

# Navigating the Digital Playfield:

Understanding Engagement and Consumer Expectations

December 2023

**FUTURE  
PLATFORMS**

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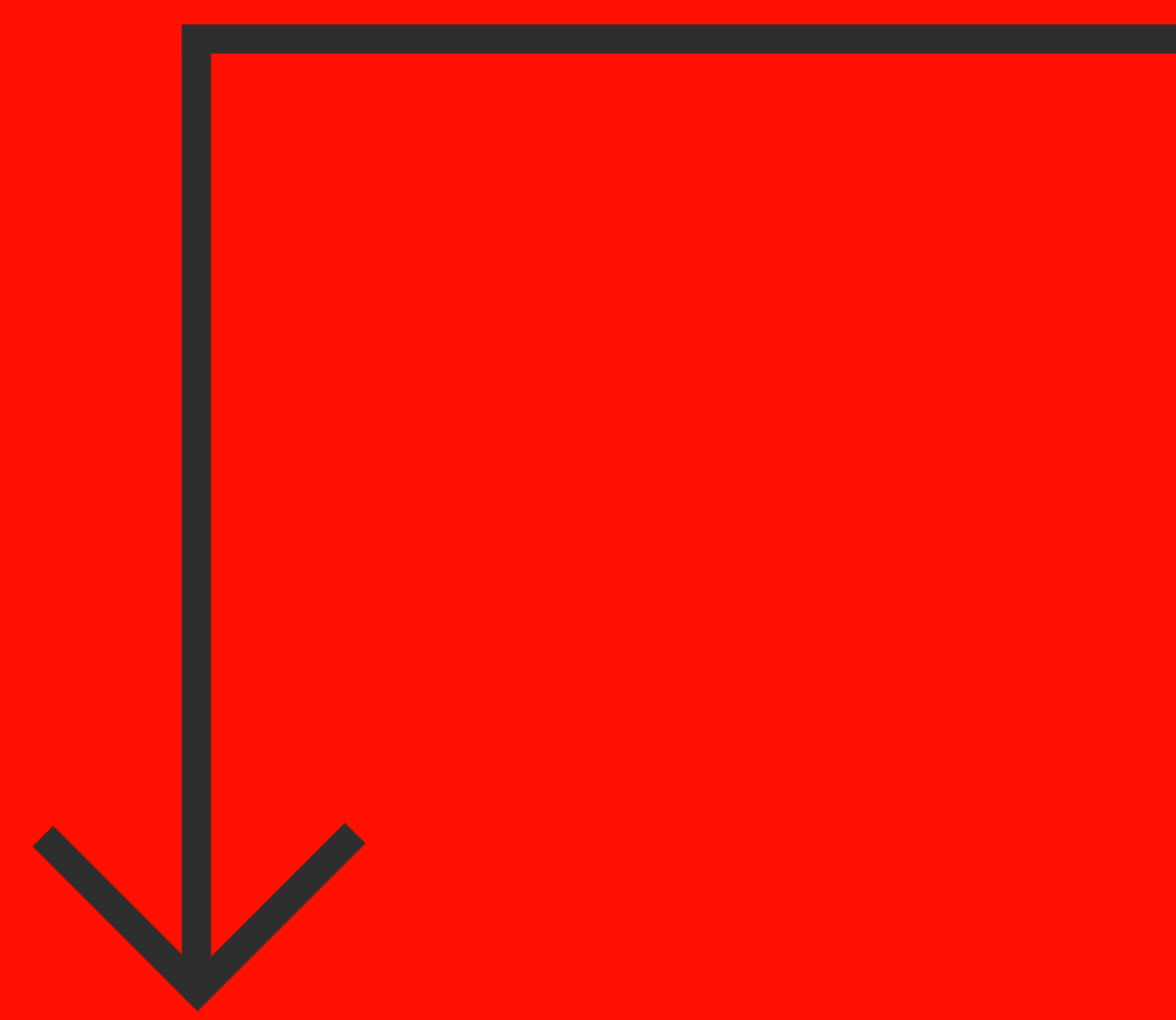
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# O1

Navigating the Digital Playfield

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# Executive Summary

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# Foreword

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From  
Future Platforms  
Joint Managing  
Director

Remy Brooks



Sport is a unique enterprise that has the power to connect individuals from different parts of the world to join forces towards a common goal or shared interest. While, of course, elite-level sport is only possible thanks to the ability, talent and sacrifice of the athletes who dedicate their lives to their craft and our entertainment, it is equally true that sport is essentially nothing without its fans.

Fan engagement is absolutely key for any sport, governing body, club, or individual sportsperson. Once you go behind the curtain, you'll see that the only reason why broadcasters are fighting tooth and nail for coverage is to secure the attention and resources of the fans. As such, fans are where much of the revenue and growth come from in sports, and building a real connection is paramount to the success and longevity of any sport.

In this whitepaper, "Navigating the Digital Playfield: Understanding Engagement and Consumer Expectations," we at Future Platforms have distilled the

essence of modern sports consumption and fan engagement. Our aim has been to explore and unpack the digital dynamics that are reshaping the relationship between sports entities and their supporters.

We delved into the digital evolution that has transitioned sports from live event viewing to interactive fan experiences, underscoring the significant impact of digital media platforms. With the proliferation of digital technologies, we've entered a new era where engagement transcends the physical and enters the digital realm, allowing fans to interact with their idols in ways that were previously unimagined.

Our findings highlight the importance of a digital companion to the live experience, an aspect that leading sports broadcasters like Sky Sports have capitalised on through innovative app features. We've discovered that most sports app users engage primarily just before the event, underlining the potential to enhance fan anticipation and experience in these critical moments.

Overall, this whitepaper urges sports entities to focus more on their fan engagement; challenging them to go beyond passive data analytics and actively seek out real conversations with their fanbase. It is not enough to merely observe. Rather, there is an imperative to engage, listen, and adapt based on direct fan feedback. By doing so, sports organisations can uncover rich insights and take informed actions that resonate with their audience, fostering a stronger bond and ensuring that fans feel their voices are truly heard and valued.

We also touch on the transformative potential of NFC technology in sports merchandise, illustrating how it can strengthen fan loyalty and open new revenue streams for clubs. This insight is particularly vital for smaller clubs and less mainstream sports, presenting a lifeline for sustainable growth.

Furthermore, the whitepaper examines the multifaceted nature of sports fandom in the age of digital media. Our [research](#) indicates that fans are not only consuming sports through traditional broadcasts but are also leveraging various digital platforms to enrich their experience. This multi-platform usage is especially pronounced among younger audiences, who are engaging with sports through a combination of streaming, mobile apps, and fantasy leagues.

Equally, we address the burgeoning role of social media and individual trusted voices in sports journalism, which are reshaping how sports

narratives are crafted and consumed. The personal brand of journalists like David Ornstein, Amy Lawrence, and Fabrizio Romano exemplifies this shift, while the rise of YouTube fan channels shows that credibility and engagement often stem from individual expertise and presence as much as from traditional media powerhouses.

Through engaging with fans and incorporating their feedback into the digital experience, sports entities can avoid the pitfall of disconnect and instead demonstrate a profound understanding of their audience. This level of investment in fan interaction is palpable; fans can discern when their input has been incorporated and are more likely to form a lasting connection with sports brands that show they are listening.

Lastly, the whitepaper offers strategic recommendations for sports entities to harness the full potential of digital engagement. From leveraging data for tailored experiences to utilising the celebrity of athletes for increased marketability, the future of sports consumption is one that demands adaptability, personalisation, and an unwavering focus on the digital fan experience.

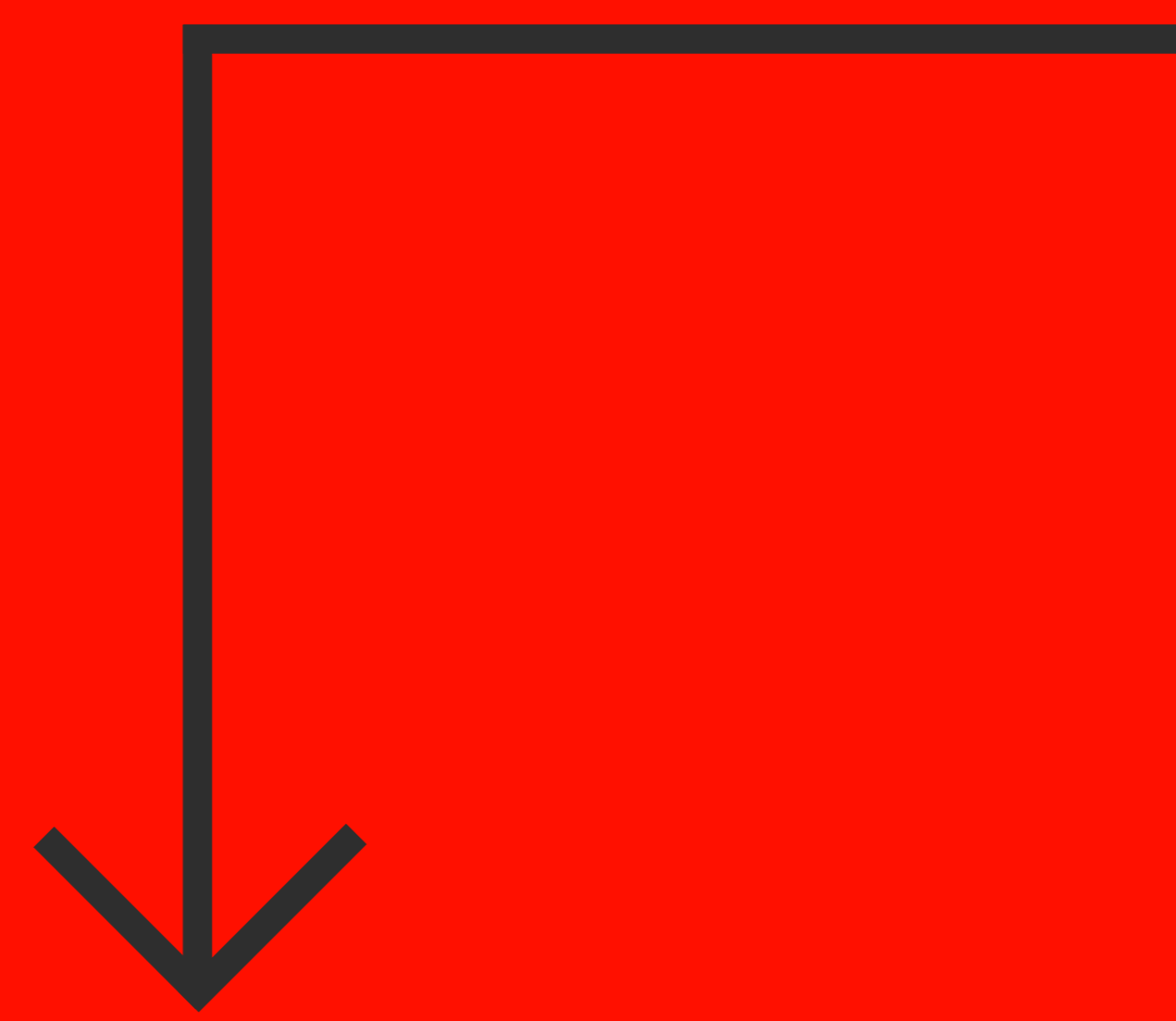
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**The whitepaper offers strategic recommendations** for sports entities to harness the full potential of digital engagement.

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Navigating the Digital Playfield

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# Introduction

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# The Evolving Landscape of Sports Consumption

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Welcome to our sports and fan engagement whitepaper — Navigating the Digital Playfield: Understanding Engagement and Consumer Expectations. We are Future Platforms, a bespoke, independent digital product agency. Based in the UK, we offer a human-centred approach to consulting, serving as engineers, designers and strategic advisors to a diverse range of clients across multiple industries.

As a digital product agency, the term “digital” holds great significance for us and encompasses the full spectrum of our expertise, which includes the development of official apps, websites and e-commerce platforms that elevate your brand.

Below, we explore insights from our latest research on the British sports fans’ experience.

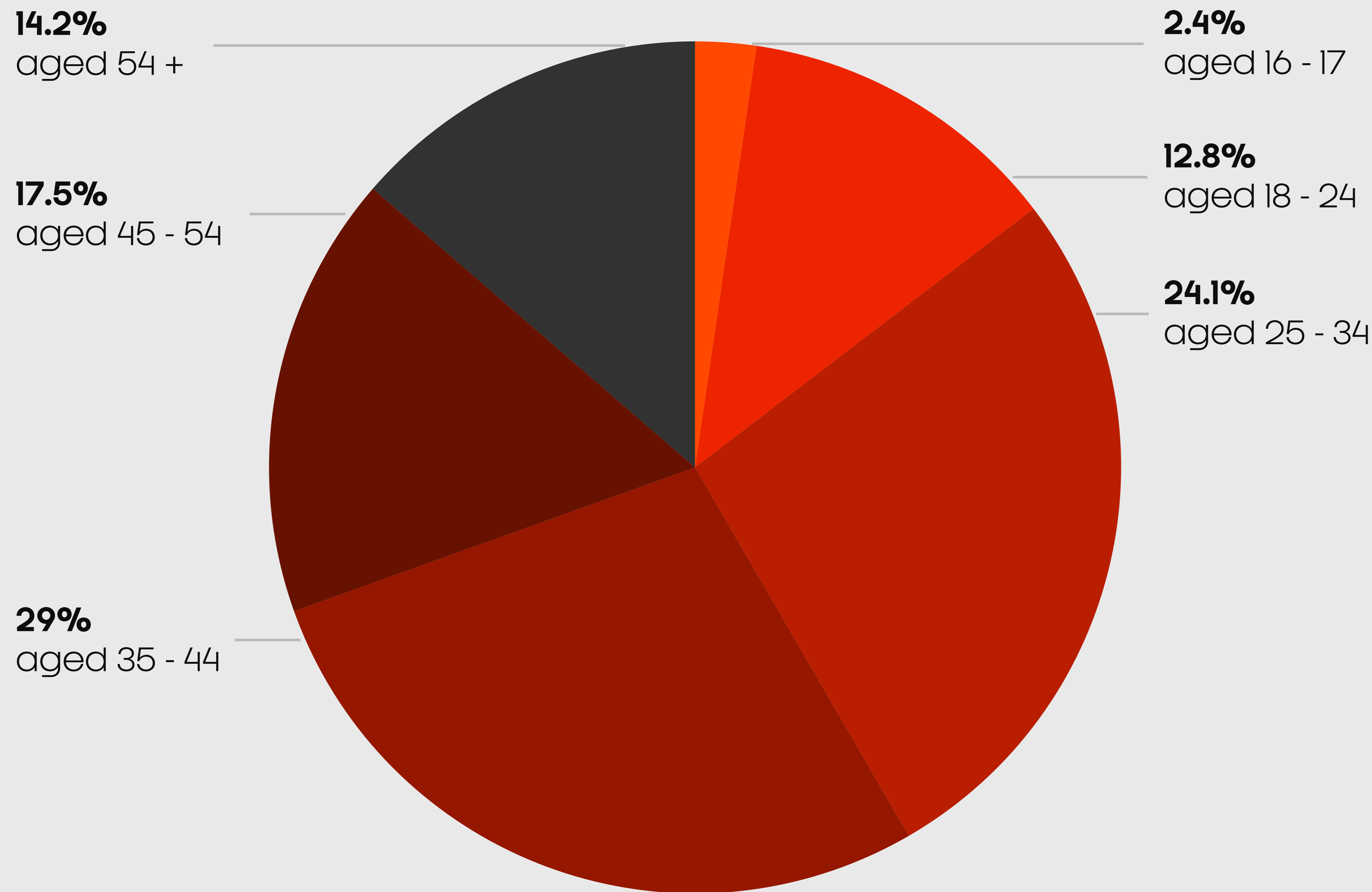


We highlight the role of digital;  
assessing how it enhances the  
experience, and examining the  
impact on consumer behaviour  
and **engagement.**  
**engagement.**  
**engagement.**



# Research Overview

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**1,000**  
British sports fans

**25**  
Questions

**43%**  
Women

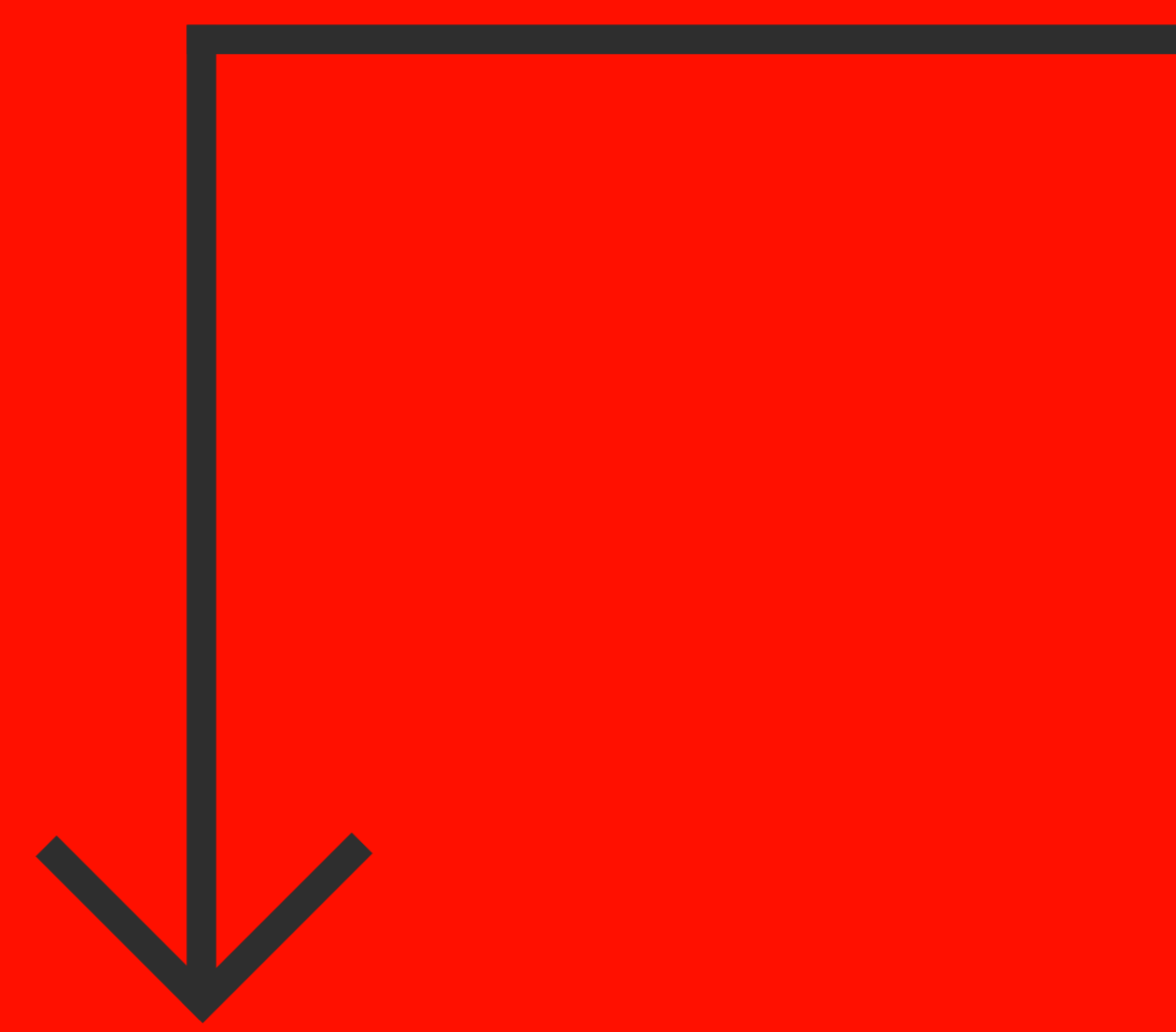
**57%**  
Men

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Why  
Engagement  
Matters

To understand why engagement is so important to sporting institutions, it's vital to first understand the context of engagement and how it has inadvertently shaped the history of sports. Historically, sports were an event-based enterprise that you only saw live, heard on the radio, or read about in the newspapers. However, following the UK's first live television broadcast in [1931](#) and the subsequent resumption of live sports in the country following World War II, the sports industry began to realise that television was a great way to improve engagement, bring in more revenue, and ultimately grow their business.

“Fan engagement is absolutely key for any sporting institution, rights holder, governing body or even the individual sportsperson, as engagement is where growth comes from.”

**Remy Brooks, Joint Managing Director of Future Platforms.**

Televised sports coverage in the UK [significantly changed forever](#) in the 1990s with the launch of Sky Sports from the pay television broadcaster BSkyB and the creation of the Premier League in [1992](#). In the decades that followed, several other sports have undergone radical changes to their televised and organisational structures in a bid to build awareness and increase their sports' popularity and fan engagement. For example, Cricket, which has typically been considered Britain's second sport, underwent [significant overhauls](#) to modernise the game and appeal to a younger audience. These overhauls ultimately culminated in the creation of the shorter, made-for-TV format that is Twenty20.

**1931**

Epsom Derby, the first sporting event broadcast live in Great Britain

**1937**

Wimbledon Men's Final, the BBC's first live outside sports broadcast and one of its longest running.

**1948**

London Olympics, with coverage initially only available to Londoners.

**1966**

FIFA World Cup, the BBC's first colour broadcast, garnering 32.3m viewers.

**1975**

Muhammad Ali vs Joe Frazier, the first overseas satellite broadcast.

While television's influence has undoubtedly aided fan engagement in many sports, the proliferation of digital media and its various platforms has taken engagement to an entirely new stratosphere. As noted by Remy: "Engagement is a chance to offer fans a real connection with their favourite clubs, teams or personnel, and give them an opportunity not just to consume, but really engage with their idols. Digital is really a great way of connecting people to content as well as each other. As such, if you don't invest in that fan experience digitally,

you're missing a genuine opportunity to give fans what they want while also missing out on the growth of the business."

With the advent of digital media, fans are now able to see real-time updates and get information faster than ever before. In addition to merely receiving information, many sports teams, sporting bodies and rights holders are also exploring interactivity features such as fan commentary and including [gamification elements](#) within their apps to increase engagement even further.

Source: [tvlicensing.co.uk](http://tvlicensing.co.uk), The History of Live Sport on UK Television

1996

World Heavyweight Title Fight, the UK's first pay-per-view televised event.

2006

FIFA World Cup, the first HD sports broadcast on the BBC.

2010

Arsenal vs Manchester United, Sky launches a 3D channel.

2011

Sky launches the Sports 'on the go' mobile app.

2012

London Olympics Opening Ceremony, watched by 1bn people.

O4

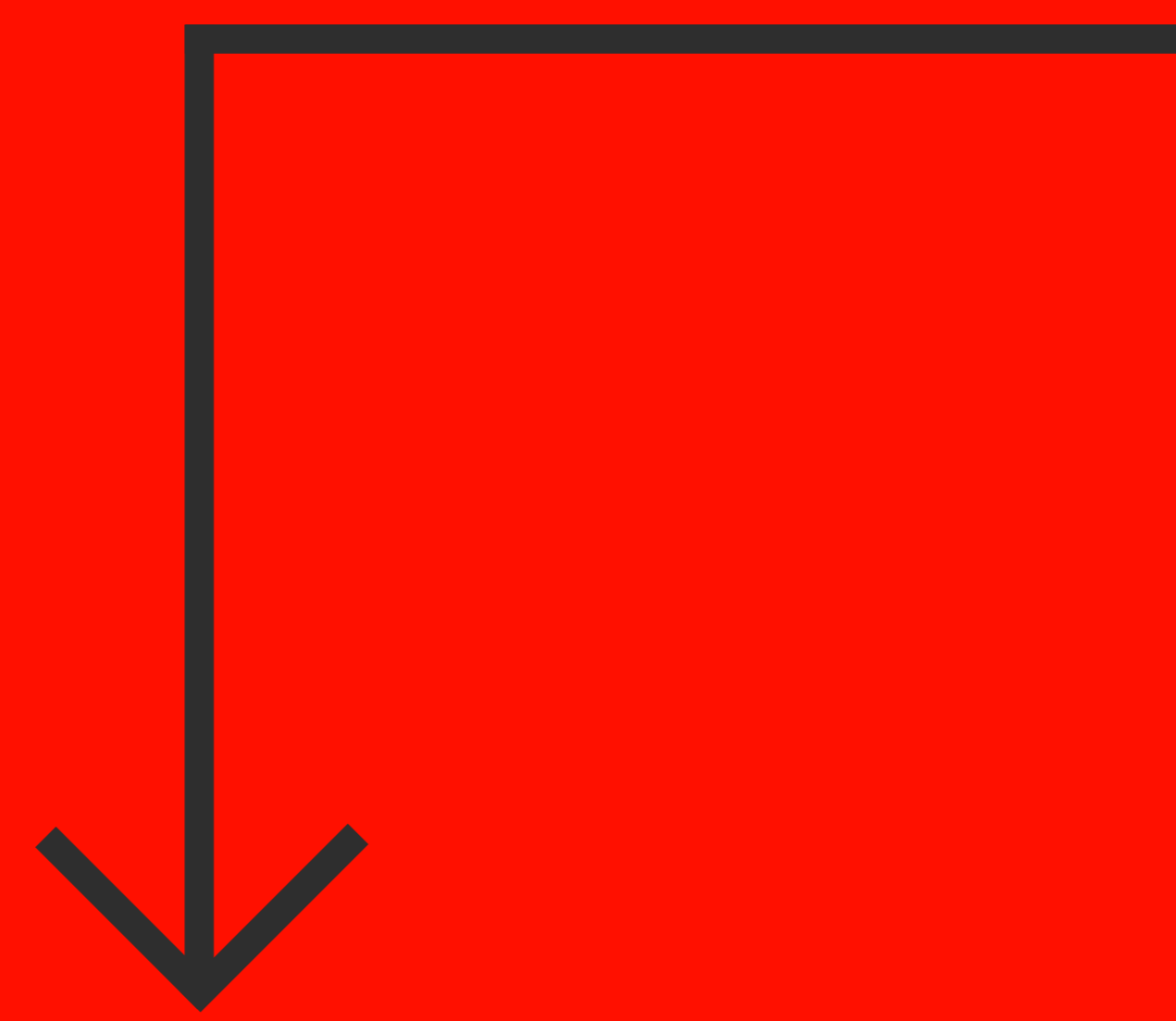
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The Future  
is Digital

Whenever we have spoken to sports teams, rights holders and even sporting bodies, they all talk about digital as being a companion to the live experience - i.e., something that you'll use while you're watching the sport itself. Sky Sports, for example, has been a major player in this field, offering users of the Sky Sports app the ability to [ride with Lewis Hamilton, Max Verstappen and other racers](#) of their choice while watching the main Formula 1 coverage on their television screens.

While it is admittedly quite advantageous to have ready access to up-to-date stats and alternative viewing angles, our research into the usage of sports platforms found that most users are actively interacting with the apps [in the moments just before the live event starts](#). So, for example, more football fans use the Sky Sports app to check for lineups and any last-minute

changes than those who would be accessing alternative coverage during the game. Conversely, our research found that just over:

13%

of users surveyed use their favourite sports platform after the live event has occurred.

The question then is not if we should care about the digital experience but more about how we can enhance it even further. As content creators, there needs to be a concerted effort to enhance the buildup and anticipation of these live events even further during the times when the audience is most engaged with sports brands. To see what this might look like, we look at two interesting uses of technology that are reshaping the fan experience below.

# Connecting Fans with NFC Technology

The use of NFC (near-field communication) technology in sports is not an entirely new concept and has been used by multiple premier league football clubs and [major stadiums around the world](#) as a way of facilitating easier turnstile access and removing ticket touts from the matchday experience. However, one company, Connected Fanatics, seeks to take this concept to new heights.

Co-founded in 2020 by Daniel Lewis, formerly of the physical-to-digital fan network Skute, Connected Fanatics seeks to embed NFC technology into football jerseys to allow football clubs to engage with their fans using the unique identifier in their replica kits. Once scanned, fans could then access a myriad of personalised experiences that could be tailored to a specific player or shirt number. In addition, clubs could also use NFC technology to unlock a new revenue stream by tying content behind an NFC-locked subscription model.

The NFC-based subscription model could also be a lifeline for lower-league clubs and even sports such as rugby, which have traditionally struggled to sell jerseys compared to the most popular football teams.

“

Because people aren't buying the merchandise like they normally do, you have to reassess and admit that the current business model is broken. If you connected all of the jerseys (both old and new) by embedded NFC technology and offered something unique that fans can't anywhere else, then they may be obliged to pay a small subscription to the clubs, which would

**unlock and facilitate a  
new revenue stream.**

Therefore, whether the fan buys the latest jersey or not, it doesn't really matter as the club will still be making money from each fan, but in a different way.

Daniel Lewis, Chief of Customer Success at Connected Fanatics



# The Rise of Multi Platform Usage

**The modern sports fan is no longer bound to a single device or platform**

While there has been considerable focus on the [8-second attention span of Gen Z](#) and the implications for the [future of sports coverage](#), it's important to note that sports fandom is actually increasing thanks to new digital platforms. Research by established global audience specialists [Nielsen](#) reveals that younger viewers are following more sports than their older counterparts. However, younger fans are doing so via a combination of streaming, mobile and fantasy experiences.

In our own [research](#), we found that the majority of sports fans (82%) use TV or radio broadcasts to follow their favourite sports. Interestingly, we

also saw that every sports fan uses a number of other platforms to follow their preferred sport(s) as well. Besides TV and radio, 80% said they use official apps and websites, 77% of respondents stated they use social media to follow sporting personalities and organisations, while 72% said that they stream content online.

From both our findings and the studies conducted by our peers, it's clear that the modern sports fan is one that is no longer bound to a single device or platform. Rather, fans are utilising platforms and devices to access content when and how they desire.

82%

of sports fans use TV or radio broadcasts to watch live events. However, sports fan uses other platforms too, including:

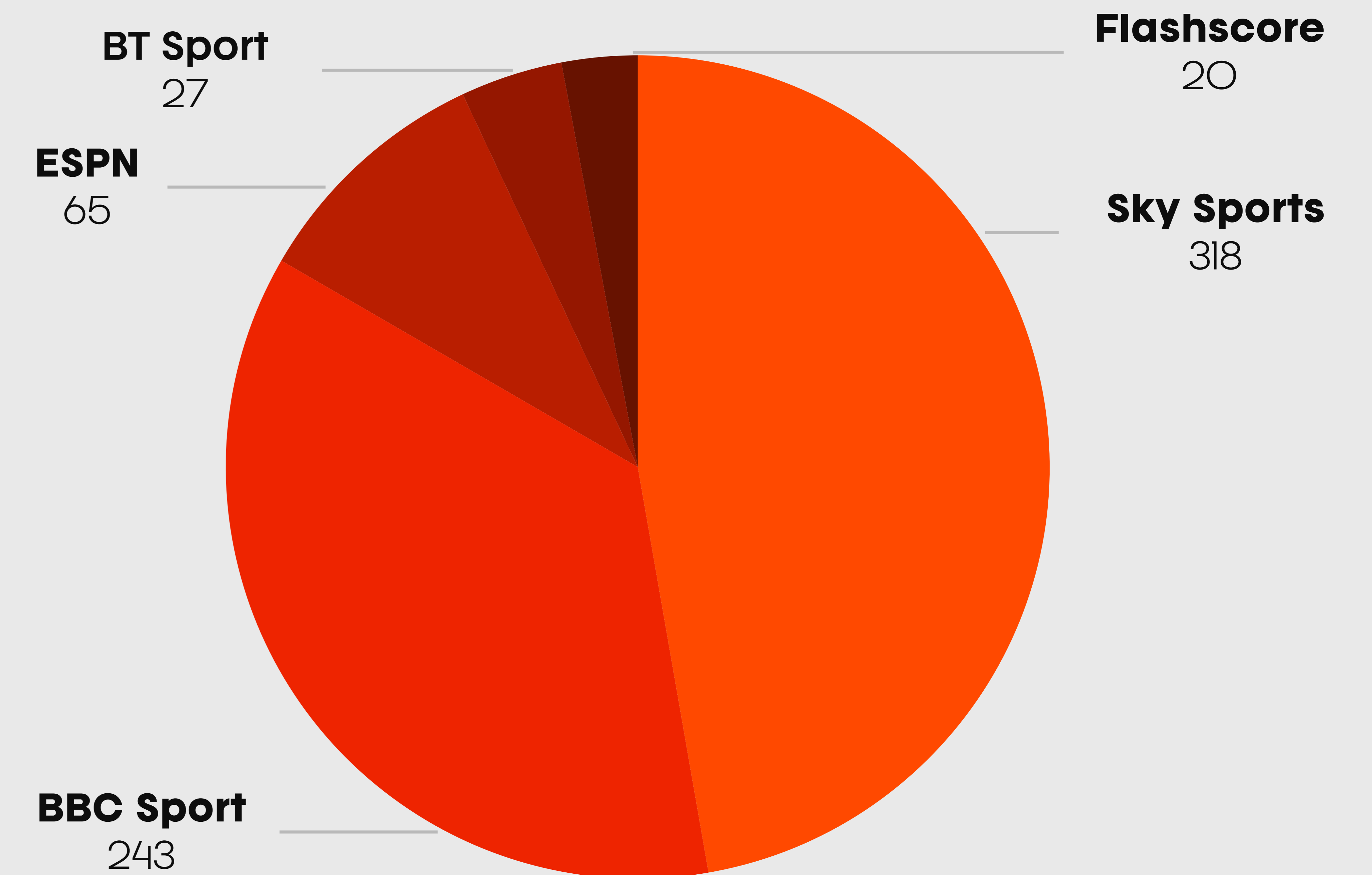
80% Official apps and websites

77% Social media

72% Online streaming platforms

# The Power of Social Media and Trusted Voices in Digital Sports Media

While our research found that broadcasters and rights holders have the [most popular dedicated sports apps](#), there is no denying that the new home of the conversation about sports is on X (Twitter). For example, according to figures released by the social media platform, in Dubai alone, there were more than [1.4 million tweets](#) made about cricket when Pakistan and India faced each other in the 2022 Asia Cup on the 28th of August. Meanwhile, the social media platform states that [85%](#) of X users regularly connect with football, and there were more than [1 billion conversation impressions](#) during the FIFA 2023 Women's World Cup.



“

The internet and digital media essentially broke what was previously a very gatekeeper-esque media landscape. **Before the social media era, very few people had a voice,** and even fewer would care about what you had to say on a particular topic or issue unless you were endorsed by a major brand such as ESPN, Talksport or the BBC etc.

**Remy Brooks, Joint Managing Director of Future Platforms.**

X has provided a platform for both regular fans and professional journalists to converse and debate about their favourite sports team, athletes or trending news and events affecting their chosen sport. In addition, the platform has also made it possible for individuals to build their brand, stand out from the crowd, and, in some instances, even become bigger brands than the outlets they may have been working for in the past.

One of the most notable examples of a former employee becoming almost as big as their employer is the former BBC Sports Correspondent David Ornstein (now of The Athletic). Ornstein is a frequent X user who regularly posts a mix of easy-to-digest football updates and casual selfie video updates on the world of football. Ornstein has used his considerable knowledge and connections to build a mould-breaking approach to modern football journalism. In addition, he is also a regular guest on Rio Ferdinand's popular YouTube football podcast-style show, FIVE.

However, arguably, the best example of using social media to build your brand has been Italian sports journalist Fabrizio Romano and his incredible rise to fame. Beginning his career as a football transfer journalist in 2011, Romano began making a name for himself as a reliable source after managing to secure inside information from an Italian agent in Barcelona regarding (the then-FC Barcelona B player) Mauro Icardi and his [upcoming transfer to Sampdoria](#). Icardi was happy with the article, which allowed Romano to also get another exclusive transfer story regarding Icardi's subsequent move to Internazionale (Inter Milan). Romano increased his reputation even further with the 2020 move of Bruno Fernandes to Manchester United, which he states "was my first big news on an international level". This move coined the now iconic catchphrase "Here we go!" which the journalist has since used to announce the confirmed arrival of a player at a new club.

At present, Romano has written for or appeared in a number of publications and platforms, including The Guardian, CBS Sports, Sky Sports and more. In terms of respect, Romano is arguably the single greatest source of reliable transfer information in the football world and has over 25 million followers on Instagram, more than 19 million followers on X and looks set to exceed 2 million subscribers on YouTube as well. In many instances, Romano has created a one-person media empire by himself, becoming arguably more trusted than even the biggest rights holders.

Besides X, YouTube has also become a place where sports fans congregate. In the past, YouTube was primarily the place to find classic sports matches and clips. However, the last 10 years or so have seen the platform transcend from an archive to being the home of a slew of original content creators and sports influencers. One of the most recognisable names in YouTube sports fandom is, of course, Arsenal Fan TV (now named AFTV). Founded in 2012 by lifelong Arsenal fan Robbie Lyle as a way to “[give a voice to fans of the club](#)”, the popular YouTube

channel has over 1.4 billion video views and has gained a massive following for its frank and sometimes vitriolic guests who routinely and openly air their frustrations about the club and their performances. While the channel has faced numerous criticisms over the years, not least from sports personalities in the media such as [Gary Neville](#) and (the then) Arsenal player [Hector Bellerin](#), the channel has persevered and has broken into the mainstream in an unprecedented manner. For example, despite their aforementioned previous disagreements, Lyle is a regular on the [fan debates](#) hosted on Neville’s YouTube show, [The Overlap](#).

The success of AFTV spawned not only a myriad of similar channels, including the likes of The United Stand and RedmenTV, but it also opened the door for football clubs to use influencers to increase their engagement. For example, Clive Palmer from the Arsenal Vision podcast was invited by Arsenal to [exclusively interview Martin Odegaard](#) when he signed a new contract.

# Romano

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**25 million** Instagram

**19 million** X (Twitter)

**2 million** YouTube

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Romano has created a one person media empire by himself, becoming arguably **more trusted than even the biggest rights holders.**

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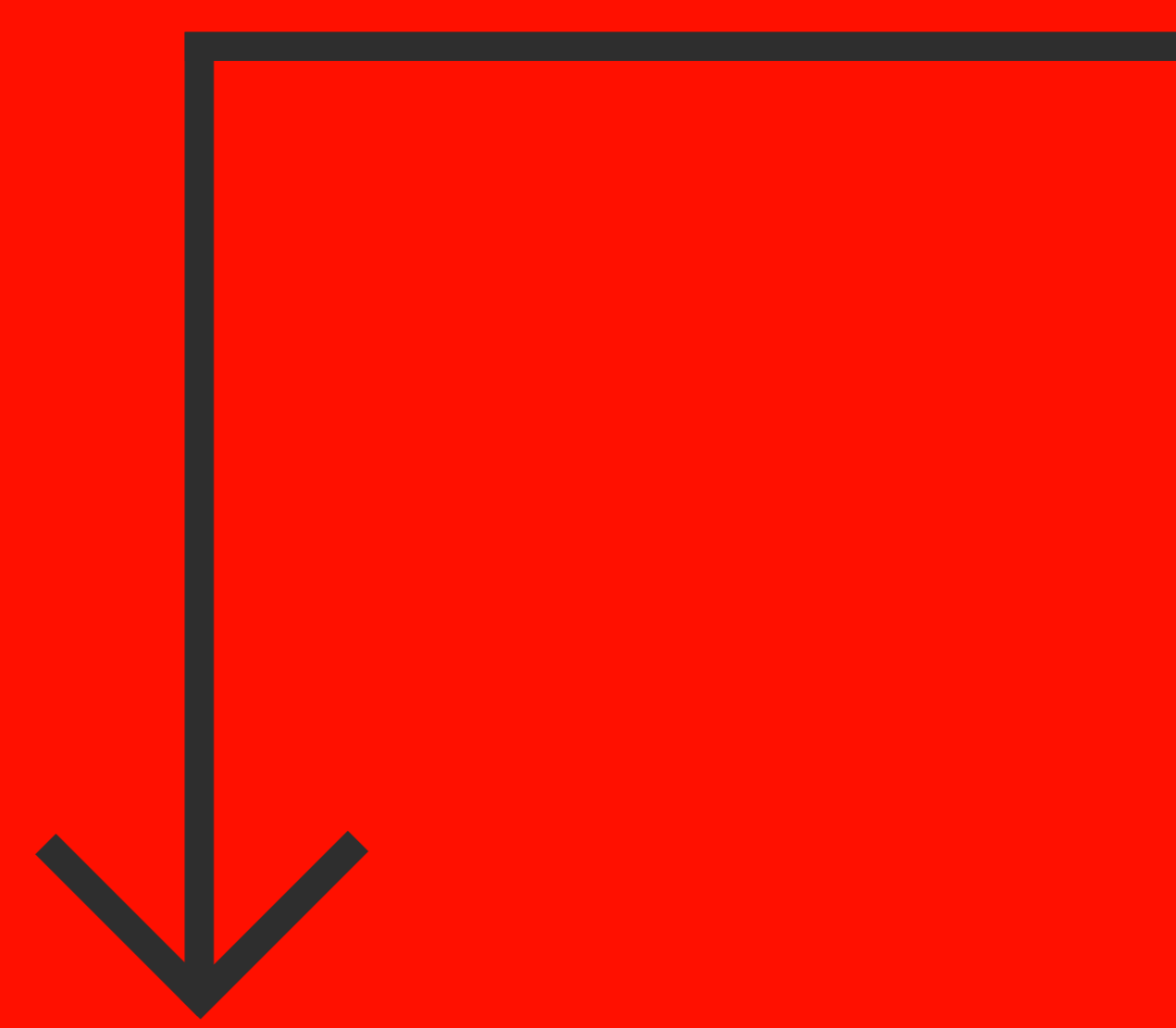
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Leveraging  
Data for Tailored  
Experiences

It was once stated that

# Data is the new oil

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but we believe that there's more to it than that. Perhaps we're biased, as, after all, data is intrinsic to what we do. However, it's hard to deny the transformative power that data delivers when refined and utilised correctly.

One of the most eye-catching and significant uses of data in recent years has been personalisation, but as noted by Remy,

“personalisation is one of the easiest things to say, but among **the hardest to actually do.**”

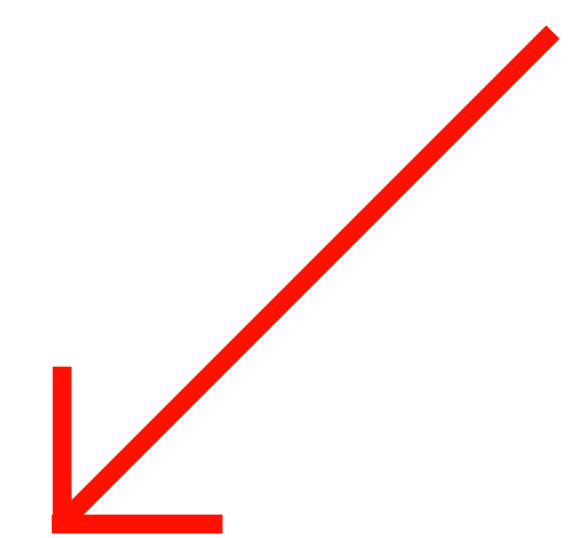
From looking at the offerings of the majority of digital sports platforms, it's clear that while personalisation does play a significant part in their respective apps, the personalised aspects could be enhanced even further

# Personalised Algorithms

questions—which require you to give a thumbs up or down—serve the purpose of tailoring the vast library of content on Netflix to suit your individual preferences. Therefore, when a user indicates that they're only really interested in Comedy and perhaps Sports documentaries, the algorithm(s) behind Netflix's content library will automatically curate their content to ensure that the very first thing the user sees when logging into the platform is content that is geared towards their tastes and preferences.

The key to a genuinely personalised experience lies within data and, in particular, personalisation algorithms. Defined as a sophisticated computational formula, personalisation algorithms are created by analysing individual data points. These data points can be varied, focusing on aspects such as past behaviour, preferences, and interactions that will tailor the digital experience content and recommendations uniquely for each user.

Looking beyond the regional dominance of select sports platforms and towards some of the most popular apps/services in the world, it's clear that personalisation algorithms play a big part in their offering. For example, while it is well-documented that Netflix offers a plethora of content and that there is effectively something for everybody on the platform, what is less focused on is the series of questions that it asks you when setting up your account for the first time. These





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Clubs, sporting bodies and organisations can learn a lot from the onboarding process of Netflix, which is something we regularly advise at Future Platforms. While there is undoubtedly a lot of friction involved with sufficiently onboarding someone, **that doesn't mean that you should shy away from creating an in-depth and really engaging onboarding experience.** As long as you're asking relevant questions in a way that actually delivers value to your customers and makes the post-onboarding experience all the better and more personalised for it, then it is absolutely something you should invest in.

**Remy Brooks, Joint Managing Director of Future Platforms.**

Conversely, there is little point in asking the user numerous questions and having an onerous onboarding process that collects a multitude of data just for the sake of your data analysis team or to simply sell at a later date. Users are a lot smarter and more tech-aware than many give them credit for, so once they log into digital platforms and land on the homepage, they will be dismayed to see that the choices specified in the onboarding did little to personalise their experience.

When used correctly, such as in the Netflix example above, personalisation algorithms are a great way to not only feed the users the content they care about, but also to keep them engaged and ultimately locked into your digital ecosystem.

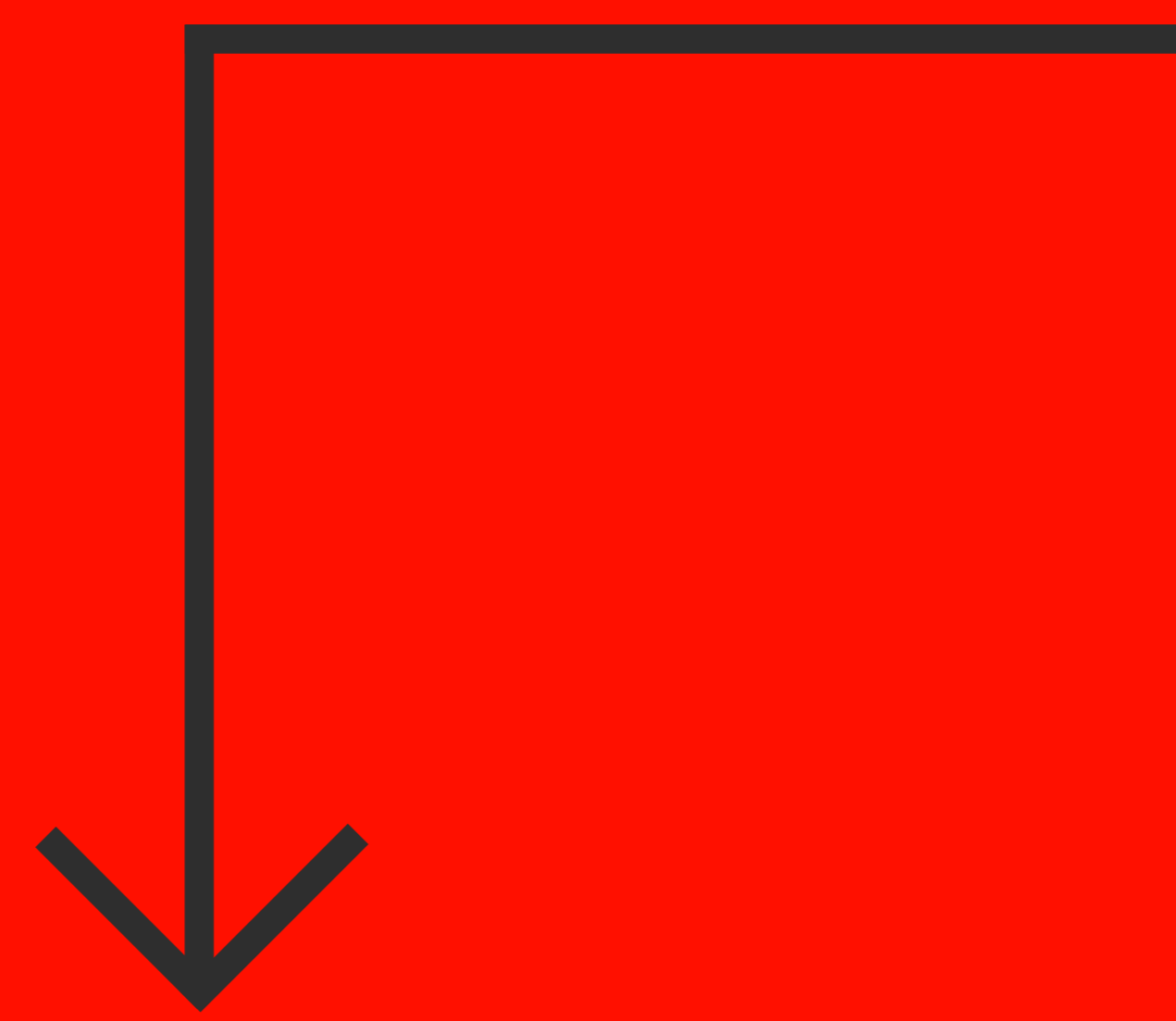
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Pain Points and  
Opportunities

We understand that the path towards

# digital transformation is rarely straightforward

even when you're certain of the path or the necessary objectives needed to reach your end goal. As a digital product agency and consultancy, we have helped several businesses overcome roadblocks, challenges and adversities to help them achieve their goals, and when it comes to fan engagement within sports, this is no exception.

# Greater Customisation

In team sports in the UK, while the individual is often praised and recognised for their achievements, the emphasis in the past has traditionally been on the club rather than the individual star player(s). However, in recent years, younger fans getting into sports such as rugby, cricket, and, in particular, football have increasingly begun to gravitate towards the individual player, becoming fans of the player first and the team they represent second.

The rise of the superstar and their transient fanship has ultimately caused friction between new fans and older or

lifelong supporters, who commonly refer to them as “[tourists](#)” who only visit a club because of their status or a particular superstar. From a content and fan engagement perspective, however, the biggest example of this friction can be seen in the reluctance of UK-centric apps such as Sky Sports and even the official Premier League app to create content that is specifically tailored towards a particular individual or team.



**75%** of survey respondents use multiple channels to get more out of sports remotely, but what exactly are they looking for?

- / News, data and stats on match outcomes and up-and-coming talent
- / Community features that enable peer discussions
- / Quizzes, questionnaires and competitions

The NBA and the MLB, both do a **remarkable job** of allowing you to personalise your experience

Users of the official **NBA app** can readily buy **tickets**

In the Sky Sports app, you're able to select a team to follow from a number of the different sports that the service broadcasts. However, when it comes to individuals, especially in football, there are very few players to choose from. Furthermore, once you have decided to follow your specified club or player (from a list provided by the broadcaster), the content shown within the "My Sports" section is not always as rich and diverse as one would expect. For instance, if you happen to follow a lower-league club, the amount of news stories is somewhat limited to just highlights of recent games rather than any specifically curated news or exclusive content.

The Premier League app, meanwhile, has a naturally smaller focus, but despite this, it still falls short in many different aspects. One of the most egregious is the fact that, despite asking users to choose their preferred club(s) to follow, upon first loading the platform, a user has to scroll through a generic "latest news" tab to find the content that they have requested. Additionally, the user experience leaves a lot to be desired, as much of the tailored content requires the user to be taken out of the official Premier League app and onto the club's website.

Comparatively, in US-centric sports such as basketball and baseball, the two major organisation bodies, the

NBA and the MLB, both do a remarkable job of allowing you to personalise your experience.

Both the MLB and NBA apps let you choose your favourite teams to follow, as well as giving you a selection of every player to follow from across the respective sports. So, for example, if you're a massive LA Lakers fan, you can follow the results, news and stats related to the team but also keep track of any updates concerning other players such as Kevin Durant, Stephen Curry, Giannis Antetokounmpo, etc.

Lastly, one of the biggest issues with the Premier League is that getting tickets to see matches is, for the most part, a costly and unintuitive experience. To even stand a chance to see any Premier League team without an expensive matchday experience package, you must first be a paid member of that particular team. Furthermore, once you have become a member, there is often a convoluted ballot system in place due to the limited number of tickets on sale. By comparison, however, users of the official NBA app can readily buy tickets to see any NBA team directly from the platform itself. This entire process is incredibly user-friendly and intuitive, making the sport more accessible for lapsed fans and tourists alike.

# Live Streaming

According to our [research](#), live streaming was the most popular area that respondents wished to improve across their digital experience. While live streaming, of course, forms a part of every rights holder's digital experience, there are times when multiple events are taking place at the same time, and the broadcaster only selects one option, which often leads fans of rival sports or teams to seek out coverage through alternative (and often illegal) streaming avenues.

The UK's Intellectual Property Office estimated that nearly 4m people illegally watch live sport, despite institutions such as the Premier League having [taken a tougher stance on illegal streaming](#). As such, there is clearly a massive demand for more live sports coverage, but the conundrum rights holders will need to resolve is how to offer this at an attractive price point while still generating a

profit. For individual clubs and sporting organisations, meanwhile, these figures should show that there is very much an appetite for more coverage; it's merely a case of working out and identifying what content you can stream through your digital experiences.

During the in-season,

**56%**

of fans consume sports news daily and

**80%**

check-in weekly during the off-season. But what fans are looking for during this time differs:

**/ Daily users were more interested in stats, data and short videos**

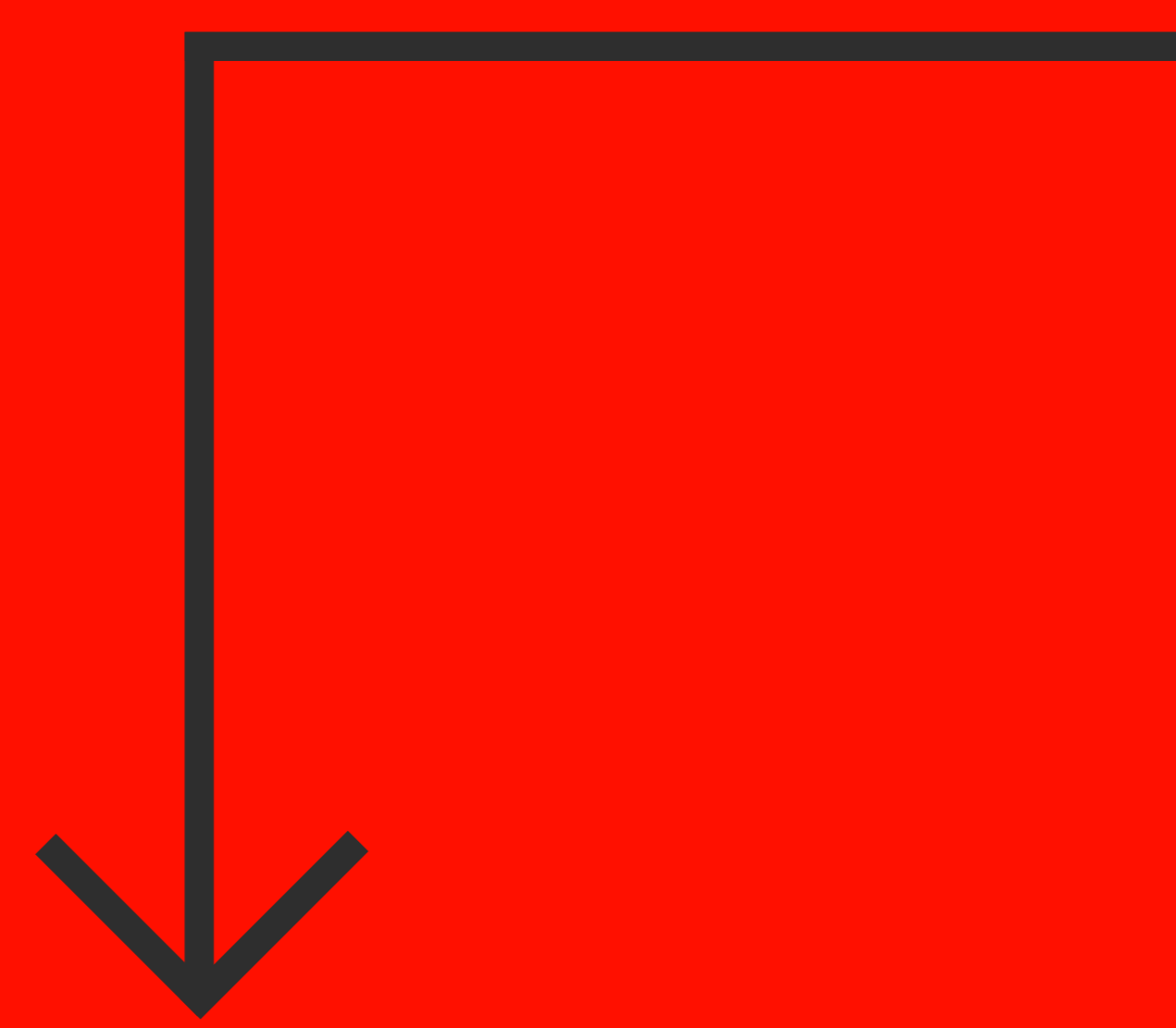
**/ Infrequent users (monthly or less) sought in-depth formats, like long videos and written articles.**

# 07

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The Road Ahead:  
Strategic  
Recommendations  
for Future Success

# Creating a Personalised Experience

To actually **deliver the right content to the right audience** requires a CRM system, an SSO (Single Sign-On) across all your platforms, a lot of audience segmentation, and a plethora of data.

As highlighted previously, personalisation is one of the key areas for improvement that we have seen across many digital experiences, including on websites and in apps. While there are some services, such as the official NBA app, that [absolutely nail personalisation](#), there are others that fall rather short in comparison.

Unfortunately, a lot of what we have seen at Future Platforms so far has been very content-pipe-driven—for example, a user watches a video, so in return, the platform will then put forward more videos for the user to watch. However, to go beyond this and actually deliver the right content to the right audience requires a CRM system, an SSO

(Single Sign-On) across all your platforms, a lot of audience segmentation, and a plethora of data. For example, if you're a boxing promotion looking to undergo digital transformation, you might want to know if the user is only interested in the biggest fights or if they are heavily invested in boxing as a whole. You may also want to know if they attend matches (and if so, where, when and how many), and do they buy the Pay-Per-Views or simply watch the highlights online.



As a content creator, once the user has given you their data, you should promise personalisation and deliver upon it in a way that feels hyper-relevant to the user from their very first use. Following that initial use, your digital service (which also extends to supplementary apps and websites) should always be learning and adapting to the users viewing habits to keep them engaged. For example, if your user is reading long-form articles about a specific team or athlete, then your personalisation algorithm needs to automatically recommend and suggest more content that aligns with this. Similarly, if you

have users who like more bite-sized news updates, then the algorithm should put these more front and centre to keep the user engaged and locked into their digital ecosystem.

This deep-level form of personalisation has proved to be immensely successful and [equally controversial](#) for social media platforms such as [TikTok](#) and [Instagram](#). However, as a sports industry institution, there is no reason why you can't adopt some of the personalisation aspects of these social media behemoths and pair them with more positive,

uplifting original content that actually enhances the user experience and improves their mood as well.

Ultimately, understanding all of the above is incredibly important to forming a personalised experience within your digital offerings. As such, when advising clients at Future Platforms, we often mention that data can serve as a signal to help you improve engagement and better understand your audience and what resonates with them.

Once the user has given you their data, you should **promise personalisation** and deliver upon it in a way that feels **hyper-relevant** to the user from their very first use.

Son's beloved and **superstar status in the Republic of Korea** has also allowed Spurs to go on pre-season tours of the country to packed stadiums

# Utilising the Celebrity

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Looking at the UK's most popular sport, football, it's clear to see that several teams already lean into the marketing pull of their biggest superstars. For example, Celtic, who have a long history of recruiting Japanese players since the signing of Shinsuke Nakamura back in 2005, has created an entirely Japanese-only portal mainly dedicated to coverage of Kyogo Furuhashi, Daizen Maeda and their remaining contingent of current Japanese players. Meanwhile, in the Premier League, Hwang Hee-chan is central to the overseas marketing for Wolves, as is Tottenham Hotspur's Son Heung-min, who is the captain and most marketable player in the Tottenham team following the departure of Harry Kane. Son's beloved and

superstar status in the Republic of Korea has also allowed Spurs to go on pre-season tours of the country to packed stadiums while also getting numerous fans attending home and away matches seemingly just to watch the South Korean star in person.

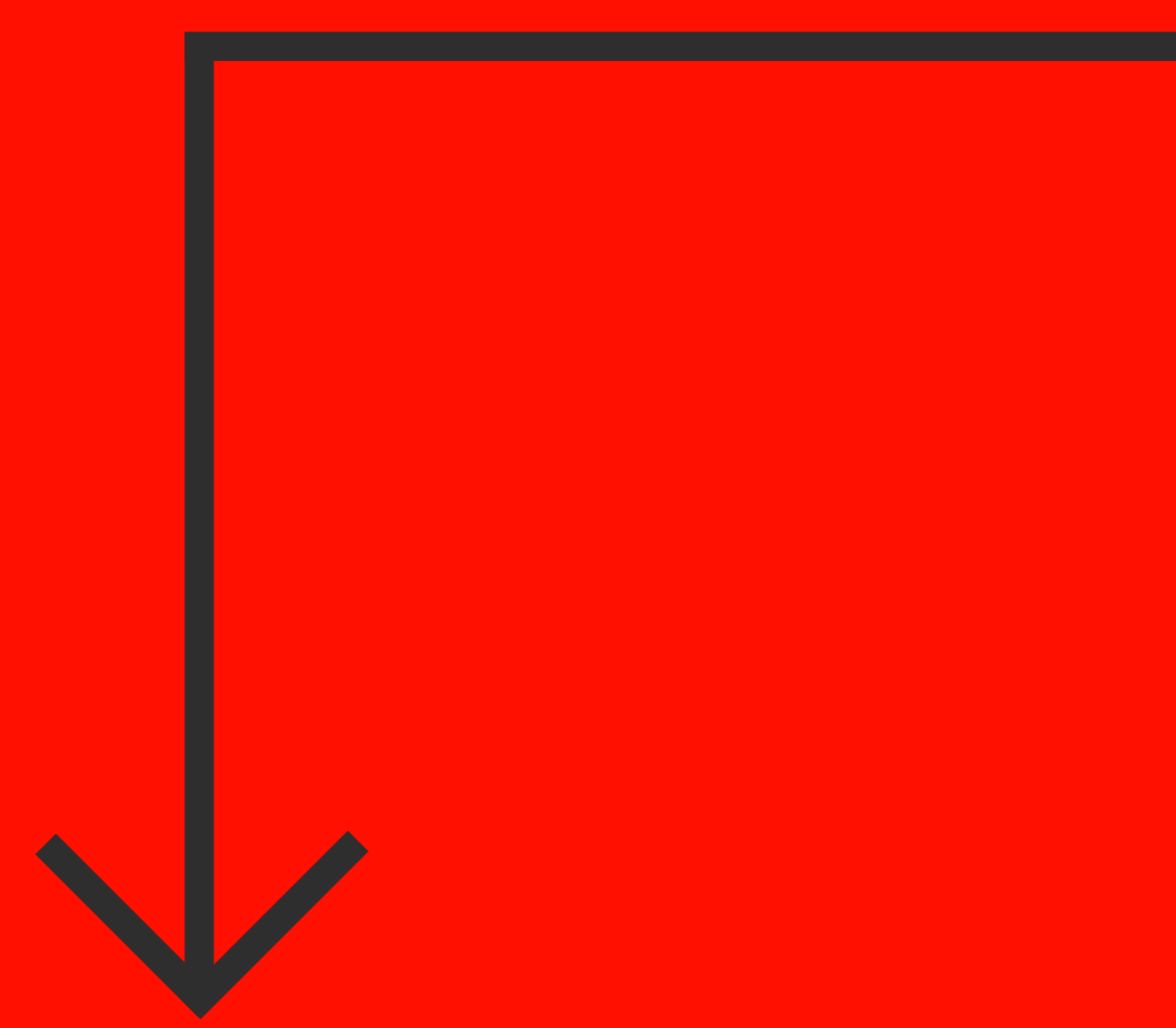
While football clubs tend to have a policy that no one player is bigger than the club, we actively encourage teams across all sports to embrace the superstar idolisation element of modern fandom. Teams such as Tottenham and especially Celtic show that by utilising the celebrity-like status of their biggest players, they can boost engagement and increase their marketability as a club to foreign fans while still retaining the support of their local fans.



Navigating the Digital Playfield

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Conclusion

## Our journey

through the digital transformation of sports consumption has revealed the immense potential and necessity of evolving fan engagement strategies. The digital playing field is no longer just a support act for live events; it is a leading player in enriching the fan experience. Future Platforms, with our human-centred approach and innovative technological solutions, has successfully demonstrated through partnerships with entities like the International Skating Union, EE at Glastonbury and Virgin Active that a seamless, personalised digital experience is pivotal in driving both engagement and commercial success.

The advent of technologies such as NFC and the rise of multi-platforms signals a new era where the power of personalisation algorithms and social media influence cannot be ignored. Data, when leveraged with sophistication and sensitivity, transcends being merely informative to becoming a transformative tool for creating deeply personalised experiences that resonate with fans on an individual level.

As we have navigated through the complexities and opportunities within the digital landscape of sports, it has become clear that the integration of innovative features, attention to user preferences, and an understanding of the unique dynamics of modern sports fandom are integral to crafting successful digital sports platforms. The digital ecosystem we envision is one that not only understands the pulse of its audience but also anticipates its desires, forging deeper connections between fans, athletes, and the sports they love.

Future Platforms stands at the forefront of this revolution, ready to guide and collaborate with sports entities looking to make that leap into a future where the digital experience is as compelling as the sport itself. Our work is defined by a commitment to excellence, a passion for innovation, and a belief in the power of sports to unite us all. Through our expertise, we empower organisations to not only meet the expectations of today's sports enthusiasts but to set new standards for tomorrow's digital engagement.

## Key takeaways

- / At a minimum, fans expect platforms to offer live sports coverage.
- / Beyond this, fans want news, stats and interactive features.
- / Club leaders should prioritise **giving fans greater personalisation** and control over their experience.
- / Clubs should also leverage athletes' celebrity status and examine overseas sports leagues for inspiration on how to modernise the fan experience.

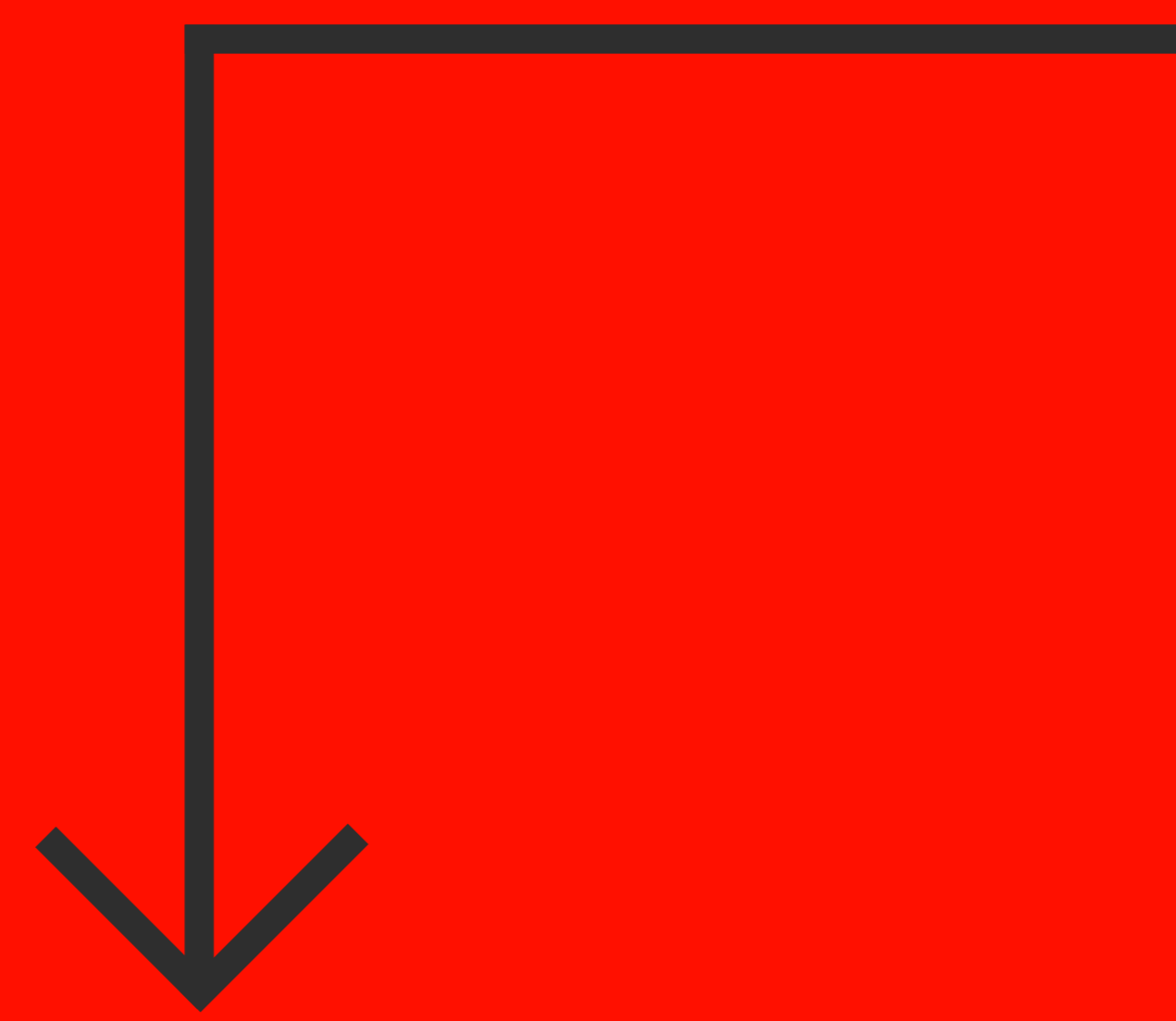
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About Future  
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**Future Platforms** is a digital product agency that offers **digital strategy, design, and engineering** for a wide range of clients across multiple industries.

As a bespoke, independent consultancy, we pride ourselves on **delivering unique solutions** for clients looking to take a big leap in improving their customer experience and finding new **revenue streams**.

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