arena)	It involves facilities, naming rights, architecture, advertising inside the stadium, etc., The sports clubs can make money using several sorts of events (Leopkey & Parent, 2009);
Club Management	Responsible for: (i) designing its offers and benefits (embedding its value proposition and experience) articulated to the expectations of different targets, as fans, supporters, enthusiasts and followers, (ii) managing their flow of money from ticketing, selling licensed products, sponsorships, and media rights, as well as ensuring the quality of the event value chain, pre, during and post-game, (iii) and purchasing and selling athletes, ensuring infrastructure and staff, executing governance strategies and managing its brands (Ratten, 2016; Foster, O'Reilly, D ávila, 2016);
Partnerships & Sponsorships	It aims to support fans in sports events (paying for private and public transportation), guide and provide safety for the fans inside the stadium, restaurants, parking, etc. In other words, partners are co-creators of the value chain offering facilities inside and outside the venue (Amorim & Almeida, 2015; Chadwick & Thwaites, 2005);
Media & TV Broadcasting	Responsible for buying rights of matches for television for an audience of fans, and offering to passionate fans an alternative platform, as cable tv, pay-tv, websites, social networks and apps (Burden & Li, 2009; McHugh, Bronson & Watters, 2015).

Sources: Authors

2.3 Issues That Influence a Sports Ecosystem

According to Maltese & Danglade (2014) and Rundh & Gottfridsson (2015) state that some groups of variables may interfere with a sports ecosystem. For Shilbury (2009), the first group is comprised of the external environment as demography and social trends, economic issues, technology trends, political legislation, natural and sustainable concerns, etc. According to Bradbury & O'Boyle (2017), the second group is composed of the internal environment such as resources, competencies, capacity of providing services, consumer-oriented culture of the club, departments' performance, suppliers and outsourcing, sponsorships, marketing mix (product, price, place and promotion) and public. For Rundh & Gottfridsson (2015) and Yoshida (2017), the third group approaches the fans (as consumer) to answer the issues such as "Who are the fans?", "Why do they buy a specific sport product?", "When and where do they buy the product or service?", "What does the consumption entail in terms of pre- and post- event activities?", and "How do fans use the product so that a complete specification of them can be lined up to their expectation?" These variables may infer in the performance as well as in the fans' perceptions regarding a sports ecosystem. Thus, we chose four variables to carry out this research:

- Monthly salary (or incomes): fans may be encouraged to or discouraged from the consumption of goods and services offered by a sports club due to their wages (e.g., a demographic detail);
- Gender: men and women have different consumption habits and preferences. Men tend to be more fanatic than women (in theory). Thus, understanding their profile may assist marketers to fit an offer for each group (another demographic detail);
- Form of transport: the transportation system is a relevant information that impacts in the negative and positive way in the sports ecosystem since a sports club depends on the stakeholders and partners from the public (bus, train, and subway) and the private (taxi, Uber and car parking facilities) sectors to carry out a sports event in its stadium (e.g., internal environment detail);
- Monthly attendance: understanding when and how many times the fans buy tickets and consume, goods and services can help the sports marketers know their habits and consumption behaviour (e.g., a consumer behaviour detail).

Therefore, the monthly salary, monthly attendance, form of transport and gender may provide a sports marketer distinct views concerning the sports ecosystem. On the one hand, a fan who has a high income can value or criticise an ecosystem's dimension more than others. On the other hand, a fan who has a regular attendance in the stadium may think in a different way in relation to those who go to the arena once a month. Our proposal describes these contents in this study in order to discover what is the attribute which more interferes in the fans' opinion. By and large, each attribute can change the fans' perceptions of the ecosystem's dimensions.

3. Methodology Design

This research has the purpose of approaching the sports ecosystem in three of the most prominent sports clubs in the State of São Paulo, Brazil. Thus, this exploratory study aims to understand and analyse which fans' attributes most infer their point of view concerning of the sports ecosystem of the Corinthians (from the São Paulo city, Brazil) to organise sports events. Three hypotheses were described to infer the results (h1) monthly salary is the second one since recession that has caused unemployment to rise in Brazil; (h2) transportation is the second fan' attribute which more infers due to the public transport system is poor and chaotic in São Paulo city; (h3) and the stadium is the sport ecosystem's axis most critical since is located 20 kilometres from downtown in a poor area in São Paulo city.

These authors designed and prepared a sports ecosystem (as shown in Figure 1/Table 2) to perform this study, since the four models analysed do not reflect the sports club reality in Brazil. Also, a pre-test was carried out with 10 sports fans some weeks before collecting process to see the fans' reactions. The five sports ecosystems were presented to these 10 sports fans: the four which were designed by the authors above, and that one organised by these authors. None of them had any sort of identification, and all of them had a description of each axis. The question proposed the fans was: 'what do sports ecosystem was most appropriate to understand the Brazilian sports clubs?'. At the large, 5 choose the sports ecosystem prepared by us, 2 from Collignon & Sultan's ecosystem, 2 from Maltese & Danglade's ecosystem, and 1 from Rundh & Gottfridsson's ecosystem. None of them choose the KPMG's ecosystem. They argued that a model using seven dimensions designed by us became much more accessible to observe the proposal of each axis for the sports business and marketing. The fans' opinions assisted us in organising a questionnaire to collect data taking into consideration a considerable number of fans.

Apropos the data and results reports, a questionnaire with 78 topics/statements (see Table 3)-related to the sports ecosystem perspective was designed by these researchers considering five Likert levels (1) totally disagree; (2) partly disagree; (3) I cannot answer; (4) agree; (5) totally agree. Besides, four fan's personal details were demanded by the fans in order to know their attributes, for instance, gender, monthly salary (with base on the minimum monthly wages in Brazil), monthly attendance to the stadium (1, 2-3, 4-6) and transportation they use to go to the stadium (own vehicle, public transport or private

transportation, as uber, taxi, etc.). These questions were included on the top of the instrument. Generally explaining, 78 topics were presented in questionnaires and fans should select one of the five levels in the rating scale for each statement, spread in seven dimensions: (i) league: 10 statements; (ii) stadium: 12 statements; (iii) goods suppliers: 13 statements; (iv) interactions with services: 20 statements; (v) club management: 12 statements; (vi) partnerships and sponsorships: 6 statements; and (vii) media & tv broadcasting: 5 statements.

Table 3. Topics of the questionnaire

Leagues & Tournaments	Stadium (or Arena)	Goods Suppliers
01. Clear rules	11. Point of sale (ticketing)	23. Fans buy illegal goods
02. Calendars for matches	12. Comfortable seats and toilets	24. Discount to fan-members
03. Calendars for tv	13. Car parking structure	25. Assortment of models and sizes
04. Quality of games	14. Snack bar or restaurants	26. 3 goods per year
05. Balanced teams	15. Prioritising fan-members	27. Licensed club stores
06. Media coverage	16. Space (or area) for the disabled	28. Sports stores
07. Tv broadcasting to Europe	17. Partnership with public sector	29. Few options of goods
08. 15,000 fans on average	18. Safety for fans	30. Vintage uniforms
09. Fan's regular audience	19. Guides to help fans	31. Sponsor stamped on club goods
10. Cash prizes similar to Europe	20. Expensive tickets	32. Stores in stadium
Fans' Engagement	21. Kiosks to sell products	33. Celebration uniforms
36. Reading books and newspapers	22. Kiosks to become members	34. Gifting family and friends
37. Collecting photos and posters	Club Management	35. Customising goods
38. Pay-tv subscription	56. Business management concepts	Partnerships & Sponsorships
39. Visiting the trophy room	57. Transparent management	68. Making investments in the club
40. Main athletes and starting line-up	58. Monetarily responsible concepts	69. Adding value to club brand
41. Visiting club website every week	59. Customer-oriented principles	70. Having few incentive policies
42. Attending training	60. Paying the bills	71. Risk for company's brand
43. Following social networks	61. Dealing with partners	72. Improving quality of products
44. Visiting club stores	62. Positive image for investors	73. Enhancing relationship with fans
45. Having historical T-shirts	63. Producing own athletes	
46. Attending opponent's stadium	64. Receiving criticisms	
47. Encouraging relatives	65. Social responsibility plan	
48. Encouraging co-workers	66. Relationship with fans	
49. Wearing T-shirts on match day	67. Using marketing strategies	
50. Seeing T-shirt in another State	Media	
51. Seeing T-shirt in another country	74. Valuing the national league	
52. Mock friends	75. Paying well to cover games	
53. Watching sports tv programmes	76. Prioritising clubs on media	
54. Choosing the team in FIFA video game	77. Promoting naming rights on media	
55. Accessing YouTube to watch the goals	78. Interfering on league calendars.	

Source: Authors

Overall, 180 questionnaires were administered to sports fans between February and March 2017. To use the instrument, these researchers selected three matches of each football sports club, in which, three criteria were relevant: (i) administered to ordinary fans; (ii) carried out only inside the club stadium; and (iii) all 78 statements should be answered. Table 4 presents the Who, Where, When, and What, related to the administration process. The data collection took place inside and around the Corinthians Arena before the games and took roughly 3 hours per match. However, only 180 questionnaires were obtained from the Corinthians' fans. The limitation in obtaining all questionnaires answered is because, Corinthians' fans did not want to help us answering them. The administration process was the same in all matches. In other words, 360 instruments were

printed to be administered on the day of the three matches. Unfortunately, Corinthians had a half instruments answered, according to expectation.

Table 4. Matches, places, date and tournament

Corinthians' Games	Place	Date	League or Tournament
Corinthians vs Palmeiras	Corinthians Arena	22 nd February 2017	S ão Paulo Tournament.
Corinthians vs Santos	Corinthians Arena	4 th March 2017	S ão Paulo Tournament
Corinthians vs Red Bull Brazil	Corinthians Arena	23 rd March 2017	S ão Paulo Tournament

Source: Authors

The software Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to perform the analysis of the results in three steps: first, a general report applying chi-square tests from cross tables between the four groups of fans' attributes and sports ecosystem topics; then, the selecting process of the issues which achieved the significance $\leq 0,05$ (5%); and finally, observing and settling on which profile of each group of fans' attributes that agreed or disagreed with other profiles on a given topic have reached more than 95% of statistical significance. The analysis and explanation of the results will be introduced in four tables, see Tables 5 to 8 below which were designed respecting the analysis procedure. Throughout the report of the findings, relevant fans' attributes are pointed out to indicate the fans' characteristics and their implications for fans' choices.

4. Findings & Results

4.1 Monthly Salary vs. Sports Ecosystem

Table 5. Monthly salary (or incomes) vs. sports ecosystem

Leagues & Tournaments	Sig <= 0,05	(\$) MS	A D	Stadium (or Arena)	Sig <= 0,05	(\$) MS	A D
01. Clear rules	0,000	5-8	A	11. Point of sale (ticketing)	0,000	1-4	D
02. Calendars for matches	0,000	5-8	A	12. Comfortable seats and toilets	0,001	Zero	A
03. Calendars for tv	0,002	5-8	A	13. Car parking structure	0,002	5-8	D
04. Quality of games	0,000	1-4	D	14. Snack bar or restaurants	0,001	5-8	D
05. Balanced teams	0,001	1-4	A	15. Prioritising fan-members	0,002	Zero	D
06. Media coverage	0,001	1-4	D	16. Space (or area) for the disabled	0,000	Zero	A
07. Tv broadcasting to Europe	0,000	Zero	D	17. Partnership with public sector	0,000	Zero	D
09. Fan's regular audience	0,000	1-4	A	18. Safety for fans	0,000	5-8	D
10. Cash prizes similar to Europe	0,000	1-4	A	19. Guides to help fans	0,001	Zero	D
Goods Suppliers	Sig <= 0,05	(\$) MS	A D	20. Expensive tickets	0,000	5-8	A
23. Fans buy illegal goods	0,000	1-4	A	21. Kiosks to sell products	0,005	5-8	D
24. Discount to fan-members	0,000	5-8	D	Fans' Engagement	Sig <= 0,05	(\$) MS	A D
25. Assortment of models and sizes	0,000	1-4	A	38. Pay-tv subscription	0,001	5-8	A
26. 3 goods per year	0,000	Zero	A	39. Visiting the trophy room	0,004	1-4	D
27. Licensed club stores	0,001	Zero	A	40. Main athletes and starting line-up	0,000	5-8	A
28. Sports stores	0,000	1-4	A	41. Visiting club website every week	0,004	5-8	D
29. Few options of goods	0,011	5-8	D	42. Attending training	0,028	Zero	A
30. Vintage uniforms	0,018	5-8	A	43. Following social networks	0,001	1-4	A
32. Stores in stadium	0,000	5-8	A	44. Visiting club stores	0,000	5-8	D
33. Celebration uniforms	0,001	Zero	A	45. Having historical T-shirts	0,000	1-4	D
34. Gifting family and friends	0,006	1-4	A	48. Encouraging co-workers	0,000	5-8	A

35. Customising goods	0,012	1-4	A	49. Wearing T-shirts on match day	0,000	5-8	A
Club Management	Sig <= 0,05	(\$ MS)	A D	50. Seeing T-shirt in another State	0,000	5-8	A
57. Transparent management	0,000	1-4	A	51. Seeing T-shirt in another country	0,024	5-8	D
58. Monetarily responsible concepts	0,001	Zero	D	52. Mock friends	0,047	1-4	D
59. Customer-oriented principles	0,000	Zero	D	53. Watching sports tv programmes	0,015	5-8	D
60. Paying the bills	0,000	1-4	A	55. Accessing YouTube to watch the goals	0,005	Zero	A
61. Dealing with partners	0,000	1-4	A	Partnerships & Sponsorships	Sig <= 0,05	(\$ MS)	A D
62. Positive image for investors	0,000	1-4	A	68. Making investments in the club	0,005	1-4	A
63. Producing own athletes	0,000	5-8	A	69. Adding value to club brand	0,001	5-8	A
64. Receiving criticisms	0,000	Zero	D	72. Improving quality of products	0,004	1-4	A
65. Social responsibility plan	0,000	1-4	A	73. Enhancing relationship with fans	0,030	5-8	D
66. Relationship with fans	0,024	Zero	A	Media	Sig <= 0,05	(\$ MS)	A D
67. Using marketing strategies	0,014	5-8	D	74. Valuing the national league	0,000	Zero	D
				75. Paying well to cover games	0,000	Zero	D
				76. Prioritising clubs on media	0,000	5-8	A
				78. Interfering on league calendars.	0,000	5-8	A

Caption 1: (\$) MS = Monthly Salary with 3 options: Zero (0), 1-4, and 5-8 Minimum Salary = US\$ 280, 00 (roughly)

Caption 2: A=Tending to agree regarding other 2 groups, and D=Tending to disagree regarding other 2 groups

Source: Authors

Considering the 78 topics introduced in the questionnaires answered by 180 fans, 66 topics have more than 95% statistical significance. Three groups were organised according to their monthly income (having as base the monthly minimum salary in Brazil): zero (students who depend economically on their relatives), 1-4 and 5-8 minimum salaries. The group described in the column (\$) MS represents the one which has a different point of view from the other groups. Regarding the leagues, those who earn between 5 and 8 monthly salaries tend to agree that the club has clear rules, and in relation to dates and times of calendars for matches at the stadium and on tv. However, they tend to disagree about the stadium axis, for instance, they do not agree that the arena has comfortable seats and toilets, car parking structure, snack bars and restaurants, safety to fans and kiosks for selling goods and services to fans, i.e., these offers do not live up to this group of Corinthians' fans expectations. Thus, the group who receives between 5 and 8 monthly salaries has different opinions regarding these two axes, see Table 5.

As regards goods suppliers, the group who earns between 1 and 4 monthly salaries tends to buy illegal goods, because the licensed goods are expensive, for instance, an official T-shirt costs roughly US\$ 76.00, and their salaries are roughly between US\$ 267,00 and US\$ 1067,00. However, when they have the condition to pay for an official good, they most often buy in sports stores like Decathlon, instead of going to licensed club's stores or suppliers' stores (e.g. Nike), since there are many sports chain stores in various areas of São Paulo. Besides, this group of fans recognises that Corinthians' sports suppliers provide an assortment of models and sizes for fans, and that is possible to easily customise some goods. They also admit that they buy Corinthians' goods to give as a gift to their relatives as well as friends. Thus, this category of fans shows an elevated purchasing and consumption potential, which means that the marketers should undertake an offer of goods, in partnership with Nike company, addressed to this target audience, given that these fans are a relevant source of revenues and profits.

As to "fans' engagement", the group of fans who earns between 5 and 8 salaries stood out on both positively and negatively. On the one hand, they: (i) have a pay-tv subscription, (ii) know the main athletes and those who start the game in every match, (iii) encourage their co-workers to support the team, (iv) wear the t-shirt on every match day, and (v) they have seen fans wearing Corinthians' t-shirt in other States they have been to. On the other hand, they do not: (i) usually access Corinthians' website, (ii) visit Corinthians' stores, and (iii) watch sports tv programmes. Besides, they have never seen people using Corinthians' t-shirt abroad.

To sum up, they are not shop goers who buy from club's stores and sports stores. Again, they are not 'heavy users' in relation to Corinthians' media. Nevertheless, because of their profile, they are potential consumers to enhance the profits of the club. Therefore, marketers should study this target audience since they cannot be ignored or excluded in a marketing plan for future campaigns. Their engagement is a proof that they deserve special attention as customers.

With reference to club management, two groups have a divergent point of view in relation to others. For the group who receives between 1 and 4 salaries, Corinthians (i) has a transparent administration, (ii) pays the bills correctly every month, (iii) has the ability to deal with partners to get great commercial contracts, (iv) promotes a positive image to achieve commercial investors, (v) and invests in social programmes as part of the club's social responsibilities. According to them, Corinthians has implemented principles and philosophies based on best practices of business and marketing. Unlike, students (zero) or those who depend on their relatives who see that Corinthians' professionals do not manage the club using concepts or principles with financial responsibility and customer-orientation. Moreover, the criticisms are not welcome in the club and the relationship with fans does not follow the marketing principles. By and large, the club managers have been implemented a new management process. Under this circumstance, it is up to the sports managers to quickly improve these stages to respond to an audience of fans who complain about the quality of the club's management.

In relation to 'partnerships and sponsorships', the group who earns between 1 and 4 salaries understands that the partners and sponsors have made investments in the club, for this reason, the products have been improved. In addition, partner and sponsors have added value to Corinthians' brand, but they are not assisting the club to enhance the relationship between club and fans, according to the group who earns between 5 and 8 salaries. In the last axis, students see that the media does not value the national league and, then, media companies do not pay well to broadcast the leagues in the State of São Paulo. Furthermore, the group who earns between 5 and 8 salaries states that the media prioritises some clubs to broadcast news, information, and games over others in the State of São Paulo. Also, the media interferes in the league calendars to fit and promote their tv programming grid. This group believes that Corinthians' partnerships and sponsorships have the club, but the media does not invest the amount of money expected for a club as Corinthians, given that Corinthians is an influent team in Brazil. Thereby, their arguments are based on the number of investments of previous years, a number of investments of European sports clubs, and the fan's audiences in São Paulo and Brazil as a whole.

4.2 Transportation vs. Sports Ecosystem

Table 6. Transportation vs. sports ecosystem

Leagues & Tournaments	Sig <= 0,05	Tran s.	A D	Stadium (or Arena)	Sig <= 0,05	Tran s.	A D
01. Clear rules	0,048	PuT	D	11. Point of sale (ticketing)	0,020	PrT	A
03. Calendars for tv	0,011	OwV	D	13. Car parking structure	0,009	PrT	D
06. Media coverage	0,037	PuT	D	15. Prioritising fan-members	0,009	OwV	A
08. 15,000 fans on average	0,042	PrT	D	20. Expensive tickets	0,007	PuT	A
Goods Suppliers	Sig <= 0,05	Tran s.	A D	21. Kiosks to sell products	0,029	PuT	D
23. Fans buy illegal goods	0,004	OwV	D	Fans' Engagement	Sig <= 0,05	Tran s.	A D
28. Sports stores	0,009	PuT	A	38. Pay-tv subscription	0,008	OwV	D
Club Management	Sig <= 0,05	Tran s.	A D	42. Attending training	0,048	PrT	A
66. Relationship with fans	0,042	OwV	D	45. Having historical T-shirts	0,047	PrT	A
Partnerships & Sponsorships	Sig <= 0,05	Tran s.	A D	49. Wearing T-shirts on match day	0,41	PuT	A
68. Making investments in the club	0,007	PuT	D	Media	Sig <= 0,05	Tran s.	A D
71. Risk for company's brand	0,031	PuT	A	74. Valuing the national league	0,009	PrT	D
72. Improving quality of products	0,001	PuT	D	76. Prioritising clubs on media	0,022	OwV	A
73. Enhancing relationship with fans	0,024	PrT	D				

Caption 1: (\$) MS = Monthly Salary with 3 options: Zero (0), 1-4, and 5-8 Minimum Salary = US\$ 280,00 (roughly).

Caption 2: A = Tending to agree regarding other 2 groups, and D = Tending to disagree regarding other 2 groups.

Source: Authors

Analysing the form of transport and sports ecosystem, only 22 topics reached more than 95% statistical significance. To understand the transportation perspective, three categories were grouped: public transportation (PuT), private transportation (PrT) and own vehicle (OwV). The group who has a different opinion is depicted in the column Trans, see Table 6. Concerning the leagues, PuT disagrees with the other two groups about the club having clear rules and regulations for guiding fans, the media coverage and the attendance of 15,000 fans on average per match. In the Brazilian League 2016, Corinthians had an attendance of 33,000 fans (on average) per game, somehow, the PuT group’s opinion makes sense. Also, OwV agrees about the calendars for tv, since they attended the stadium once a month to watch the games, then, it is more convenient for them to watch on tv. Notably, the PrT group tends to disagree about parking areas for cars in the stadium axis. Perhaps, it explains the fact that they take taxi or Uber to go to the stadium. Still in this axis, PuT group tends to agree regarding the expensive tickets since both earn roughly between 1 and 4 monthly salaries. Therefore, they take public transportation to go to the arena as their monthly salary is low to pay (regularly) for an expensive ticket to watch a match in the venue.

The PuT group tends to buy Corinthians’ goods in sports stores instead of licensed club’ stores and suppliers’ stores, inasmuch as the PuT group needs to take multiple transportation (and pay more) to go to the club’s stores. The sports stores are closest to them. Regarding the fans’ engagement, PrT group seems to be more fanatical than the others, because they attend training sessions and have old t-shirts of the club. Corinthians’ fans are a ‘sport of memorabilia’, that means those people who tend to collect a multiples objects (books, pictures, posters, etc) and asset from the club who they support. Thus, Corinthians’ fans are fanatic. Concerning the club management axis, OwV group believes that Corinthians has not managed the relationship with fans well, also, PrT group states that partnerships and sponsorships have not helped Corinthians improve this skill. Corinthians’ fans who demonstrate a better economic position, as in PrT and OwV groups-since they have the condition to afford a better transportation or buy a car-are those who most disagree about the relationship between the club and fans. Apropos the last axis, the PrT group has the opinion that the Brazilian media tends to value the national league less than the international league. They explain that sports fans (in general) have watched more games on pay-tv channels than before, e.g., the European leagues, which have been broadcasted in Brazil on channels like ESPN, Fox Sports and Sport tv.

4.3 Monthly Attendance vs. Sports Ecosystem

Table 7. Monthly attendance at stadium vs. sports ecosystem

Leagues	Sig <= 0,05	M.A.	A D	Stadium (or Arena)	Sig <= 0,05	M.A.	A D
03. Calendars for tv	0,021	2-3	A	11. Point of sale (ticketing)	0,007	2-3	D
05. Balanced teams	0,002	1	D	14. Snack bar or restaurants	0,012	1	D
08. 15,000 fans on average	0,034	4-6	A	16. Space (or area) for the disabled	0,018	1	A
Goods Suppliers	Sig <= 0,05	M.A.	A D	17. Partnership with public sector	0,047	4-6	D
24. Discount to fan-members	0,004	1	D	18. Safety for fans	0,002	1	A
26. 3 goods per year	0,000	4-6	A	19. Guides to help fans	0,041	1	D
32. Stores in stadium	0,010	2-3	A	Fans’ Engagement	Sig <= 0,05	M.A.	A D
34. Gifting family and friends	0,001	1	A	41. Visiting club website every week	0,029	4-6	A
Club Management	Sig <= 0,05	M.A.	A D	42. Attending training	0,000	4-6	A
56. Business management concepts	0,001	2-3	A	43. Following social networks	0,007	4-6	A
57. Transparent management	0,028	2-3	A	44. Visiting club stores	0,000	1	D
62. Positive image for investors	0,005	1	D	50. Seeing T-shirt in another State	0,016	2-3	A
67. Using marketing strategies	0,030	4-6	A	51. Seeing T-shirt in another country	0,022	2-3	A
Media	Sig <= 0,05	M.A.	A D	Partnership & Sponsorship	Sig <= 0,05	M.A.	A D
75. Paying well to cover games	0,000	2-3	D	72. Improving quality of products	0,001	2-3	D
78. Interfering on league calendars.	0,001	1	A				

Caption 1: M.A. = Monthly Attendance at Stadium with 3 options: 1 time per month; 2-3 times per month; and 4-6 times per month

Caption 2: A = Tending to agree, and D = Tending to disagree

Source: Authors

With respect to monthly attendance versus sports ecosystem, 27 topics were observed with more than 95% significance. By and large, three groups were considered for explaining the monthly attendance at the stadium on the Corinthians' games: 1, 2-3 and 4-6 see Table 7. The group who attends matches between 2 and 3 times a month sees that the league calendars for tv are suitable and, curiously, their monthly salary is between 1 and 4. Thus, it is up to club managers to take advantage of their engagement and fanaticism to offer cheap tickets for some seats in the stadium. Concerning the stadium, the group who usually attends games once a month, observes that the club provides spaces for the disabled as well as ensures the safety of fans. However, they see that the club fails in providing snack bars and restaurants and guides to help fans, for instance, employees or volunteers to assist finding the seats. Generally speaking, fans tend to increase their participation in events when clubs provide facilities which overcome their expectations. Also, fans with attendance between 4 and 6 times a month to the venue disagree about the partnership between the public sector and the club, since most of them take public transportation to go to the arena to watch the games. Thus, their points of view are relevant, honest and require special attention from the club marketers in order to respond to their demands.

Regarding goods suppliers, the group who attends the club between 4 and 6 times a month is the one who buys 3 goods per year, on average. In other words, their fanaticism engages and encourages them to spend more money on goods and souvenirs, and also on tickets. Moreover, they have a distinct behaviour in relation to fans' engagement. Some examples serve to illustrate this point: they (i) access the club's homepage every week, (ii) attend training to watch the team and idol players, and (iii) follow the team and athletes' posts on social media, as Facebook, Instagram, etc. Probably, because of that, they agree about the implementation of marketing strategies in the club, they recognise the marketing strategies being developed by the club. Still, regarding the club management, the group who attends the club 2 or 3 times a month believes that Corinthians has implemented business management principles and run a transparent administration for achieving more revenues and profits to the club. For them, this financial gain is due to (i) the partnerships and sponsorships which have enhanced their club's goods, and (ii) the media have been paid well for broadcasting the matches on the national and international leagues which Corinthians (e.g. Libertadores Cup) takes part in.

4.4 Gender vs. Sports Ecosystem

Table 8. Gender vs. sports ecosystem

Leagues	Sig <= 0,05	Gender	A D	Fans' Engagement	Sig <= 0,05	Gender	A D
05. Balanced teams	0,003	M	A	38. Pay-tv subscription	0,000	F	D
09. Fan's regular audience	0,009	F	D	40. Main athletes and starting line-up	0,005	F	D
Goods and Souvenirs	Sig <= 0,05	Gender	A D	Partnerships & Sponsorships	Sig <= 0,05	Gender	A D
26. 3 goods per year	0,010	F	D	72. Improving quality of products	0,016	M	D
Club Management	Sig <= 0,05	Gender	A D	73. Enhancing relationship with fans	0,026	F	A
66. Relationship with fans	0,030	M	D				

Caption 1: Gender = M: Male; and F = Female

Caption 2: A = Tending to agree regarding the other group, and D = Tending to disagree regarding the other group

Source: Authors

Looking into the "gender versus sports ecosystem", only 8 topics presented more than 95% the statistical significance, see Table 8. It can be noted that women fans (i) earn, on average between 1 and 4 monthly salaries, (ii) attend to the stadium once a month, and (iii) use the own vehicle to go to the stadium. Looking at table 7 (column Gender), it is possible to observe that women fans are less engaged than men. The women audience does not (i) watch the matches of the leagues regularly, either in the stadium or on tv, (ii) buy 3 club goods per year, (iii) invest money to subscribe for pay-tv, and (iv) know the main athletes and those who start the matches. However, due to attendance at the stadium or on tv, men believe that (i) the teams which take a part in the leagues have similar level of quality of athletes (as to competitions), (ii) Corinthians has not invested time and resources to enhance the relationship between club and fans, and (iii) partnerships and sponsorships have improved the goods as well as services of the club.

It is worth mentioning that none of the topics concerning the stadium and the media stood out according to fans. If engaged, the women audience has an enormous potential to add value to Corinthians to increase revenues and profits from marketing strategies addressed to their profile, for instance, qualified goods and services to suit their profiles and expectations.

To sum up, sports clubs in Brazil do not accurately study, know or define their target audience. The sports managers and marketers still believe that fans passion is enough to move their fans to go to the stadium or to seat on the sofa to watch a club match on tv. The fans, as customers, want more than that, they want experiences, entertainment, amusement, professionalism and spend their money on something worthwhile.

5. Final Considerations

This paper had the purpose of understanding and analysing which fans' attributes most interfere in their point of view regarding the sports ecosystem of Sport Club Corinthians (from the city of São Paulo, Brazil) created to organise sports events. Concerning the findings and results, monthly salary is the fans' attribute which showed most conflicts and distinct points of views regarding the sports ecosystem, according to Corinthians' fans. Overall, 66 out of 78 statements depicted some divergent opinions, of which, 15 statements were on the fans' engagement axis, followed by 12 on the goods suppliers and 11 on the stadium and club management. For this reason, the first hypothesis was ratified, in other words, monthly salary is the fan's attribute which most interferes in the Corinthians' ecosystem, according to the fans' point of view. However, the second hypothesis was not confirmed as monthly attendance (with 27 statements) came in as the second most critical attribute, followed by transportation (with 22 statements), and gender (with 8 statements). These authors supposed that transportation would be the second critical attribute. Then, monthly attendance, transportation, and gender had all together 57 divergent topics, i.e., these fans' attributes together had less divergent statements than monthly salary attribute (66 topics). Therefore, monthly salary is the attribute that Corinthians' fans least share the same view, either positive or negative.

Looking into the dimensions of Corinthians' ecosystem and the four fans' attributes, we can see that the third hypothesis was confirmed, because these authors pointed out that the stadium as well as partnerships and sponsorships dimensions were supposed to be the most critical, according to Corinthians' fans. The stadium (22 out of 48 = 46%) and partnership and sponsorship (11 out of 24 = 46%) are 'tied' as the dimensions with less equal opinions among fans, followed by: leagues and tournaments (18 out of 40 = 45%), the media (8 out of 20 = 40%), goods suppliers (19 out of 46 = 36%), club management (17 out of 48 = 35%) and fans' engagement (27 out of 80 = 33%). Even without being mentioned on the gender attribute, the stadium is the most critical dimension that a sports manager or marketer needs to manage to meet the fans' expectations.

Given these points, the report about fans' attributes revealed that: (i) women fans attend the stadium once a month, on average; (ii) Corinthians' fans, in general, take public transportation to watch the matches in the stadium; (iii) Corinthians fans earn between 1 and 4 monthly salaries (roughly); and (iv) the fans who most interfere in the outcomes (either agreeing and disagreeing) are those who earn between 5 and 8 salaries per month, as can be noticed, for instance, on the axes: leagues, fans' engagement, and the stadium. It is pertinent to explain that the idea is not stating whether the Corinthians' ecosystem is good or bad, but identifying critical dimensions and topics according to Corinthians' fans. As a large sports club in Brazil, managing Corinthians is not an easy job, given that their structure and value chain are complex and singular.

Hence, for developing marketing strategies for sports clubs it is important that marketers know the stakeholders' skills (or qualifications) as well as the club's capacity to provide products and/or services to suit fans' expectations. Rundh & Gottfridsson (2015) have suggested the term ARA: actors (sponsors), resources (internal and external resources) and activities (ticket sales, the game, etc.). These three perspectives are relevant because they include different transactions, the flow of knowledge, creation of necessary resources and bonds shaped and drawn on by actors. The overall behaviour that emerges in the network shapes its development and how it adapts to incidents in the environment, which marketers must consider at the time they develop the sports club's business and marketing strategies. Therefore, sports business and marketing require a thorough knowledge of an entire sports ecosystem-regardless of the model presented in this paper-to plan and organise the strategies, tactics and activities for offering sports clubs products or services to satisfy the demand of fans.

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