Enhancement of Fans Experiences in Stadiums through better Facility Management

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Abstract

Background: Where there is a sport, there are fans. Fans are the heartbeat of any sport as they tend to motivate players on the fields, during a live match. Their emotions are involved with players, teams, and countries. The objective of this study was to generate ideas and strategies that a facility can acquire, that fulfil the requirements and expectations of fans, which will make them visit the facility.

Methods: In making this possible, five closed group discussions have held, where the participants shared their insights as a fan. In this era of advanced trending technologies and digital transformation, connecting with fans has made it easy and, their expectations can be met.

Conclusion: The discussions were made to get a deep understanding of the fans' experience in a stadium and also focus on uplifting their belief in the future through better facility management and quality services, based on which meaningful conclusion had formed, that a facility can transform.

Keywords: Engagement, Live experiences, Motivation, Spectator expectations, Stadiums

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1. Introduction:

Sport plays a very vital role in our life. To choose one, an individual firstly develops an interest in that sport, based on which they love to play and follow the same, that teaches them immense values and helps in develop as individuals. In this process, they become the ‘fan’ of that particular sport, not only that they see for some professional athlete or sportsperson of that sport, but to which they can look after and get motivated. It urges them to be like their favorite sportsperson, eventually ending in becoming their fans. Another reason for this interest in the sports fan is in terms of fans as consumers(1).

Fans are the heartbeat of any sport. They show great interest in the game and feel motivated by coming to the stadiums to watch live matches and to support their team or their favorite player. Sports fans often wish to get real-time information in their hands, to which they can relate to(2). Fans’ involvement in the live-game inside a stadium provides a great sense of boost in the performance of the players and teams. Imagine a stadium without fans and players on the ground, dead environment will be there around the arena.

In the sports industry, a stadium is a venue in which sport consumers experience sports through physical presence(3). The sport consumers here refer to the fans who look forward to being a part of the events around the globe, some travel through different countries to support their team and show their affection, passion, and love for the game(4).

The happening of a sporting event through all five senses generates excitement within people around the stadium, which encourages sports fans to attend more live events rather than watching the same live events over Television\(^{(5)}\).

Taking the experiences of sports consumers into consideration, it becomes very crucial to understand the requirements and expectations of these fans, who travel from long distances to be a part of the game. They are the ones who choose to spend such large amounts on the tickets to watch live and feel that environment in stadiums that are not quite possible watching on Television at home.

The reason behind it can be the social involvement that encourages the participation of sport consumers as fans in the stadiums. A seat inside a stadium offers a dynamic atmosphere where, in addition to watching the game, attendees can hear the uproar of the crowd and feel the thunder of the stadium, engaging in a more memorable experience compared to watching the games broadcast from home\(^{(6)}\). The increased participation of sports consumers in stadiums around the globe and particularly in India, over the past few years, has led to change and upgrade the infrastructure development to uphold, maintain, and fulfill the expectations of fans.

Some measures such as broadening the dimensions of fields, increasing the capacity of stadiums, construction of new era stadiums is not sufficient. For example, Motera Stadium in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. When there is a shift in the thinking process that focuses mainly on the attitude of sports fans', then only the enrichment of a fans' experience in sports facilities can be achieved.

Through the introduction of technologies, a whole new experience for fans can help in increasing the engagement level towards the game and players, relating to sentiments of fans, keeping an eye on their reactions, satisfactory services by meeting the comfort level at the time of gameplay. To facilitate spectator involvement, many facilities have turned to technology and applications further involve spectators. With the use of advanced technology and their adaptation would help in exploring in terms of spectator experiences, by sharing their experiences using technology\(^{(7)}\).

Nowadays, fans look for In-stadium experiences, such as live video streaming and replays over big screens which create intuitions and engage them in a way where fans find themselves playing or are a part of the team\(^{(2)}\).

The other things that fans usually think of is the security and safety inside and outside stadiums are the facilities capable of handling the crowd at one moment. In this work, one can think of developing Smart Stadiums, which will propose to adapt to the changing environment and technologies, particularly in Smart cities.

The Smart Stadium concept proposes that a sports stadium can get transformed into a dynamic testbed for technologies, smart sensing, and information delivery and services in an environment that stands many of the same challenges presented by Smart cities, at a smaller scale\(^{(6)}\).

Government and Sports Associations or private partners should develop a model, such as PPP, which would work towards improving the facility infrastructure, adapting technology-driven services, enhancing fans’ experiences in stadiums, quality services, hiring professionals, redeveloping the existing facilities to meet the present requirements and adapt to the futuristic approach.

The globalization of sport has historically proven as a necessary factor in the cultural, social, and economic relations between societies\(^{(6)}\). Elements that a game includes for fans are being at the game with friends, cheering and chanting along with the crowd, drinking and eating at the stalls, dressing up in merchandises to support your favorites, and sharing emotional and dramatically engaging experiences during the event of the game\(^{(8)}\).

The objective of this study was to utilize the experiences of fans as well as the expectations that they pertain, that can be applicable or beneficial for the sports facilities to undertake or meet. There is a need to focus on the necessities and compulsion of fans. By keeping ourselves in their shoes
and experiencing the environment, the difficulties they face while coming to the stadiums, or while sitting in stadiums.

2. Material & methods:
   a) Selection of the participants

   Based on the research topic Enhancement of Fans Experience in Stadium through better Facility Management, the participants selected for discussion were regular in visiting sports in stadiums in their city or state. The age of these participants ranged from 20 - 30 years (24; ±1.28). The meeting took into five focus groups, consisting of 7-8 members in each group.

   b) Selection of the variables

   The participants got selected through the purposive technique through some personal contacts. In the process of identifying the alternatives for betterment or enhancing the experience of fans in a stadium, the two variables one, dependent variable, which was the Enhancement of Fans’ experience in stadiums and two, independent variable, which was the participant’s age, gender, beliefs.

   In this paper, the qualitative method had applied to reveal the essential standpoint of the participants that were part of the focused group discussion.

   c) Data Collection

   The discussion has held over the Zoom application, an online meeting platform. The Id and passwords were with the participants for being part of the meeting. Due to the pandemic situation of COVID 19, prevailing at the time of this study, a virtual or online meeting was the best alternative to happen. A brief discussion was made on the topic, emphasizing the issues related to the stadiums and facilities management and the service rendered at the venues for the fans on the game day.

   The concept behind it was to approach the people to seek their views, beliefs, and experiences as a fan inside a stadium. To generate a meaningful approach in the enhancement of fans and some insights of fans' preferences can be showcased by the study to the maximum extent.

   They were allowed to give their opinions and suggestions based on the questions asked to them. This process was done by grouping to establish constructive responses from the participants. Eight questions got asked and discussed, and after a healthy discussion on the topic, the participants were able to exhibit their expectations, which they expect from the sports facilities in their city, state, and around the country. Stadium satisfaction plays a crucial role in making the fans to bring them back to visit, the facility again whenever the sport is in action.

   Some of the essence that focused on and highlighted the discussion was fans centric approach, environmental influence, better quality services, hygiene perspective, and infrastructure. These elements are significantly relevant for enhancing the expectations and experiences of fans in a stadium.

   In achieving the utmost satisfaction, the prime objectives of the facility management should be to fulfill the required gap between the expectations and experience the fans can have in a sports arena.

3. Results and Discussion:

   Looking forward to enhancing the fan experience, advanced technologies, and methodology have found a home in a new era of the sports arenas, as stadiums usually become the place where people socially interact with society to celebrate unique experiences. Smart stadiums initiative for smart living people by various technologies and applications have led the cities to form the smarter stadia or restructure the existing facility with world-class potential. Experiences, whether it is inside or outside a stadium, are the only criteria for fans to make them visit again to a facility.

   Stadium operators across the country and globe are all too aware that for all of the exciting moments they wish to deliver, getting fans in the seats is becoming exponentially challenging. It becomes very crucial as a venue operator to conduct an event in such a way that fans get involved and interact with the facilities and services which they can have access to and make the most use of...
It requires a lot to make the fans triggered, of the ways to be ensuring better services. Usually, sports venue operators spend a lot to win over the fans’ expectations, and to do these, they need to adapt to the changes and transform into advanced technologies.

Recent trends have seen that digital transformation is helping sports franchises give their fans newer and better ways to interact with their teams, which is appealing from a fan perspective. Adapting to the digital platforms for keeping the fans engaged with different sorts of audio-visual content and interaction with fans allows fans experience to be more frequent, long-lasting, and higher reach.

As in India, cricket is being dominant among the other sports. The stadiums are filled with the thrilling crowd whenever there is a match across the country, considering ODI, Tests, T20, and IPL in cricket, which was the turning point for the Indian public to experience some unexpected scenarios making a whole a lot of difference from a fans point of view. Other sports leagues, as ISL, PKL, have gained momentum in catching the eyeballs and making fans’ experience a different version of sports.

Connecting with fans on an emotional level can be very powerful and can put a stronghold on their sentiments. There is an emotional connection for many fans who are so connected to the sport, club, team that they follow. It allows them to experience a whole lot of exciting moments throughout the game, where they feel ups and downs scenarios as their heartbeats fluctuate when watching the action-packed games and thus expect to obtain some level of engagement. In achieving the requirement of the fan's needs, two close-group discussions carried where some of the criteria under which the participant's emphasis was as follows; parking space, service quality, seating comfort, food and beverages, ease on entry, internet accessibility, etc. The questions that discussed are:

1: What are the sports that you attend most regularly?
2: How would you rate the state facilities from 1 to 10?
3: How much would you spend per game to watch a match live in the stadium?
4: What a fan expects while visiting Stadiums during the game day?
5: Are facilities focusing on the requirements that are indeed important from the fans’ perspective, what are those requirements?
6: How do facilities management assist in making the fans experience in such a manner that makes fans visit again in the stadium?
7: How will technology improvement benefit the fans’ experience in a stadium?
8: As a fan, what are your future expectations that a stadium should adapt to provide a better experience for the fans?

These questions were required to be taken into consideration in discussions to mainly understand the expectations of sports consumers that come together in huge numbers into a stadium. There is a demand amongst the sports consumers to create a sense of home for the fans in the stadiums, which will provide fans to live the moments with their loved ones. Social interaction strategy can build positive relations among the fans, eventually making them enrolled in some fan clubs and getting themselves involved more with the players and sport.

The very first question that the participants made to respond to was on the sports that they attend most regularly and to that Cricket is the sport that participants as a fan attend most regularly. Because, in India, Cricket is the most dominant sport among all other sports and second, comes the Football that fans enjoy watching.
Figure 1. Sports attended by the participants

Figure 1 shows the sports attended by the participants and with 60% Cricket is mostly attended then comes Football and in Others, sports such as Badminton, Tennis, Hockey, etc.

Further, the participants were allowed to rate their state sports facilities out of ten (one as lowest, and ten as highest), which they have visited or participated as a player in that sports facility or venue. To which the responses were merely average. About 55% of the participants have rated their state facilities to 5 or (≤) 5. The reason being that sports facilities lack maintaining the infrastructure and not much importance given to the basics amenities. That shows the status of the facilities in states. The other 45% of participants, who rated the sports facilities in their State, were concerned and suggested that a lot of improvement is required. The service quality at each stadium is needed to be of a world-class that can accommodate huge crowds.

Solutions for the same was the primary objective of this study to create awareness and opportunity for all the facility management, sports ministries, and associations. The infrastructure for Cricket has developed at nearly every corner in the country and, only some are of international standards. However, the facilities for other sports are not likely the same. The stadiums situated on the outskirts of the city results in loosening the connection with the people. Long traveling, heavy traffic, parking issues, security management and system, waste management, restrooms, premium seating are some of the elements that need to practice and acquired by the facility.

Based on the third question, that was how much as a fan would the participants will be overspending on tickets per game, ranging from rupees 500 to 10,000. The majority of the participants were in favor of having experience in stadiums like never experienced before, as they spend ample money to buy tickets and, all they wish to receive is satisfaction and entertainment throughout the game. About 80% of the participants average spend One Thousand and Five Hundred Rupees (Rs. 1,500) for a ticket. They love to watch live matches and cherish those moments with loved ones. Otherwise, they will enjoy watching on Television rather than spending a massive amount to come to the stadium. Their convenience is what matters the most inside a facility. The interpretation for the responses has been showcase through the following line graph:
Figure 2. Participants spending per game for buying tickets

The fourth question comprises of the expectations that a fan has while visiting the stadium over which the participant shared their views. Serving as a helping hand at every step creates a sense of importance within the fans. Staff and volunteers positioned around the ground or even outside the sports arena should examine in accommodating the fans’ demand and necessity. Serving fans’ firsts should be the priority for the facility management and system.

Countering the fifth question, about 81% of the participants agree that facilities do not focus on the requirements that are important from the fans’ perspective, represented through the below pie chart.

Figure 3. Facilities do not focus on the requirements

It is indeed essential to keep a check over the possible necessities for fans well before the match day and even during the event. Based on the beliefs of participants and knowing their views as fans, it was essential to recognize the future expectations of the participants from the facility management to which they can consider for making and enhancing the fan’s experience exceptional.

The eighth and the last question comprised of the future expectations that participants as fans pertain and would like the stadiums to adopt to enhance the fan’s experience to the next level benefitting the fans. The participants in their responses suggested and provided their views on future expectations as follows.

**Future Expectations**

**VR/AR:** Bringing and participating in virtual reality (VR)/augmented reality (AR) to the fans. These technologies provide fans with an immersive experience as if they are the players on the field. Having booths in and around the stadium will attract more fans to try their hands on this new experience. AR/VR platform can provide an immersive experience for sports events, interacting...
with a variety of devices to enhance the experience. 3D cameras can enable real-time visualization in stadiums\(^{(11)}\).

Cashless: Going cashless is one of the most accepted digital upgrades that venues may be able to look into in the coming years. Tickets sales at gates will get out lifted, and online payment or transaction should get implemented. Even at the outlets for food and beverages, fans can pay through QR code scan, and payment feasibly initiated.

WI-FI: Having upgrades (5G), will provide better connectivity, meaning fans can stream, download apps in no time. They will have no issue in surfing real-time information and stats about players. Experiences such as lightning-fast to enable images of the action to share with friends and on social media, as well as share their photos, videos, over social media handles benefiting the facility as well as provide all the infrastructure support of broadcasting and internal communications. The demand for 4G and 5G standardization wireless bandwidth are gaining that can also truly meet the purposes of fans and can scale up the experience\(^{(12)}\).

Biometric screening: It helps in reducing long wait times. Many tech companies have been coming up with solutions to bring greater convenience to the stadiums. The biometric will allow the fans to enter the stadium without any halts. They can be seated in a quick time as earlier. Fans can display their tickets on smartphones and messages for non-smartphone users.

Fan tracking and apps: There is a way to bring fans in and keep them. Through the tracking system, the management can help in making the life of the fans easier at every step of the way is what will keep them coming back. They want to feel the energy and intensity of the crowd in real-time. The app complements and personalizes their experience with interactive maps, mobile check-in over social media, several offers, rewards on purchasing from outlets, and exclusive content. And also, pedestrian access and car park availability can be checked from the app before one leaves home to attend stadium for huge events, which can trigger ease in the movement.

AI: New AI platforms in the market are now that is allowing fans the opportunity to communicate with their favorite teams via automatic chatbots. Through this, a fan can experience real-time conversations on different tactics and strategies. The whole new experience will lead to boost the feelings of fans.

Traffic: Navigating traffic and parking near and around the stadium, arriving hassle-free and get destressed is what fans wish. In the past, the public often struggles to find park places and causes hours of public traffic and delays. Nevertheless, these days are becoming less common. It is essential to keep track of public transport and traffic movements.

Making the experience profound, the facility can add a retractable all-weather roof and install seats that vibrate as the action on the field intensifies, with built-in USB ports\(^{(13)}\). A glass-walled tunnel so you can see the players before the game. A skywalk, allowing the fans to clamber over the roof of the stadiums, just by having that image excites most of us, then how will it feels when it gets implemented.

Customizing the experience and making the fan feel like it’s their seat, their bay, and their team. Imagine the visual impact if crowds would turn their smartphones around, through a unique modifier, each phone could act as a pixel, creating waves of color and imagery around the stadium. Therefore, adopting an intelligent building management system considering ventilation, air quality, room spaces, electrical system would benefit.

Proper department staffing would reflect in fruitful results and also the training of all the personnel who implied to manage huge crowds\(^{(14)}\). Some may manage the venue by outsourcing several departments such as food and beverages, security, pest control, custodial, etc.

The memories made through experiencing triumph in stadiums, watching heroes playing live, and being inspired by them, witnessing a crowd lift a player or team can get formed from a very young age, can lead to life-long memories. It tends to motivate youngsters to out show their talent and skills to see themselves at the top position. Fans are willing to pay money for the purchase of tickets to experience the live event and have a glimpse of players.
Their experience would get special if they are allowed and made aware of different facilities that they can take advantage of and use for their adventure. It mainly requires a sense of acceptance and importance where they feel like real fans who are present to cheer for their players and teams.

4. Conclusion:

The objective of this study was to highlight the expectations of fans from a stadium or facility management to improve the existing facilities as well as future projects that should mainly focus on enhancing the fans’ experience in the stadium.

Fans, the most prominent stakeholders of the sports, need to be given world-class services. Fans are bind with their favorite sport, team, and players emotionally, they look for ways through which they can come closer to their favorites. They make the result of the game as their result, whether a win or a loss. They would wear the team and country jerseys to feel that same intensity as of like the players. They tend to write quotes and messages on chart sheets, carry them into the stadium to express their love for the team and players. Their energy level tends to hike with a glimpse of watching their favorite players plating right in front of them. Fans are the main drivers behind the growth of sports, so are their demand; fans are no longer limited to the experiences inside a stadium nowadays, they look for a great package around the arena as well.

Use of advanced technology that relates to the fans in making the experience and connects with the sport by watching live. New capabilities such as automated replay generations, high tech consumer devices, seat upgrades, parking availability near the stadiums, surround sound systems, tools for engagement perspective, a personalized technique for shorter lines, and directions to navigate. Wi-Fi networks for fans to access, enabling cashless payments, smartphone applications, in-stadium sensors for safety and security, use of social media, etc. Therefore, more convenience and accessibility for the fans should be considered as crucial aspects to fulfill their expectations, to make them feel satisfied.

Developing infrastructure is not only the purpose but special attention and focus are to put on such matters where only through everyone’s cooperation, a sports facility can operate successfully. Stadia are already often truly jaw-dropping and can be even more so!

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