

“From offline to online media: engaging French professional basketball fans on a new playing field”

Dissertation submitted in part fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master in Sciences of Marketing – Level 9 at



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18 200 words

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

SIG : Strasbourg Ilkirch Graffenstaden

LNB : Ligne National de Basket

BCL : Basketball Champions League

FFBB : Fédération Française de Basketball

Jeep Elite®: name of the French basketball championship since the 1st March 2018 after the sponsoring of the brand Jeep.

PRO A: highest level of French professional basketball (the second level is PRO B)

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DECLARATION

I, Jessica SCHNEIDER, declare that this research is my original work and that it has never been presented to any institution or university for the award of Degree or Diploma. In addition, I have referenced correctly all literature and sources used in this work and this work is fully compliant with the Dublin Business School's academic honesty policy.

Signed: Jessica SCHNEIDER

Date: 25 / 12 / 18



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thanks my parents for offering me the opportunity to take Master courses at Dublin Business School. To me, going study abroad for the last of my 5 years as a student was an honoring culmination. Thus, I am truly grateful for their help and support in my studies but also through all my life.

Secondly, I wish to thanks my supervisor, Gary Bernie, for bringing his guidance, advices and expertise for this dissertation.

I would like to thank all the people who volunteered and took time to take part to my research study. Also, I'm thankful for the collaboration, professionalism and support of SIG organization.

Finally, I wish to dedicate my dissertation to Strasbourg, my lovely hometown city which has been through a terrible attack mid December. Hoping that peace will triumph and that sport will always participate to unify and gather people around the beautiful values it promotes.

ABSTRACT

"The DNA of the game allows the optimization of the broadcast: basketball is the sport that lends itself best to digitalization, there are actions every 24 seconds". A. Béral (2018)

The way sports fans attend a game or support their favorite team has shifted over the past 30 years with digital. More specifically, professional French basketball clubs have recently undertaken this transformation in communications. Indeed, traditional media as TV, radio and press has limitations when it comes to the fan experience. Therefore, new media appeared as a solution to sports marketers by supplementing offline.

In this way, sport fans classifications would be complex as some are engaged with a team watching the game on TV, others by deeply analyzing players' statistics online. Also, some attend games on a regular basis whereas some only attend games on special occasions.

Thus, experts in the field agree that creating superior consumer experiences across multiple channels is emerging as an important issue to build their fan base, increase loyalty and purchase frequency by fans. Then, "a multichannel marketing strategy has the capacity to enable professional sport organizations (sporting teams) the opportunity to foster fan (i.e., consumer) loyalty by increasing fan contact points in physical and virtual settings (i.e., marketspaces)" (J. Carlson & A. O'Cass, 2012).

By this way, the purpose of this paper is to explore how basketball clubs manage and combine off and online strategies to improve fans engagement and their overall experience.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context for the Proposed Research

The symbiosis of media and sport is a defining characteristic of sporting events as well as fan's engagement to their favorite teams. However, this fascinating subject has expanded with its time and matured by adapting itself to our high tech turbulent environment.

For half a century, sports fans and viewers saw television as the most immediate and appealing means by which entertainment and news was delivered (B. Hutchins and D. Rowe, 2012). The sporting event is a colorful live spectacle in which dramatic actions may happen at any moment. Fans at home, in front of their TV screens are passive spectators. Even if supplemented technologies enhanced their experience over time, we witnessed a fundamental shift in broadcast media and the global media industry which is challenged by the increasing of online media via the Internet and World Wide Web. Indeed, with platforms and content strategies rapidly evolving, traditional media (TV, press, radio...) no longer holds the same relevance as it once did for sports fans. Nowadays, they are complicated by their interaction with online audiovisual platforms. The digital age embodies a challenge for the hegemony of television for instance, which can be "alternatively bypassed and complemented by online media" (D. Rowe, 2012).

The complementarity of online and offline media is explored by authors as P. Vann (2014) who stated that "the perishability of a sporting event and the fan's emotional thrills that goes with led to the advent of new media, acting as "second screens". By embracing online media, professional leagues allow both a game extension and the opportunity to unify the sport fan experience. But how do professional clubs accommodate such radical paradigm shift? In which way do they meet the challenge of supplementing offline with online media to enhance the fan's experience?

The research will focus on the French basketball league (LNB) and more precisely on the club of Strasbourg: SIG. In 2018, with an average of 5 800 spectators (capacity: 6 200) in their stadium named "Rhénus", SIG recorded the best affluence of french professional basketball during the regular season (SIG Statistics, 2018). Winner of French Cup in 2018, the club is one of the most followed on social media during both French and European (BCL) championships. Moreover, it is the most broadcasted team of PRO A championship named JeepElite. An analysis of how the club manages to engage fans with the event, the team and the game on media before and after the starting bell whistle will be led.

How do French professional basketball clubs engage fans on a new playing field across both offline and online strategies?

1.2 Aims for the Proposed Research

Through this dissertation, the researcher will study the reconfiguration process of the spectatorship experience through the complementary relationship of offline and online media. Thus, to answer the research question above, the researcher will cover SMART objectives listed below:

- *Objective 1:* The objective of this dissertation is to analyze the engagement of fans in the context of the club SIG Strasbourg.
- *Objective 2:* The research will also explain the role of the SIG team identification when it comes to enhance fans engagement.
- *Objective 3:* One of the research objectives will be to focus on offline communications in sports and investigate the SIG fans engagement to them.
- *Objective 4:* Along with objective 4, an investigation of SIG fans engagement to online Medias will be done.
- *Objective 5:* The last objective of the dissertation is to a analyze SIG fans' omni-channel experience and engagement considering the digital transformation of the club.

Specific	Examination of the supporter-club relationship. Opinions of SIG fans on their engagement to the team regarding offline and online media.
Measurable	The questionnaire will be both quantitative and qualitative. This will use Likert-type scale.
Achievable	Proximity of the researcher with the subject.
Realistic	Small (but strong) SIG community.
Time bound	12 weeks, Summer 2018.

TABLE 1. SMART Objectives (J.SCHNEIDER, 2018)

The compilation of objectives will be approached with the funnel method (Malhotra's, 2004). If objective 1 is a focus on SIG fans in general, objective 2 will be more specific by focusing on the identification of SIG fans. Then, with objectives 3, the researcher will start an analysis of the engagement of SIG fans offline: from traditional media to in-stadium communications. In the continuity, objective (4) will focus on SIG fans engagement with online media. At this point, the examination of the supporter-club relationship will be done. Last but not least, objective 6 will be a study on a combined strategy mixing offline and online strategy. The overall fan experience will be analyzed at this stage.

To sum up, the researcher will evaluate whether differences exist amongst groups of French basketball fans in terms of their levels of engagement towards online and offline media by focusing on SIG Strasbourg. Researches will be conducted on the basis of customer engagement – relationship marketing.

1.3 Justification for the research

1.3.1 Newness and relevance of the research

Although the importance of sports in Medias has received great attention from researchers in several matters, some specific studies still has to be done regarding the fast moving environment. Indeed, academics themselves recognize that the research area needs to be explored and investigated more deeply, especially considering the omnipresent status of both sport and media and the growing Internet.

In today context, the sports fans demand is hard to please: they ask for an up to minute news sports offering. In consequences, the contemporary media sport evolution moved from broadcast to broadband and digital media (Hutchins and al., 2012). Such a shift enables sport fans to interact in a different way with their favorite teams during both match day and non match day. Thus, if fan is not a new concept, digital fandom and digital sport consumption are emerging notions.

But, we live in an era where the online and offline world is becoming increasingly integrated. Traditional media are enhanced by new media platforms. The combination of this media correlation in sports and its effect on the fan's engagement is undeniable. However, the subject has never been yet explored by researchers.

With this dissertation, the researcher wants to consider more than the digital transformation of sport, but the omni-channel experience of fans. On the top of that, the study will be done on the experience of French professional basketball fans, which has never been analyzed in literature yet.

1.3.2 Sector's economic factors

With 681 584 federation's members, basketball is the second most important team sport and the first indoor team sport in France (FFBB, 2018). To please the 14 millions french fan's demand, French professional basketball clubs are recently taking part in the digital transition which is participating to the spread of French professional basketball.

In 2017, the LNB has equipped Pro A and Pro B with smart cameras. The initiative makes it possible to follow the ball or a star player in order to always offer more spectacles to the supporters. In professional basketball clubs as SIG, the digital transformation obliged marketers to rethink the entire fan journey including all the contacts points of the new fan experience.

For instance, in 2018, the SIG Strasbourg club launched their first brand new mobile application. These brand new opportunities definitely enhanced the spectatorship experience and enable them to create and improve their Omni-channel customer experience.

1.4 Suitability of researcher for the research

The researcher has been studying marketing for five consecutive years in ISEG Strasbourg, France. Also, as a French basketball player and SIG fan, she wanted to understand in details the fan's behavior regarding professional basketball games within France. Thanks to the work experience of the researcher in the sports field, a real interest and curiosity about the sport consumption was born. The Digital Age even made the researcher wondering if one day, fans will be watching their favorite team playing at home through virtual reality glasses instead of attending the game in the stadium.

Today, professional basketball clubs has embraced online strategies to promote their brand but still need to leverage offline methods to enhance the fan's experience. Indeed, marketers tend to forget that the essence, chore of basketball as any other sport, is the game itself.

Thereby, on the one hand, the researcher truly hopes this dissertation will embody an opportunity for the French professional basketball communications departments to enhance the fan's experience. On the other hand, on the researcher's opinion, the research will participate to allocate a stronger visibility to French basketball teams within France on Medias. Thus, her main (and ambitious) expectation will be to give to the "Ligue National de Basket" in France, the same anchorage and dynamic as the National Basketball Association in the United States.

Finally, considering the real interest of the researcher in the subject, she hopes that the dissertation will enable job opportunities in the sport field. She believes that a Fan Experience job will provide her fulfillment. Representing a professional sport organization and being responsible of the implementation of fan interaction, in game entertainment, brand marketing or external event support would completely suits the researcher.

1.5 Time, Cost and Project Management

1.5.1 Time Management

This research was conducted over a defined 12 week period from 20th May to 20th August 2018. Due to the defined timeline and the snapshot approach, a cross-sectional study was most appropriate (Saunders, 2016, p.200). It was done in the researcher's own time, outside of work.

A Gantt chart was developed highlighting all the major tasks to be performed and the timeframe for completion (Cf. Appendix 2, Time management, Gantt Chart) in order to finish within the strict 12 week period.

The individual Depth Interview (IDIs) is the starting point of primary research followed by questionnaires which embody the first part of the research phase. Then, focus groups are part of the second phase of the research as they only can be conducted once the questionnaires are administrated and analyzed.

In order to respect both the Gantt Chart and deadlines proposed by the dissertation's supervisor, the researcher had to develop strong planning skills (Cf. Chapter 7, Reflexion Chapter).

1.5.2 Cost Management

The researcher wanted to limit substantial costs during the study. For this purpose, the entire study has been led in France, home country of the researcher.

First, the IDI was performed in person in Strasbourg (France). Secondly, questionnaires were produced on Google Forms which is a free tool. The administration was done face to face directly to SIG fans during a game at home, in Strasbourg. Concerning the focus group, the researcher rent a meeting room for free in the building of her school: ISEG Marketing & Communication School in Strasbourg. Minor costs have been used to welcome participants during focus groups (food and beverage). Other resources (laptop, internet, mobile...) belong to the researcher. Finally, as all submissions are electronic, no printing or binding costs were accrued (Cf. Appendix 3, Cost management Chart).

1.5.3 Project Management

With a strict 12 week timeframe it was necessary to plan and execute this project efficiently. Even if the researcher tried to stick to her Gantt chart and sequence of tasks and activities, unexpected delays have been overcome. However, delays have been promptly recovered with valuable improvements on drafts for instance. (Cf. Appendix 4, Research Logbook).

1.6 Dissertation Roadmap

The objective of the **first chapter** of the dissertation is to give a background to the study. In this chapter, the reader will understand why the researcher chose this topic. Also, he will go through what are the motivations of the study and the objectives for the research.

The chapter two is the Literature Review. Here, the researcher will examine different academic research from global themes. This chapter will be divided in different section. The first one will focus on the customer engagement in relationship management with a subsection on engagement and technology. The second section will tackle sport fandom and sport consumption. To conclude, an analysis of Sport and the media (offline and online) will be presented. After this chapter, the reader will have a better understanding of the overall subject and will see the opportunities and the potential of the subject related to the research question and objectives.

The chapter three is the Research Methodology chapter. The methodology will argue about how the research will be conducted. The researcher will present the methods for primary research, data collection and analysis. The sample will be introduced given the focus of the study on SIG basketball club. At the end, research methodology will allow a better understanding of the angle that the researcher took for the study, how she proceeded and who were concerned.

The chapter four contains a presentation of Research findings and data analysis. Data collected in individual depth interview, questionnaires and focus group will be described. Mainly, answers will be presented in tables and graphs. For the questionnaire, the reader will get through three sections: general interest in Basketball and media habits, SIG Fandom and media engagement.

The chapter five is the discussion chapter. This chapter will allow an interpretation of the results, answering the research question and discussing the implications of findings. This detailed commentary will be organized according to research objectives.

The chapter six is a presentation of conclusions and recommendations. The researcher will draw general conclusions by summarizing her findings. Then, the second part will focus on recommendations for the sport industry, for regulatory bodies and for further research.

Finally, **chapter seven** is a Reflective chapter. The researcher will present an honest, insightful self reflection about her experiences, feelings, learning and personal development. This critical self-assessment will focus on both the dissertation and the master program.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Literature introduction

The purpose of this second chapter is to present the literature review that will be used as secondary data and will be taken as a solid foundation for this research. Several authors' opinions on the main themes of this research question and objectives will be examined and discussed in this chapter. The literature overview will be divided in three sections: Customer engagement, Sport fandom and finally the Sport & the Media.

2.2 Customer engagement

2.2.1 Definitions and concepts

Despite the extensive use of the term “engagement”, there is still a lack of literature and unexplored area regarding the evolution of brand communities.

The concept of engagement was first introduced by Kahn (1990) who studied its psychological preconditions by which customers and service providers deepen their relationship with one another. If customer engagement marketing refers to a firm's strategic efforts, customer engagement is an outcome measure of the firm's activities. For instance, Brodie and al. (2011) considers it as a customer's value addition: “consumer's spontaneous, interactive, and co-creative behaviors primarily in non transactional consumer-company exchanges to achieve his or her individual and social purposes”.

Hollebeek L. (2011) highlighted that “the level of an individual customer's motivational, brand related and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in brand interactions”. Thus, both theories converge on the holistic aspect of the customer excluding behaviors inside the core of the transaction.

Although, the conceptualization and measurement of engagement is challenging, the capture of intense, qualitatively rich experiences was the basis for the measurement approach to engagement adopted in the current research. Indeed, one of the major gaps in the literature on engagement is in empirical evidence about how it should be measured (Webster & Ho, 1997; Jacques et al., 1995).

Moreover, the ever changing media landscape pushed researchers to analyze consumer and fan engagement as a specific interactive consumer experience which has been enhanced by technology.

2.2.2 Engagement and technology

The ways consumers communicate with each other have been changing dramatically over the last decade. With the rise of social media for instance, organizations understood that effective marketing lies on Relationship marketing which contributes “to stronger brand awareness, increased understanding of consumer needs, enhanced loyalty, and added value for consumers” (Witkemper, Lim, & Waldburger, 2012, p. 172).

If some academics believe that digital helps the brand and reinforce relationships, E.C. Malthouse in *The Impact of New Media on Customer Relationships* (2010) is more tempered. If the rise of new media creates extensive opportunities (reach consumers, communicate with them, and measure their communication, browsing or purchase-related behaviors), it could also interfere with the companies’ marketing messages (pinball framework, E.C Malthouse, 2010). The disruptiveness of new media influences the construct of engagement and customer relationship. Therefore, consumers are active partners who take part in the entire organization’s management process.

However, once digital channels are well used, they enable brands (in this case, professional sport organizations) to interact with their consumers (fans) in a more personal and direct way (Ioakimidis 2010). Social media for instance, are actively contributing to value co-creation (Popp, Germelmann, & Jung, 2016) which participate to an unique, loyal relationship.

More, the fundamental insight is that engagement comes from experiencing digital (for example: a website) in a certain way. Thus, B.J. Calder and al., (2009) stated: “consumer engagement with a website is the collection of experience with the site”. Considering this theory, authors recycled it and applied the definition to any media from a magazine to television.

In this context, O'Brien & Toms (2008) examined the general term engagement regarding peoples' experiences with technology and online media. The study results indicate that "engagement is a process comprised of four distinct stages: point of engagement, period of sustained engagement, disengagement, and reengagement." For each of these stages, authors examine several attributes influencing the user engagement.

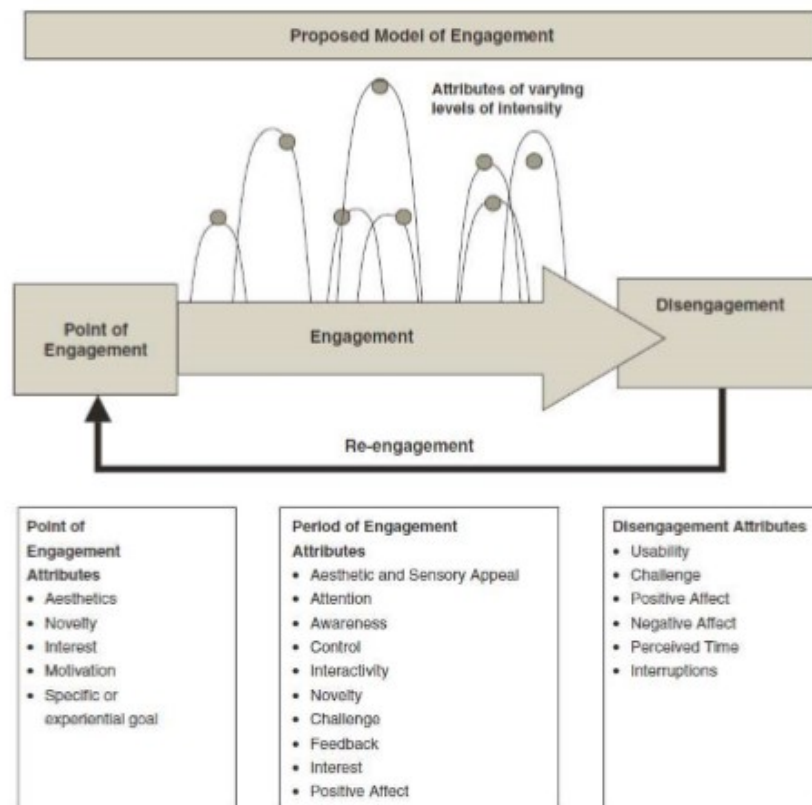


FIGURE 1.1 Proposed model of engagement and its attributes

Going beyond usability, marketers have to design more engaging experience online. Thus, O. Brien's and al. (2008) define engagement as "a quality of user experiences with technology that is characterized by challenge, aesthetic and sensory appeal, feedback, novelty, interactivity, perceived control and time, awareness, motivation, interest, and affect."

Engagement in a technological environment has also been analyzed by D. Chaffey and al. (2013) with the ladder of engagement. This digital marketing tool "is intended to show how customers can drive business (using the new social media culture) in a carefully structured way ». Thus, moving customers up the ladder creates brand loyalty and boosts sales.

2.2.3 Engagement in a sport context: fandom

Fan engagement is a specific form of customer engagement, part of relationship marketing. Considering the increasing importance of sport management in literature, many authors analyzed the sport spectator's involvement. Entertainment, escape from daily life, socialization or positive stress, there are plenty of theories on fan's motivation and engagement.

Concerning the core of the sport fan engagement, many other constructs have been developed in the sport management literature: fan loyalty, psychological connection to team, team identity, fan identification (see 3.2) etc.

In any case, sport organizations are particularly interested in the cognitive, affective, and behavioral (i.e., engagement) responses of their fans.

In the first place, a clear definition of fan engagement is needed. Thereby, Hunt et al., (1999) explains that sport fans' engagement in following their favorite teams includes attending sporting events, watching games on television, purchasing a number of team products, reading sport magazines and newspapers, and talking with others about sport. If by their behaviors, fans benefit their team, more recently, Yoshida and al. (2014) went even further by demonstrating that fans also benefit other fans. Indeed, besides the emotional connection with the sport, fans choose a sporting event to socialize. According to Eastman and Land (1997), social interactions unify the participants and create a community in which participants identify themselves.

Moreover, researchers suggested that sport fans do not only develop vertical ties to their team (team identification), but also horizontal ties to other team fans (Katz & Heere, 2013). These two aspects are part of engagement in a sport context. Hence, this fan community and sport fans in general generates social and commercial currency to the benefit of a sport club, expands the reach of such club's brand and enhances the overall success of the club.

Also, Yoshida and al., (2014) stated that "the construct of fan engagement consists of three defining attributes: management cooperation, pro-social behavior, and performance tolerance." Engagement, under this definition, arises out of the different ways in which a product or service is experienced (see Sport fan, part 2.3). Similarly, this definition highlights the particularity of the concept of engagement: its multidimensionality.

With its complexity, sport fan engagement is a fascinating subject explored by academics and practitioners.

2.3 Sport fan

2.3.1 Definitions and concepts

The development of the sport industry and the commercialization of professional team sport clubs have resulted in the importance of a stable and strong fan base as an imperative driver of a team's competitive advantage. As the sport fan is the core of the fandom phenomenon, authors analyzed their characteristics.

First and foremost, sport fans are directly related to consumption as they are seen as consumers (Crawford, 2004).

To this extend, authors as F. W. Stander & L. T. de Beer (2016) stated that "The supporter (or fan) is often classified as an important partner in the context of achieving industry growth and development in the realm of professional sport". Researchers agreed on the social and commercial influences of fans on professional clubs, as key commercial partners. In consequences, "the sport fans generate social and commercial currency to the benefit of a sport club".

By contrast, Wann et al. (2001) defined sport fans with no allusion to the commercial aspect of a professional sport club as an organization. Indeed, they stated: "Fans do not represent mere spectators to or watchers of sport, but rather a fraternity of people who diligently and over a prolonged period of time display their allegiance to a specific sport team of which they are fervent supporters".

Going even further, DeGaris (2015) analyzed the sport fan's consumption and behavior. More than simply an attendance to a game in a stadium, sports marketing is about creating "brand experiences" and catering to not only what the product itself is, but how the consumer (the fan) perceives the brand, not just how it is experienced. As a matter of fact, sport fans are not just consumers. If authors as Toffler (2006) categorize them as "prosumers", DeGaris (2015) stated that "they are the product".

2.3.2 Fan identification

Fan and team identification literature are largely driven by the work of Daniel Wann. Indeed, the author (2004) claimed that that one of the most important benefits of team identification is socialization.

On the one hand, Team identification is recognized as a phenomenon associated with sport consumption. It refers to a sport fan's perceived connectedness to a sport team and the tendency to experience the team's successes and failures as one's own (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). On another hand, fan identification refers to "the personal commitments and emotional involvement customers have with a sport organization" (W.A Sutton, 1997).

Bhattacharya, Rao & Glynn (1995) have noted that the consumers feel like they are part of the organization the more identified they become and the more likely they are to form a lasting relationship with the organization. To illustrate those thoughts, authors construct a conceptual framework for fan identification.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Fan Identification

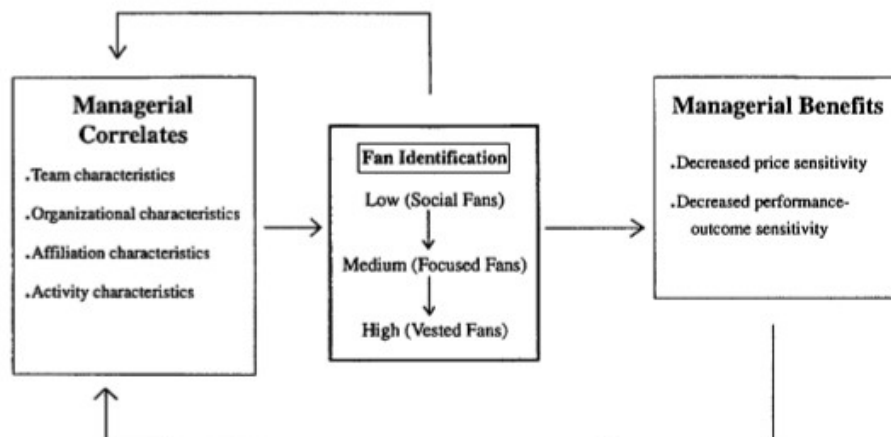


FIGURE 2.1 FAN IDENTIFICATION FRAMEWORK - Bhattacharya, Rao & Glynn, 1995

To better understand the framework, we can resume that each level of the 3 fan identification results from different behavior. Social fans or fans low involvement fans have passive relationship with a team are likely attracted for the entertainment, social interaction opportunities, or stress-relieving qualities. On the contrary, vested fans are highly involved with a team. They can be extremely loyal (on short or long-term) and hold a particular team as central to their identity.

Other authors as Hunt et al. identify five different types of fans: Temporary, local, devoted, fanatical, and dysfunctional (1999). Each type of fan possesses a different level of attachment and spectatorship to a sports team which lead to various independent behaviors.

Further, literature is full of theories on identification motives in team sports. Several researchers have suggested that there are certain psychological motives that are related to fan identification (Fink et al., 2002; Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995). Fink et al. (2002) identified nine motives that were based upon social and psychological needs: team effort, team affiliation, vicarious achievement, entertainment, drama, physical skills, escape, aesthetics, social interaction and family. All of them are predictive for team identification.

Also, research have shown that interactions between teams and fans through social media can create desirable outcomes for sport organizations (Hambrick et al. 2010) including increased levels of fan identification. Embracing social media will enable the team to build a stronger connection with fans. Simultaneously, fans will strengthen their identification with the team.

2.4 Sport & the media

2.4.1 Definitions and concepts

As Vivek and al, (2012) highlighted, consumer engagement has shifted with the reconfiguration process of advertising. Indeed, as mentioned in the previous part, engagement definitions also tackle its dimensionality. Heath R. (2007) argued that it can be either uni-dimensional or multi-dimensional.

2.4.2 Offline and online

“Experiences explain why someone uses media” E. Malthouse (2010)

Regarding the particular rapid advances in media technology, organizations have no choice than to rethink their marketing mix strategy.

Traditionally, communalism was underpinned by activities that were centered on pubs, stadiums, offline social networks and fanzones. Since the advent of television, sport fans gathered to enjoy the game. However, traditional media is all about reach (Hannah R., and al., 2011). In other words, “marketing can no longer solely be about capturing attention via reach; instead, marketers must focus on both capturing and continuing attention via engagement”.

Thus nowadays, traditional marketing as an offline form of advertising used to promote sales (e.g. television advertising, product sampling, and in-store promotion) is associated to online marketing.

Indeed, according to Dumistrescu et al. (2012), the digital era is a “consistent provider of customer experiences, where customers are empowered and engaging in different online tools that companies provide for personalized and co created experiences”.

Digital technology has also impacted the way consumers behave as the customer becomes a user. Although, companies are “responding to these changes with a more complex media mix whose integration of old and new media which makes it possible to increase impact on consumers by breaking through the clutter and engaging with them through interaction, participation, entertainment and innovative creativity” (Gambetti, R. & Graffigna, G., 2010). Ali Acar O. and Puntoni S. (2016) analyzed this changing demand as the empowerment of the consumer.

Besides, marketing actions can have synergistic effects enhancing the effect of one media through the effect of another media (Assael 2011). Early on in the digital age, many marketers used traditional media as radio, television and print to drive visitors to their Web sites, leading to research on the interaction between online and offline exposure. Thus, the general complementarity of both offline and online media (web, social media...) has been analyzed by a few authors. Kaplan and al., (2010) wrote that organizations “prefer to converge digital marketing communication efforts with traditional marketing communication activities.”

Rather than taking an all or nothing approach, it appears that a multi-channel approach will be explored. Indeed, in recent literature, authors don't study anymore online and offline as separate cohorts or segments, but as interrelated channels.

2.5 Omnichannel experience

The Omnichannel approach offers the ability to marketers to provide the consistent experience to customers by converging their 'offline and online' channels.

2.5.1 Experience, definitions and concept

In order to approach and understand the omnichannel experience in the best conditions, an explanatory introduction is necessary. A clear definition of *experiences* has been provided by Arnould et al. (2004). Indeed, they are seen as the products or services' impressions to people, i.e. the perception of the feelings information. Thus, the author has categorized the consumption experience in four main customer/product interaction moments:

1. Pre-purchasing experience, it is the phase in which the consumer starts to build expectations based on the found information.
2. Purchasing experience in which the customer starts to face stimuli. In this phase, the firm should be able to transmit positive feelings and emotions.
3. Consumption experience that starts immediately after the purchasing; the customer is in a direct relation with the product.
4. Memory of the experience which is the phase that is able to influence new behaviors.

To this extend, authors as Neslin (2006) assume that "the customer progresses through need recognition, information search, purchase, and after-sales service". The customer then searches various channels for information.

2.5.2 Omni channel sport experience

In a sport context, according to P. Vann (2014), "Social media is now an integral part of modern sports broadcasting, which combines old and new media into a redefined and multidimensional experience for fans".

In other words, "new media technology is artificially trying to produce the Feel or having been there as participant or spectator" (D. Rowe, 2004). Sport followers have the power to access to an up to minute offering. With internet and smart cameras, they have the opportunity to watch the game on any angle they want. Indeed, the internet has enable an extension of the game and feed fans appetite by providing to them dialogue and information with professional sport organizations.

So, nowadays traditional broadcast and old media still play a significant role in connecting sports fans to professional sport clubs, though it is now enhanced by new media platforms. Digital oriented professional sport organization are connecting the customers with their

gameday journey and staying in touch as fans move from mobile, to online, to print, to interaction with people (Knowledge@Wharton, 2016). Omni-channel therefore plays a very important role in clubs' digital transformation to create a seamless experience across multiple channels.

Indeed, the digital transformation of sports organizations obliged them to rethink the entire customer experience. Fans centrality is their guidance to enhance the fans overall journey.

Finally, digital platforms and tools (web sites, mobile, online content and social media) are acting as "second screens" to the primary broadcast via television, and are being used simultaneously by fans (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012, p. 4). Thus, the Omni-channel experience bridges the gap between those second-screen devices, and mobile sporting apps to create an unique, enhanced fan experience on match day, whether fans are in the stadium or watching at home.

2.6 Literature conclusion

Throughout the literature review chapter, the definitions and main aspects of the customer engagement were analyzed and compared to different authors' opinions. The basic foundations of marketing and communications such as relationship marketing and offline/online media were stated in order to make a connection with the main topic of this research.

Indeed, the terms of sports fan has been studied as well as the experience and engagement of fans related to media. By the depth analysis and link of the previous notions, the sport fan omni-channel experience can be defined and understood. Then, the theory and literature will be applied to the concrete study of a professional sport organization so the objectives of the research can be covered.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction to research methodology

According to Saunders et al. (2012), methodology is the general plan used by the researcher to answer the research question and reach the objectives. For this purpose, a combination of both primary and secondary research will be undertaken to answer the research question: How do French professional basketball clubs engage fans on a new playing field across both offline and online strategies?

A rational and clear research methodology will enable the research to cover the research objectives as follow:

- O1: The objective of this dissertation is to analyze the engagement of fans in the context of the club SIG Strasbourg.
- O2. The research will also explain the role of the SIG team identification when it comes to enhance fans engagement.
- O3 One of the research objectives will be to focus on offline media in sports and investigate the SIG fans engagement to them.
- O4. Along with objective 4, we will investigate SIG fans engagement to online Medias.
- O5. The last objective of the dissertation is to a analyze SIG fans' omni-channel experience and engagement considering the digital transformation of the club.

The research methodology used in this dissertation is chosen following the model given by Saunders & Lewis, (2012) also known as “the research onion” shown in figure 1.2. This onion is a metaphor used to describe the layers of the research process.

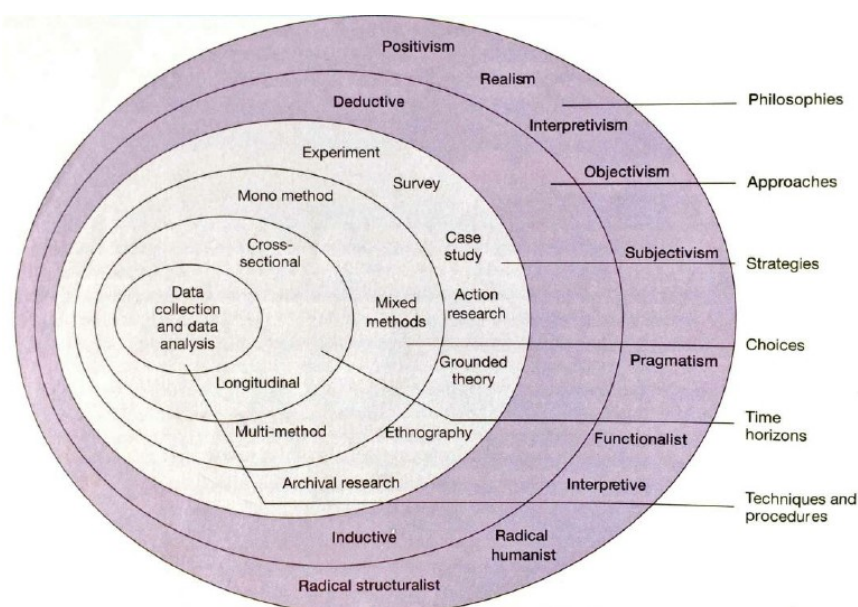


FIGURE 3.2 RESEARCH ONION, M. Saunders, P. Lewis, A. Thornhill, 2011

The aim of this third chapter is to present the research methodology, as well as to introduce the research approach, strategy, population, sample and procedures that will be used for the purpose of this dissertation. Limitations will be exposed in a final section.

3.2 Research Philosophy

A research philosophy is the first layer of the research onion and is the most crucial one. A research philosophy is a « belief or an idea about the collection, interpretation, and analysis of data collected” (Levin, 1988).

There are various philosophies explained in the research onion; the major standpoints relate to epistemology: ontology, and axiology. Each view of research philosophy also has different philosophies attached to it – the most significant are positivism, realism, interpretivism, and pragmatism, which influences the way in which the researcher thinks about the research process. Thus, the researcher will undertake Interpretivism as the research philosophy. According to Saunders and al. (2012), interpretivism is used to “understand differences between humans in our role as social actors”. Indeed, the researcher’s view of the nature of reality will be explored as a study of human behaviors and opinions by examining the sport fan’s engagement related to media.

3.3 Research Approach

Some major approaches are explained by Saunders et al. (2012): deduction, induction, and a third one abduction, a mix of both induction and deduction.

Thus, the methodology chosen for this research is the inductive process which enables to collect data and develop theory as a result of data analysis. Being particularly concern with the context of the research, the researcher will select and study a small sample of subjects. Moreover, the inductive approach is linked with the field of social science by taking into account the human being itself and its behavior.

Here are the steps of the inductive reasoning according to Bryman and al., (2010).

1. Observation
2. Pattern
3. Hypothesis
4. Theory

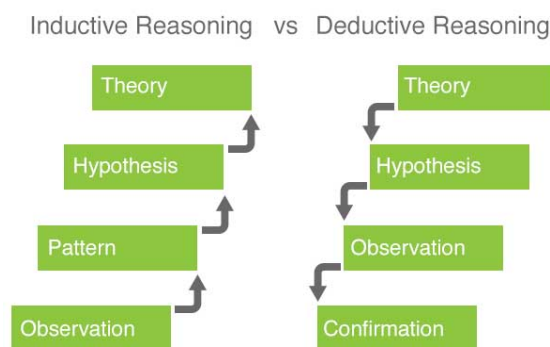


FIGURE 3.3 INDUCTIVE VS DEDUCTIVE REASONING, Bryman and al., (2010)

3.4 Research Strategy

Saunders and al. (2012) defined the research strategy as a general plan of how a researcher will go answering her/his research question. There are different types of strategy in order to know how to respond to the research question and to be coherent with research aims. The different strategies are the following: experiment, survey, archival research, case study, ethnography, action research, grounded theory and narrative theory.

In order to answer the research question: How do French professional basketball clubs engage fans on a new playing field across both offline and online strategies?

A list and justification of research methods as a strategy will be established in this section.

First, qualitative research will constitute the first step of the dissertation's research design.

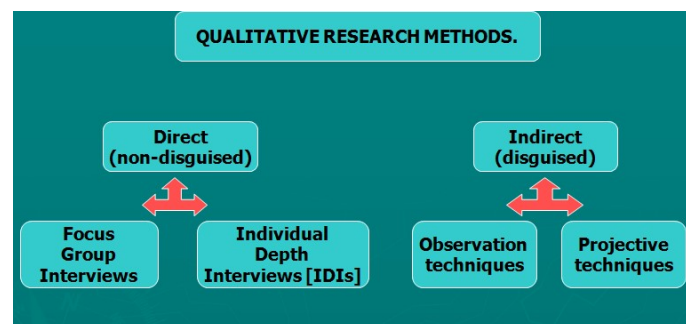


FIGURE 3.4 CLASSIFICATION OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROCEDURES Saunders and al., 2010

The researcher chooses direct (non-disguised) method by selecting **Individual Depth Interviews (IDIs)**. According to V. Rios & E. del Campos (2013) IDI “is an unstructured, direct, personal interview in which a single respondent is probed by a highly skilled interviewer to uncover underlying motivation, beliefs, attitudes and feelings on a topic.” Uncovering great depth of insights, I.D.I.’s can result in a free exchange of information that may not be possible.

Secondly, the researcher chooses to use **survey** as a both quantitative and quantitative research tool.

Also, even if survey is associated with the deductive approach, the data collected with this method can be interpreted and evaluated in the field of inductive approach, by the qualitative interpretation of quantitative data.

As the most common method of primary data collection, the survey will enable us to answer to the question “what”, “who”, “where”, “how much”, “how many”. More precisely, the research strategy is based on surveys by the use of questionnaires administered online but face to face. Indeed, to optimize the quality of the sample, the questionnaire was administrated to SIG fans attending a specific game with the assistance of the researcher itself. The researcher chooses the online survey (on tablet) for many reasons as the quantity, high speed, respond rate and low cost of data collection. However, the challenge will be to design effective, relevant and well wordy questions. Thus, first, the preliminary step will be to design of a pilot test to ensure the suitability of the questionnaire.

The last step will be qualitative with the selection of *focus group* as a research method. H. Collins (2017) stated that a focus group “is an interview conducted by a trained moderator in a non-structured and natural manner with a small group of respondents. A moderator leads and develops the discussion”. For the purpose of the research, one focus group will be led by the researcher. If the group will be homogenous by their fandom with SIG, it will be heterogeneous by the personal characteristics of participants (*see Part 3.5.4 Data Collection*).

Thus, in a relaxed atmosphere, six pre screened respondents will be chosen by the researcher itself according to specific criteria (see Part. 3.7.4). The great advantage of it is that group members “feed” off each other and creatively reveal ideas that event the researcher may not have thought of or dared to tackle”. Furthermore, the researcher will take anticipation initiatives by selecting more respondents in the case of withdrawals/impediments.

Finally, authors outlined that it’s useful to connect and contract both qualitative and quantitative strategies. In consequences, after being objective and understanding the context of the research thanks to qualitative and quantitative, the researcher will starts interpret and construct with exclusively qualitative research. In the context of the dissertation, the combination of all the steps will enable us to study and understand the relationship between French basketball fans and the professional clubs.

3.5 Research Choice

A study of both quantitative and qualitative researches will be used.

On the one hand, the choice of quantitative as a research strategy “emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data” and may enable me to gain a view of social reality as an external, objective reality (Bryman and al., 2010). On the second hand and by contrast, qualitative research will be used to emphasize words selected and used in the previous quantification. The researcher approach which is an inductive will be predominantly emphasized by the research strategy as a qualitative research to examine “the view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals’ creation” (Bryman and al., 2010).

The mix-methods approach is when both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques and analysis procedures are used in a research design and implementation (Saunders et al., 2009).

This research will use the mix method because after reviewing the methods choices, this is the most suitable since the survey, the Individual Depth interviews and focus groups are the tools used for the data collection.

3.6 Data Collection

The research will undertake both primary and secondary research.

To access primary data, the researcher “will require access to the organization and your research participants on more than one occasion.” (Saunders and al., 2009)

According to section 3.2 Research philosophy which was declared to be Interpretivism, data collection will be quite small samples, in depth investigations and mainly qualitative research.

As we mentioned in part 3.3 Research Strategy, there will be three steps in the data collection process combining qualitative and quantitative, which are the following:

- Qualitative Data Collection: one individual depth interview (IDI)
- Quantitative Data collection: online questionnaire administered to SIG fans face to face by the researcher. A pilot test will be designed and executed to this aim.
- Qualitative Data Collection: one focus Groups composed of six pre screened SIG fans

Data collection instruments will be detailed below in the context of the research.

3.6.1 Secondary Data Collection

“Secondary researches are data collected by others, including both quantitative and qualitative data” (Maylor and al., 2005). It will acknowledge the researcher and add different theoretical perspectives to the study. For the purpose of the dissertation, the researcher will deeply analyze the subject as from various sources. The majority of the relevant articles and sources come from reliable web sources (DBS Library, Google Scholar).

3.6.2 Primary Data Collection

3.6.2.1 *Primary qualitative Data Collection*

- ***Individual Depth interview***

The first qualitative step of the research consists in two Individual Depth Interviews. The IDI will be led by the researcher herself by face to face.

This exploratory study will enable the researcher to establishing a personal contact with the head of the club SIG. The interview will also “afford each interviewee an opportunity to hear herself or himself *thinking aloud* about things the researcher may not previously thought about” (Saunders and al., 2012).

The aim of the individual depth interview for the researcher will be to understand the club SIG’s structure and strategy when it comes to its online and offline communications. Indeed, the outcomes expected of this qualitative research are a greater expertise and a deeper understanding of the operation of communications in a professional basketball club.

The researcher will interview Franklin Tellier, multimedia creator and digital communications manager in SIG. Indeed, regarding the media aspect of the research, M. Tellier appeared to be in the best position to provide a contextualization of the subject to the researcher.

- ***Focus group***

According to Saunders and al. (2012), “the term focus group is used to refer to those group interviews where the topic is defined clearly and precisely and there is a focus on enabling and recording interactive discussion between participants”.

For the purpose of the research, a focus group with six pre screened participants will be led by the researcher herself. This qualitative step of the research flows naturally from the quantitative research previously done with the online questionnaires. Indeed, participants will be SIG fans having responded to the questionnaire and who confirmed their willingness to participate to a further study on the topic. The aim of the focus groups is to explore fan’s attitude and feeling about media platforms when it comes to follow and watch their favorite team: SIG.

In addition, participants will be pre screened by the researcher in order to obtain a heterogeneous sample. In the sports marketing field, fans are considered as a widely diverse group, found in every socio-economic class and education level (Sandvoss, 2005). SIG fans chosen will be French males and females, between 18 and 90 years old as fandom behavior might differ with the person’s age when it comes to media. Furthermore, to be more representative of the population, the selection of participants will also take into account a specific segmentation among demographics, geographic, psychographic and behavioral criteria. Thus, the researcher believes that a small group will enable a developed conversation and a free flowing group discussion in a nice and informal atmosphere. Another advantage of focus group is that group members feed each other in a spontaneous way. In the context of the research, the synergy of the group will led to a true debate as there is no secret information and in consequences, no intimidation.

The researcher as a professional moderator will orient and lead the group while taking notes on her computer.

3.6.2.2 Primary quantitative Data Collection

- **Pilot test**

For the purpose of this research, a pre-test will be executed. The researcher will obtain the assistance of six French basketball fans known by the researcher and given their demographic characteristics that made them fit the population for this study. The participants will be given the instructions to complete the questionnaire in order to identify problems with either understanding or interpreting a question, as well as any other aspect of it. After the feedback from this pre-test will be obtained, the researcher will make the last changes and develop the last version of the questionnaire.

- **Questionnaires**

As it was mentioned before on section 3.3 Research strategy, this research was based on a Survey strategy, specifically by the use of online questionnaires administered face to face.

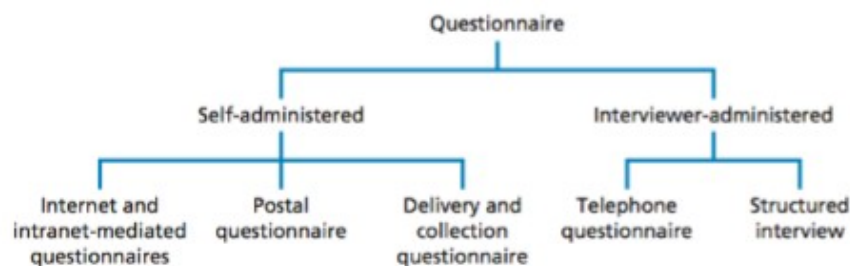


FIGURE 3.6 TYPES OF QUESTIONNAIRES Saunders and al., 2012

According to Saunders (2009, p. 360) a questionnaire can be defined as a general term to include all techniques of data collection in which each person is asked to respond to the same set of questions in a predetermined order.) However, “The great weakness of questionnaire design is lack of theory. Because there are no scientific principles that guarantee an optimal or ideal questionnaire, questionnaire design is a skill acquired through experience” (Malhotra, 2006).

Concerning the design of the questionnaire, here is a draft of the questionnaire’s design with a compilation of basic questions according to Malhotra’s framework (2004). Thus, the funnel approach is used by the researcher: from general to specific questions.

For this purpose, the first section will enable the researcher to collect basic information related to the research problem. The researcher will introduce respondents questions related to their habits when it comes to follow French basketball.

Secondly, questions will relate to classification information. In this section, the researcher will try to distinguish different type of SIG fans (according to the nine motives that were based upon social and psychological needs by Fink et al., 2002). Also in this part, responses will enable the researcher to understand the engagement of fans towards SIG club.

Then, the next section will focus on the fan experience related to media (offline and online). List of questions and category questions are particularly useful in order to be sure that respondents evaluate all the possibilities before answering. They allowed the researcher to collect attribute and behavior information.

The last section will include identification information (socioeconomics and demographics). Finally, the last question of the questionnaire will be oral and will allocate to the respondent participation to focus group ("Would you wish to participate to a further study on the SIG spectatorship experience related to medias?). Thus, email addresses will be collected by the researcher for willing respondents.

The main objective of the questionnaire is to collect more data related to the engagement of fans with offline and online Medias. In this way, the researcher wants to understand the fan's sport experience and will answer to objective 1, 3, 4 and 5. (See more in Part 3.8 Population and Sample.)

3.6.2.3 Data Analysis

- **Qualitative Data Analysis**

According to Saunders et al (2009), there is no standardized procedure to analyze qualitative data; however, authors identified three main types of processes, which are:

- Summarizing: condensation of meanings
- Categorization: grouping of meanings
- Structuring: ordering of meanings using narrative"

As manual analysis is time consuming, computer will enable helps to structure the work structure efficiently. Thus, it will ensure the closeness, accessibility, exploration, organization of the data, the search, and the ability to export it on hard copy, or other software. (Saunders and al., 2009). According to the types of processes, the researcher will use categorization as she will draw a summary of the key emerging point of focus groups and the IDI. Indeed, this Open Coding strategy will enable the researcher to highlight themes and words which stand out from the participants responses. Thus, through its examination, qualitative data will permit to evaluate opinion and behavior of the sample about their experience and their feeling about it.

- **Quantitative Data Analysis**

“Quantitative data can be divided into two distinct groups: categorical and quantifiable” (Saunders and al. 2009).

For the purpose of the study, the researcher chooses ranked (ordinal) data included in the categorical group. Thus, Google Forms will be used to treat and analyze data. Indeed, the tool is very simple to use, offers different possibilities and it includes a quantitative summary of the responses which permits to gain time during the data analysis.

The tool enables the researcher to follow real time results and to anticipate the potential cross analysis. Once all the questionnaires are complete, the software provides an automatic overview of the results thanks to graphs, diagrams and tabulations.

Moreover, Likert scales will be necessary for the research in order to measure opinions, perceptions, and behaviors. To summarize and illustrate answers, the tool will show percentages and design pie, bar charts to highlight relevant data and if differences exists among those.

3.7 Population and Sample

When it is impossible to interrogate the whole population, researches use sampling techniques (Saunders, et al., 2010). In other words, a sample is a sub-part of a population.

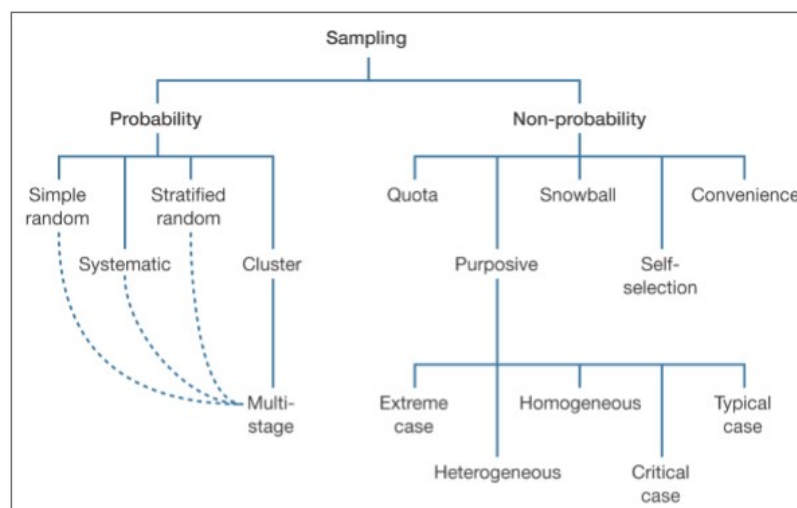


FIGURE 3.7 SAMPLE TECHNIQUES, Saunders and al., 2010

As the sample is essential to collect data, the researcher has to define in term of elements, sampling units, extent and time the target population.

The type of sample that will be used for the purpose of the research is Random/probability sampling as the research question is concern with one organization in a particular sector. Indeed, the survey was done directly to SIG fans attending a game at home.

The research population was:

- Elements: Spectators and fans of SIG basketball club attending a specific game, aged from 18 years old.
- Units: 5 400 people were attending the game.
- Extent: SIG fans attending a game at home ("Rhénus Stadium") in Strasbourg and living in France.
- Time: Friday, November 23th, 2018.

The size of the sample was hard to define as it was done on voluntary basis.

With the help of a colleague, the researcher administrated the online questionnaire to SIG fans face to face thanks to a tablet. Questions were asked to respondents by the researcher, which filled out the questionnaire with them directly on Google Forms. Thanks to this both quantitative and qualitative method, the researcher directly got access to SIG fans and she assisted them to ensure the understanding of questions and gain confidence of the respondent. Also, in this way, the sample was up-to-date with no waste in the administration (contrary on self administration of SIG social media for instance). Randomly, respondents were voluntary males and women from 18 years old attending SIG game on Friday 23th November 2018.

Thus, according to Kumar (2012, p.199) for a design to be called Random or Probability sampling it is imperative that each element in the population has an equal and independent chance of selection in the sample.

Then, for the questionnaire, the researcher will use the funnel approach. If the sample for questionnaire was done at random, some criteria will be used for the next sample: focus group participants (see Focus group, Part. 3.6.2.1)

3.8 Ethical Issues and Procedure

Ethics are critical aspects for the success of an research project. Some ethical issues might occur in the research process. First and concerning secondary data, literature studied is referenced appropriately.

According to Saunders and al. (2012) and for the purpose of this research, the list of strategies that may help the researcher to gain access to appropriate data will be follow.

Strategies to help you to gain access, discussed in this section, are:

- ensuring you are familiar with and understand the organisation or group before making contact;
- allowing yourself sufficient time;
- using existing and developing new contacts;
- providing a clear account of purpose and type of access required;
- overcoming organisational concerns;
- highlighting possible benefits to the organisation;
- using suitable language;
- facilitating replies;
- developing access incrementally;
- establishing credibility;
- being open to serendipitous events.

FIGURE 3.8 Strategies that may help you to gain access. Saunders and al., 2012

Second, when it comes to primary data, the researcher should respect some ethical principle as the integrity and objectivity of the researcher, respect for others, avoidance of harm, privacy of those taking part... To this extend, the main ethical issue that can be faced is to be sure of obtain the informed consent (provided by DBS). Indeed, each participant that is going to be part of the research (focus group and IDI) has to fill out a consent form.

Concerning quantitative data (questionnaire), the researcher will inform respondents of the entre dissertation process by oral during the face to face administration. Moreover, in the first section of the questionnaire, a description of the study and of respondent's rights will be presented (see Questionnaire in Appendix 1). The questionnaire is totally anonymous. The participant can omit the question if the question makes them feel uncomfortable and any participant has the right to withdraw at any stage. Even if the research itself does not contain risks of harming participants, this step is crucial for the researcher.

In addition, one major ethics obligation will be to respect the privacy of SIG company data. The organization might be willing to give the researcher access to private information. Thus, it is the research duty to inform SIG that the data collected will only be used for researcher's current master dissertation. For further details of the ethical issues of the research see Appendix 5 (DBS Ethical Form).

Finally, ethical issues can come from the interpretation of data due to answers take out of context, non authenticity due to a non understanding and the translation in another language.

3.9 Limitations to the Research

Research is value bound. Indeed, as the research is part of what is being research and cannot be separated, the main limitations to the research will be the Subjectivness.

First, the researcher analyzed limitations regarding the methodology of the research. On the one hand, the survey method of implementation has limitations. The administration of the questionnaire was done face to face with the assistance of the researcher and a colleague. SIG game spectators where nicely asked to answer the questionnaire on the tablet. At least, seven minutes were dedicated per respondent. Thus, the method required the researcher's patience and efficiency. Also, if the researcher could clarify and highlight respondents regarding a question misunderstanding, she had to be neutral in order to not influence any opinion, response.

On the other hand, for qualitative research, a focus group has been led by the researcher herself. The main limitation in this process was the lack of experience of the researcher in this field. As seen in 3.4 Research Strategy, a group moderator requires many qualities in order to drive the discussion. However, this was a first but rich experience for the researcher. Concerning participants, the researcher selected an heterogenous group of SIG fans. Nevertheless, a second focus group would be required in order to supplement the first one and to have more different SIG fans profile (demographics). Unfortunately, the time allocated and participant's availability didn't allow the researcher to organize another session.

In addition, the study might also not be representative of French professional basketball clubs in general. Indeed, as the researcher focused on SIG which is one of the most important clubs in France, the extrapolation (generalization) of the results might be distorted.

Finally, due to restricted words count, some ideas could not be deepened. Also, the research needed to be translated with accuracy from French to English. In consequences, some difficulties might occur when it comes to the correspondence of words after translation.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS/FINDING

4.1 Introduction

The aim of the dissertation is to discover how both offline and online communications strategies influences the French basketball fan's engagement and overall experience. In this section, the researcher will analyze and evaluate the findings of the data obtained after conducting the primary research. The findings are expressed in terms of both qualitative and quantitative data.

Thus, as mentioned in Part 3.6.2.2, quantitative data was obtained though anonym online survey administrated face-to-face by the researcher thanks to an electronic tablet (see Original Questionnaire in Appendix 5). Divided into four sections, the questionnaire was done during a SIG game at home and generated 70 responses. Respondents were voluntary SIG fans, males and females from 18 old.

Qualitative data was obtained though one Individual Depth Interview and one focus group. The goal of primary research is to answer the five research objectives.

4.2 Qualitative Data

As explained in the previous chapter, the researcher used both quantitative and qualitative methods as primary research. Concerning qualitative methods, individual depth interview and focus group were chosen. Moreover, the researcher analyzed qualitative data thanks to data display and analysis technique.

In addition, primary research methods were interdependent for the researcher as qualitative helps the researcher to build quantitative and vice versa.

4.2.1 Individual depth interview

The first step was Individual Depth Interview. This unstructured, direct, personal interview provided the researcher with the opportunity to 'probe' answers, where she wanted the interviewee to explain, or build on, his responses (Saunders and al. 2009).

The individual depth interview took place at SIG club offices, in Rhénus Stadium in Strasbourg on Thursday 8th November 2018 at 2 pm. The interviewee was Franklin Tellier, head of digital communications of the club SIG. For the purpose of the study and to respect SIG organization policy, the interviewee filled out the consent form and as a specification, will not speak for the organization itself but as a digital communication professional.

The highly skilled interviewee provided 50 minutes of rich and detailed set of data which enable the researcher to understand the context and structure of digital communications in a professional French basketball club. Prior interview, preparation has been done by the researcher to design both open and probing questions in order to explore responses that are of significance to the research topic.

- **Organization and evolution of French professional basketball in France**

To begin, the interviewee explained and clarified the context for professional basketball in France.

Firstly, it is the LNB which manages and provides specifications to the best eighteen professional French basketball clubs as SIG which compete in PRO A championship named Jeep Elite®. Thus, the interviewee witnessed the evolution of LNB over time. Despite a significant lack of budget and staff for professional basketball in France, the motto is "work to develop and sell basketball". To this extend, it exists real exchanges between these eighteen clubs and the league itself. Thus, basketball clubs became more professional thanks to turnkey solution provided by LNB. Workshops, call conferences, training courses... the interviewee stated that "instructions has been replaced by a two way communication to best match the clubs needs and expectations in order to satisfy fans".

Concerning the media, secondary researches provided the insight that French basketball recently took part in the digital transformation thanks to new LNB partnerships. However, the interviewee explained: games of the JeepElite championship are broadcasted on the TV channel RMC Sports whereas the European championship is broadcasted on BeInSport.

Thus, the interviewee complaint about the lack of coherence for SIG broadcasted games on TV. As consequence, fans might be lost and confused when it comes to follow their favorite team. On top of that, viewers have to subscribe to both channels as they are paying services.

Furthermore, the interviewee observed the great benefit of the LNB association with the company WSC Sport solutions which provide a technology that generates customized highlights automatically and in real time. In such manner, WSC highlight the video, the cheering of the facts, the commentator and the player statistics which enable fans to understand what's happening in each and every second of the game. The LNB signed the partnership in 2018 and enable each professional club to access to their own games' highlights since. At the end, it facilitates the work of clubs and strengthens their brand. Above all, this digital solution improves the fan experience as they feel more engaged with the team before and after the starting bell whistle.

In conclusion, F. Tellier is thankful for the LNB main improvements regarding digitalization as it participates to the "professionalization and democratization of basketball in France".

- **SIG Digital communication department organization**

In a second part, the interviewee presented the structure of the communication department of SIG basketball club to the researcher. Today, there are two people working full time and one intern at SIG. For the purpose of the study and for confidentiality reasons, letter of the alphabet will represent SIG employees:

- A : Responsible of Communications and Events
- B (the interviewee): Responsible of Digital communications
- C : Assistant Digital communications/community management

Concerning the interviewee, his role in the organization is to "control and emphasize the online presence of the brand SIG". He is in charge of all the editorial content on the web. For instance, during a game, he is writing the game resume in real time in order to release it online right after the game. Before, during and after the game, the assistant of digital communications (C) is handling social media by producing live tweet on Twitter (48.000 followers), stories on Instagram (19.000 followers) and live on Facebook (48.000 fans). The interviewee (B) stated that her goal is to "feed, entertain and engage the online community".

- **Fan engagement**

In a third part, the interviewee answered the researcher questions on the SIG fans engagement. On the one hand, he explained that in general, the club has a strong reputation and history in Strasbourg, France. Since 1929, SIG participates to the local and national spread of basketball. Indeed, SIG is “definitely part of the sport culture in Strasbourg” and its development over the last 90 years is a pride for leaders and those who follow the team since its beginning. As a matter of facts, the interviewee highlighted that SIG fans have a particular high average age. Consequently, the engagement and identification to the team is strong as it can be define as “a link to a big family”.

On the other hand, the interviewee tackled the online engagement which is the core of his daily mission in the club. According to him, the real strength concerning SIG online presence is the club’s official website. Thanks to a mobile compatibility, fast loads times, effective navigation and up-to-date well preformatted content, the website is better than competitor’s. Also, by its user friendliness, the interviewee stated that: “there are 7 000 users visiting it per week and the bounce rate is 40% only”. However, social media engagement rates are low. For instance, Facebook posts are not engaging enough if there are not parts of a paid advertising.

To this extend, SIG launched in October 2018, its first brand new official mobile application. F. Tellier is convinced that by gathering fans data, the club will better inform and entertain. Hence, the platform is a tool to increase and build fan loyalty. Also, the interviewee believes that the app owns “a genius viral process” which enables VIP customers to credit their subscription to family or friends. Indeed, the recipient will have to download the app to access the ticket. To this end, the main goal will be the dematerialization to simplify both the ticketing and the fan’s journey. SIG mobile application is a turning point for development of club communication

- **Omni-channel experience**

The interviewee works everyday to unify and improve the online experience of fans. More recently, innovative tools make it possible. In addition to the mobile application, the club is looking forward for a brand new architectural stadium named Credit Mutuel Forum expected for 2021. The interviewee is persuaded that thanks to these 2 000 additional seats, “the stadium will be one of the most connected arena in France with more digital, more instantaneity, more services and interactive spaces dedicated to fans”.

This all-digital approach of basketball venue is combined with traditional communications strategies as the book released for the 90th anniversary of the club this year.

4.2.2 Focus group

The focus group took place on the Monday 26th of November 2018 at 7pm. Six people met during the survey done at SIG game (see Part 3.6.2.2 Data Collection / Questionnaire) were willing to participate to a further study which consists in a focus group. In order to have a heterogeneous sample, the focus group was composed by 2 women and 4 men with demographics, between 23 and 60 years old. Participants were interviewed for about 1 hour on three topics: SIG engagement & fandom; SIG offline & online communications; SIG overall experience (see Appendix 4 Focus group guidelines).

For the purpose of the study, each of the six participants will be given a number. Below, the researcher established a sum up of the discussion.

- **SIG engagement & fandom**

Participant 1 <i>Woman, 23</i>	As a student, she goes to games when time allows her to. She plays basketball and often goes to games with friends or with her basketball team. She considers herself as a real fan of SIG as she follows the team for a few years now. For her, SIG is a pride for the region she always lived in.
Participant 2 <i>Man, 60</i>	With an annual subscription to SIG games, he is strongly attached to the team. He considers himself as a “veteran fan” by following the team for many years. He goes to every game. In general, he came alone but meets a lot of friends in the stadium. He loved to bring his family to some games to spend time with them. SIG fandom is quite an “heritage” which he wants to hand on.
Participant 3 <i>Woman, 33</i>	She has an annual subscription to SIG games. Even if she doesn’t play basketball, she identifies herself to the team since years. She feels engagement with her local sport team and doesn’t hesitate to drive 2 hours to cheer SIG on away games. She loves the atmosphere and the adrenaline that games provides. It’s real community. She buys apparels etc. However, she is not happy that VIP’s benefit from favors and not annual subscribers. She definitely thinks that they are not more loyal or more “fan” than she is unless they spend more money.
Participant 4 <i>Man, 25</i>	As a sports lover, he sometimes buys tickets for games with his friends. Even if he is a football fan first, he likes the beauty of basketball games. He doesn’t feel so much engaged with the team but considers himself more as a spectator. He comes to games to enjoy player’s performances.
Participant 5 <i>Man, 45</i>	He knows SIG thanks to a colleague which invited him in VIP area. He goes to some games with colleagues because the company he worked for is a partner of the club. He doesn’t feel specially engaged with the team but enjoys the entertainment. Mainly, it’s a way to escape his daily life and to socialize.
Participant 6 <i>Man, 29</i>	He is a young father which brings his two basketball fans sons to SIG games. He is not personally very engaged with the team but attends games around one a

	month to spend time with his family.
CONCLUSION	The researcher observed that there are several profiles among SIG fans. Also, some disagreements appeared when it comes to define a “fan”. But, even if they form a heterogeneous group with divergent fan behavior, they are aware that they all support the SIG team for personal specific reasons. Together in the stadium, differences make them stronger: they are a real community.

- **SIG offline & online communications**

Participant 1 <i>Woman, 23</i>	She follows the team on social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram). She follows SIG official fan page on facebook. Her favorite SIG social media is Instagram which is up to date, trendy and with relevant designed content. However, she deplores that people have to pay to watch SIG games on TV. She sometimes watches SIG games live on stream or follow live tweet.
Participant 2 <i>Man, 60</i>	He goes to every game at home and watches others on TV (paid channel). Recently, he goes online to read articles on SIG official website but as no account on social media. He noticed the development of SIG promotion compared to years ago. However, he is afraid that the essence of the game may to be lost with the new generation being on their Smartphone when attending the game. Also, tickets price have increased and it's mainly due to communication costs... But, he participates to (offline) social events organized by the club and buy goodies (scarf, book, jersey...)
Participant 3 <i>Woman, 33</i>	She follows SIG on Facebook and Youtube. She often shares her reactions after game on the official fan page of SIG on Facebook (which gather the community). She is mainly active and prefers partivipative content (for instance, contests and games on Facebook). As an entertainment and game lover, she would appreciate more interactivity with the team post and after the game. Offline, it's the same thing. She would appreciate more events with the team.
Participant 4 <i>Man, 25</i>	Present on SIG social media as Facebook and YouTube, he is quite passive on them. Sometimes, he goes on the website to see the score in live. However, he likes content as videos, player's interviews...
Participant 5 <i>Man, 45</i>	He sometimes check the SIG website to see the championship ranking or if there are special games and websites upcoming. He also follows SIG on LinkedIn and Twitter but is a passive user on their pages. However, he will download SIG mobile application and believes it will enhance his engagement and experience if it is a user friendly app.
Participant 6 <i>Man, 29</i>	He only follows the team on Facebook but is passive on the social media. He visits the website sometimes and receives newsletters (direct mail). He just wants to be informed of next games and special events.
CONCLUSION	The website is the most used online platform. Again, the group has heterogeneous behaviors regarding social media. The researcher noticed that online engagement is mainly correlated with team identification. However, it also correlated with the participant's age. If participant 2 is the older and the most engaged fan (offline), he is not digital friendly.

- **SIG overall experience**

Participant 1 <i>Woman, 23</i>	She thinks that there is so much to do to have a great fan experience. For instance, before the game, there are no animations for people who come early. It's quite boring whereas people are craving for news, special games and exclusive interviews... She believes that the club communications can go further with fun and creativity. She has downloaded the official app and loves it even if for the moment, updates have to be done. She wants to know more the players (more proximity). She is excited about attending a game in the new arena in 2021.
Participant 2 <i>Man, 60</i>	He always has a good fan experience during SIG games. He believes that the fan experience could only happen offline with the game itself and the essence of basketball actions etc. He thinks that SIG club could reward its best and more loyal fans.
Participant 3 <i>Woman, 33</i>	Along with participant 1, she would like more proximity with the players (online and offline).
Participant 4 <i>Man, 25</i>	He truly thinks that more videos of specific actions (replays), trainings... will embody a competitive advantage for fans. It will also increase his skills in basketball. Indeed, he believes that French professional basketball clubs has a lot to learn from NBA teams in terms of communications. He downloaded and uses SIG mobile app. He would like another option on it, to see the replay of live player's action during a game.
Participant 5 <i>Man, 45</i>	His experience is good as a VIP customer of SIG. Services are enjoyable. However, he will not come back to usual seat because its experience will be lower. He believes the new stadium will best match to the club identity and will fulfill a lot of SIG fans expectations.
Participant 6 <i>Man, 29</i>	He is satisfied with the overall experience. As he mainly attend games for his kids, he would appreciate some basketball activities at half time for instance for them. Moreover, as his kids are fans of the team, they would love to meet it and take photos with players etc (more exclusive relationship, offline). He heard about the app and will download it soon.
CONCLUSION	All participants enjoy the improvements of SIG in terms of venue (food delivery at the seat, mobile app...). However, these elements need to be developed in a more personalized way to improve each one fan experience. Above all, the omni channel experience is important for the majority of participants as offline and online communications need to be coordinated. Always, the team and the game must be the core of the strategy. Offline, fans expect more entertainment during the game and wish for a more exclusive, interactive relationship with the team. At the end, each participant is looking forward to attend SIG games in the new connected arena: the Credit Mutuel Forum (2021).

4.3 Quantitative Data

Saunders and al. (2009), specify that “multiple-methods research design” is the better alternative when it comes to research methods. Thus, for the dissertation purpose, the focus group is supplemented the quantitative questionnaire. In this way, the researcher will examine and understand fans attitude.

This section will describe and analyze the data collected through the questionnaire administrated to SIG fans during a game at home Strasbourg-Nanterre, the 23 th November 2018. The questionnaire was done online on Google Forms and face-to-face by the researcher itself and a colleague before the game and during half time. The data collected will be presented thanks to the use of statistics and graphs. In total, the researcher collected a total of 70 responses.

4.3.1 Sample Description

First of all, as it was stated before, 70 respondents comprised this research sample from which 68,6% of respondents were men and 31,4% were women.

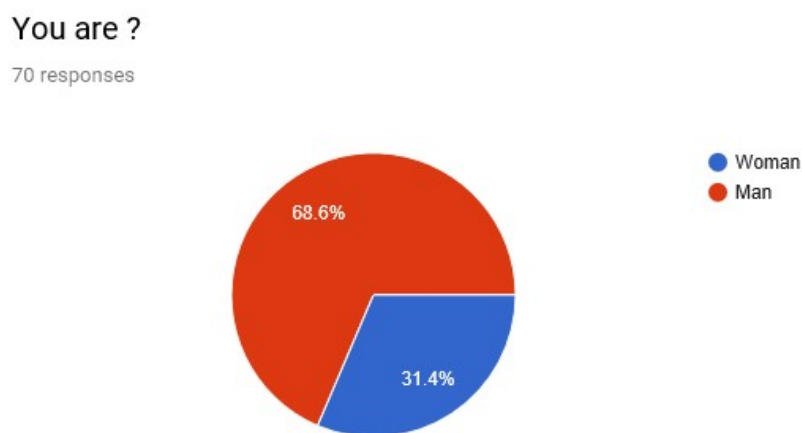


Figure 4.1 Sample's composition

Furthermore, data collected enable the researcher to analyze the sample geographic location below.

The city you live in?

70 responses

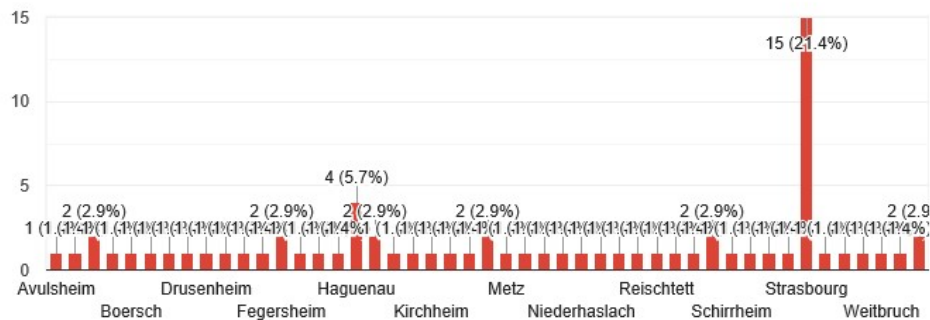


Figure 4.2: Sample's location

Statistics provided by the sample's location graph are complex to read. As it was a free-answer question, many different French locations came up. If the majority of the sample are from Strasbourg (21,4%) were SIG games take place, by deduction 78,6% of the sample are from periphery. The sample's location is heterogeneous. If each participant came from Grand Est region (France), the researcher observed that many respondents came from small distant villages.

Furthermore, the respondents were asked to state their age from the following categories: 18-25, 26-30, 31-38, 39-45, 46-55, 56-65 and 66 and more. Results in figure 4.3 below, show that two main categories are: 18-25 (24,3%) and 39-45 years (24,3%). An important pattern is also a highlighted in the Sample's age graph: 2,9% are between 56 and 65 and 5,7% are 66 years old and more.

Your age?

70 responses

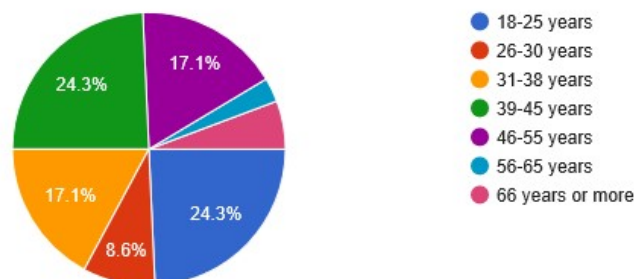


Figure 4.3: Sample's age

Further, the majority of the participants are employed with 44,3% of the responses, followed by 27,1% of executives, 11,4% of students and 8,6% of retired. Also figure 4.4 show that minorities are auto-entrepreneurs, craftsmen and teachers. No respondent is unemployed.

Your occupation?

70 responses

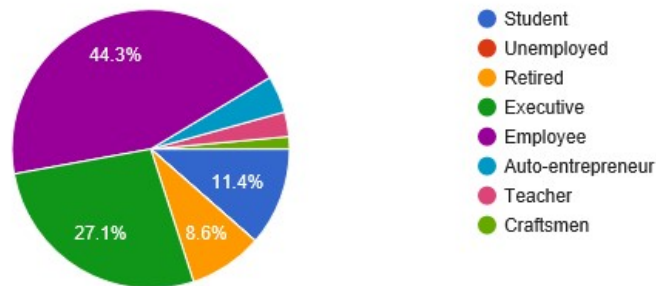


Figure 4.4: Sample's occupation

4.3.2 Focus on general interest in Basketball and media habits

In this section of the questionnaire, the researcher first focused on media habits of fans when it comes to French basketball. All questions were related to the French professional basketball championship (PRO A) named JeepElite.

On which support do you follow JeepElite, the french professional basketball championship?

70 responses

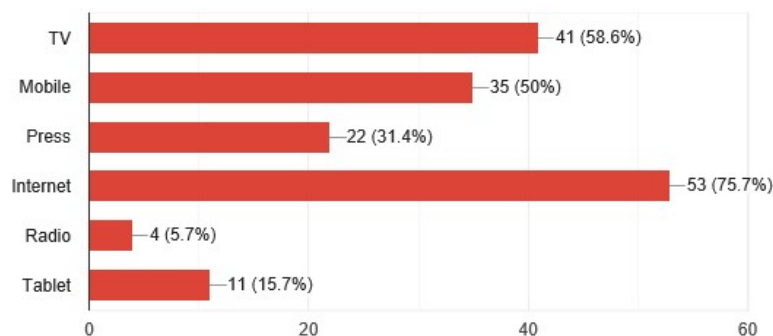


Figure 4.5: Question 1: On which support do you follow JeepElite, the French professional basketball championship?

The figure above show that 75,7% of respondents are using internet to follow the French basketball championship. TV is the second most used support with 58,6% responses. Then, 50% of respondents are using mobile, 31,4% read press, 15,7% navigate on their tablet and finally only 5,7% are listening to radio.

How many hours a week do you spend watching french professional basketball (on television/online)?

70 responses

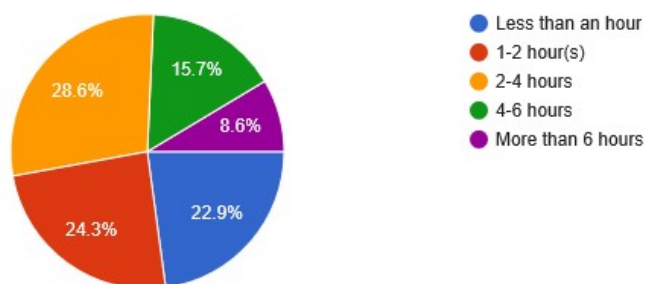


Figure 4.6: Question 2: How many hours do you spend watching French professional basketball (on television/online)?

Figure 4.6 show that the majority (28,6%) of respondents spend 2-4 hours a week watching French professional basketball (online/on television).

Then, the last parts of the section focuses on the interest of respondents in french professional basketball. Indeed, figure 4.7 below highlight that the most important motive to attend a game is Aesthetics: beauty of the game (68,6%). The following reason for respondents to attend a game are "Appreciation of physical skills of athletes: performance" (62,9%) and "Drama: need for stress and stimulation" (60%).

What are the reasons for you to attend a professional basketball game?

70 responses

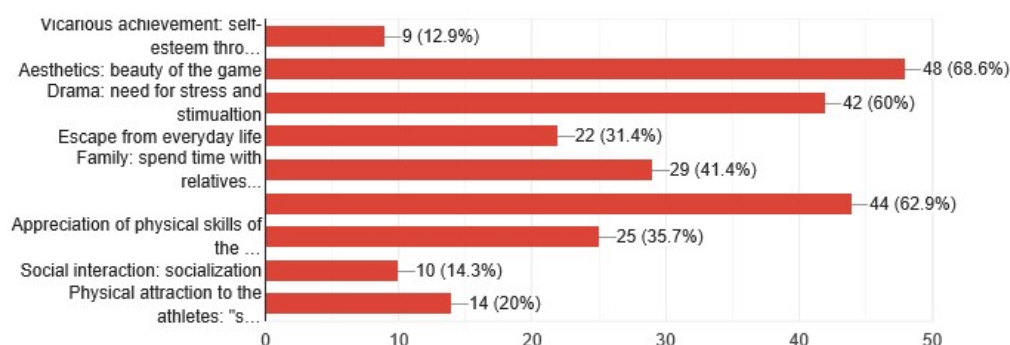


Figure 4.7: Question 3: What are the reasons for you to attend a profession basketball game?

4.3.3 Focus on SIG Fandom

This section of the questionnaire enables the researcher to collect data on SIG fandom. Firstly, the sample is split between 50% annual SIG subscribers and 50% non subscribers.

Do you have an annual SIG subscription to attend games?

70 responses

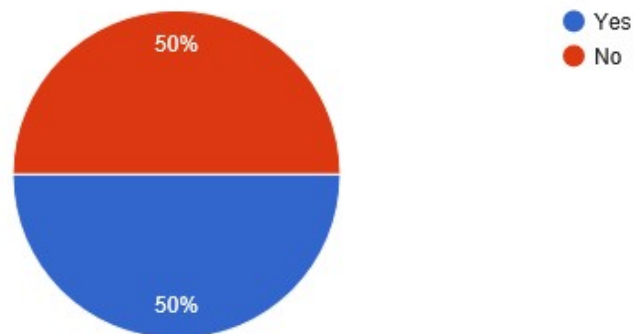


FIGURE 4.8: Question 4: Do you have an annual subscription to attend games?

Secondly, subscribers or not, findings also provide insights on fans venue.

How often do you attend SIG basketball games during the regular JeepElite season?

70 responses

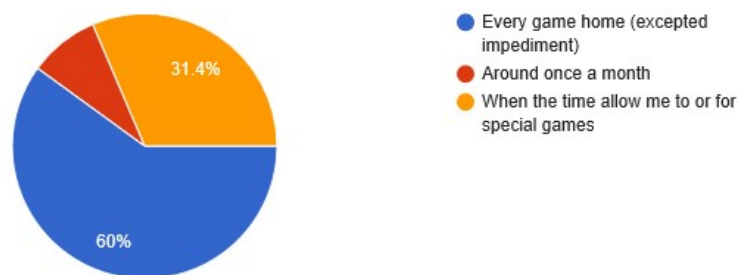


FIGURE 4.9: Question 5: How often do you attend SIG basketball games during the regular JeepElite season?

The researcher observed on the graph above that 60% of respondents attend every SIG basketball games home (excepted impediment) during the regular season. Then, some of them (31,4%) only attend special games or come when the time allow them to. The smaller proportion (8,6%) stated that they attend games around once a month.

Furthermore, when it comes to their fandom, respondents were asked to evaluate their loyalty to SIG on the Likert scale.

Which grade would you give to you loyalty as a SIG fan ?

70 responses

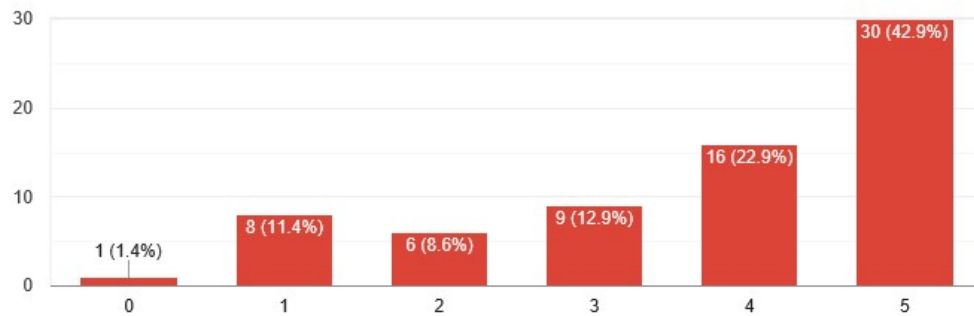


FIGURE 4.10: Question 6: Which grade would you give to your loyalty as SIG fan?

Almost the half of the sample (42,9%) gave the highest score which is 5. However, fandom is also about relationship. To this extend, SIG loyalty is evaluated through time thanks to the question below.

For how many times do you follow the SIG team?

70 responses

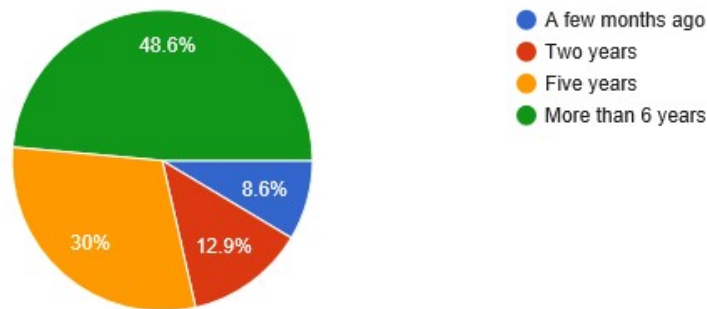


FIGURE 4.11: Question 7: For how long do you follow SIG team?

The graph shows that while the minorities follow the team for a few months (8,6%) or for two years (12,9%), most loyal fans are followers for more than 6 years (48,6%).

Then, the last question of the section is about special events. 55,7% stated that they do not attend club's special events.

Do you participate to social events organized by SIG (excluding games)?
(open day, Fan Day, trainings...)

70 responses

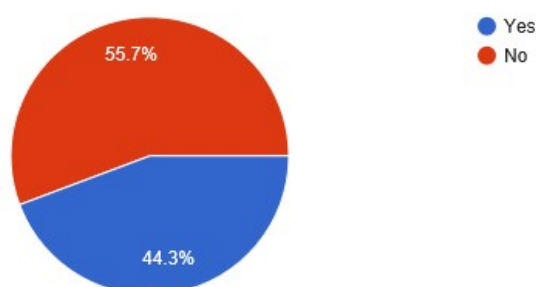


FIGURE 4.12: Question 8: Do you participate to social events organized by SIG (excluding games)? (Open day, Fan Day, trainings...)

4.3.4 Focus on media engagement

Last but not least, this section focuses on the media engagement of SIG fans. An important aspect to highlight in this section is that some questions were optional. Indeed, a few respondents couldn't answer following questions as they were not familiar with online media. The researcher noticed that these respondents were in higher age categories of figure 4.3.

Usually, to follow SIG team you...

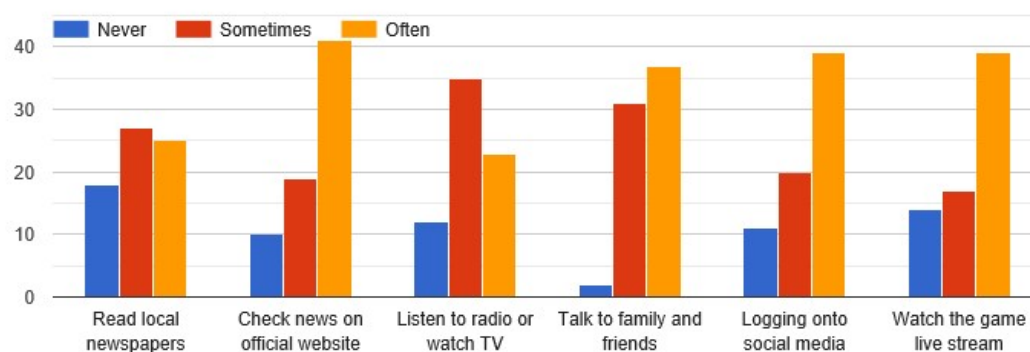


FIGURE 4.13: Question 9: Usually, to follow SIG team, you...

The first question enables the researcher to collect data related to their media habits when it comes to follow their favorite team, SIG.

Online, respondents prefer to go on the official website to follow SIG (41%, “often”). Then, social media and live stream game arrive second (39%, “often”). Offline, 37% of the sample often talks of SIG to family and friends. If traditional Medias as TV and radio get an honorable score, local newspapers get a low grade.

The next question will focus on online and will provide more information on SIG fans most preferred networks.

On which online networks do you follow SIG?

66 responses

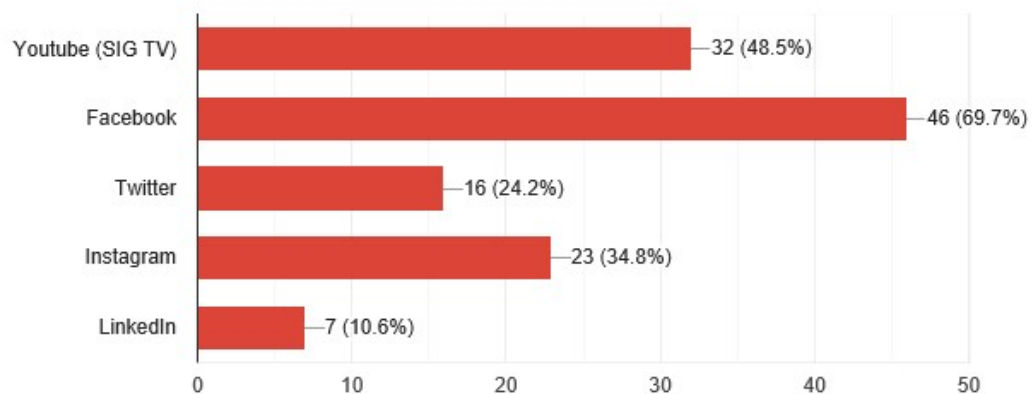


FIGURE 4.14: Question 10: On which online network do you follow SIG?

Answers listed in Figure 4.14 are online networks on which SIG owns an official page/account. Statistics show that Facebook is the most used of them (69,7%). At the second place, YouTube is used by almost the half of the sample (48,5%). Then, only of few respondents chose Instagram (34,8%), Twitter (24,2%) and LinkedIn (10,6%).

Considering the online presence of SIG, fans were asked to evaluate it with a grade going to 0 to 5 (Likert scale).

Which grade would you give to the online presence of SIG ?

68 responses

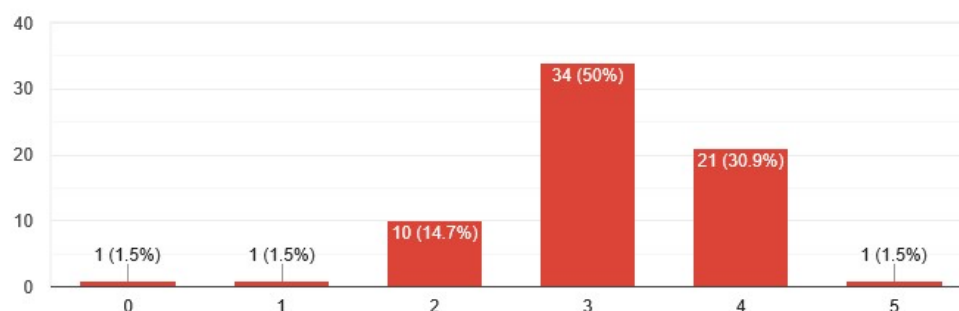


FIGURE 4.15: Question 11: Which grade would you give to the online presence on SIG club?

The figure's statistics show that the majority of responses were concentrated between grade 2, 3 and 4. 50% of the sample gave 3 as a grade to SIG online presence. Only 1,5% gave the best score to SIG online presence.

On your opinion, professional basketball club's digitalisation as SIG enables...

70 responses

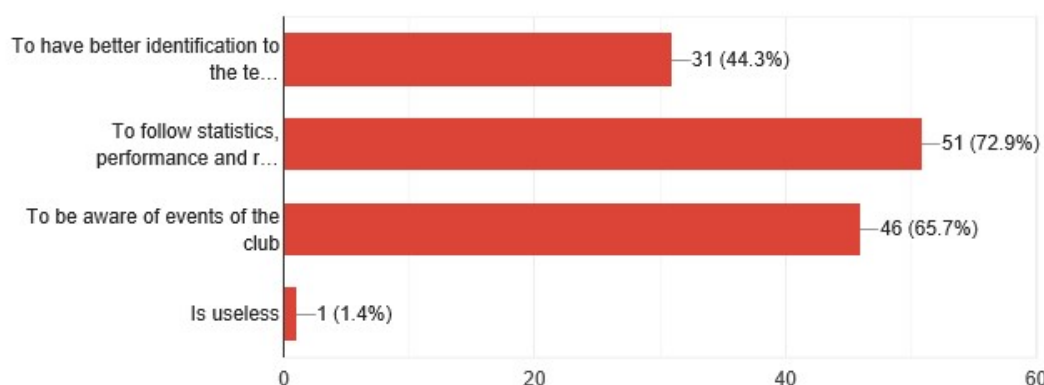


FIGURE 4.16: Question 12: On your opinion, professional basketball club's digitalization as SIG enables...

First and in general, fans believe digital enable them to follow statistics, performance and results (72,9%). Secondly, digital permits them to be aware of the club's event (65,7%). Third, another benefit is the better identification to the team (44,3%).

Then, even if a minority of respondents is not digital friendly, they are conscious about the digitalization advantages for professional basketball clubs. However, only 1 respondent (1,4%) did not perceive any of them and stated that digitalization is “useless”.

In addition, as explained previously, SIG launched its official mobile application in October 2018. The half of the sample (51,4%) has downloaded yet.

Did you download the brand-new SIG mobile app?

70 responses

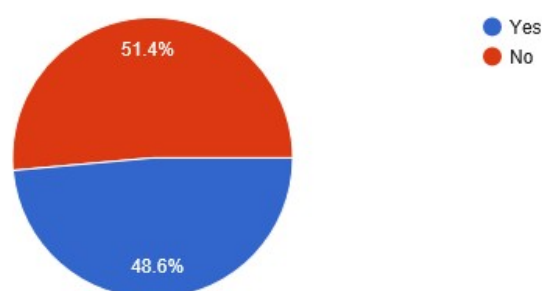


FIGURE 4.17: Question 13: Did you download the brand-new SIG app?

Therefore, online presence is an important aspect in the club communication but does it makes fan more loyal to the team? Figure 4.18 shows that the majority of fans (59,4%) doesn't consider themselves as “more loyal” with an online presence. The rest of the sample (40,6%) think the opposite.

Do you consider that SIG online presence makes you a more loyal fan?

69 responses

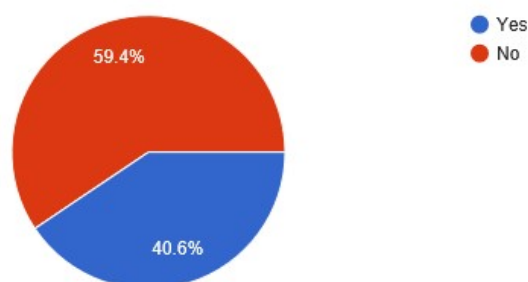
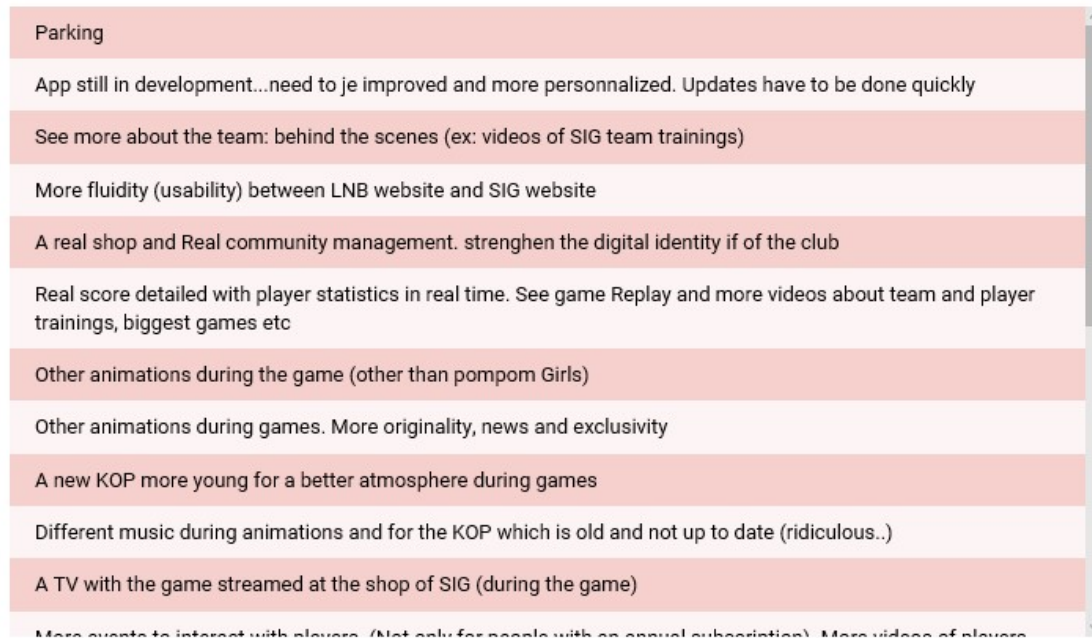


FIGURE 4.18: Question 14: Do you consider that SIG online presence makes you a more loyal Fan?

Finally, only 16,1% of the sample answered to Question 15 below, which was an open question.

According to you, what should be improved in SIG online and/or offline communications?

23 responses



Parking
App still in development...need to be improved and more personalized. Updates have to be done quickly
See more about the team: behind the scenes (ex: videos of SIG team trainings)
More fluidity (usability) between LNB website and SIG website
A real shop and Real community management. strengthen the digital identity if of the club
Real score detailed with player statistics in real time. See game Replay and more videos about team and player trainings, biggest games etc
Other animations during the game (other than pompom Girls)
Other animations during games. More originality, news and exclusivity
A new KOP more young for a better atmosphere during games
Different music during animations and for the KOP which is old and not up to date (ridiculous..)
A TV with the game streamed at the shop of SIG (during the game)
More events to interact with players. (Not only for people with an annual subscription). More videos of players

FIGURE 4.19: Question 15: According to you, what should be improved in SIG online and/or offline communications?

Respondents highlighted many different ideas for SIG communication to improve their fan experience. Among the 23 answers, three main patterns were noticed by the researcher both offline and online:

- Diversify, modernize the animation and entertainment during the game
- Create more “behind the scenes” content online (trainings, player’s background...)
- More events to interact with the team

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher will interpret research findings based on both primary and secondary researches. The variables examined in the study were selected as a result of both a review of the academic literature and specific requests made by SIG fans and by the club digital communication specialist. Moreover, the aim for the researcher is not only to draw conclusions from the primary research, but also to draw conclusions on the whole project (Saunders, et al., 2009).

This discussion is the base for the following recommendations and conclusions as it links the background research and the research findings of this dissertation. The main purpose of this chapter will be to answer to the research question:

How do French professional basketball clubs engage fans on a new playing field across both offline and online strategies?

To this end, the researcher has set five main objectives, each of them containing many subsections.

5.2 Objective 1: Analyze the engagement of fans in the context of the club SIG Strasbourg.

The research aims to give a background for fan engagement to a French professional basketball team. To this extend, the researcher used the survey (questionnaire) as a both quantitative and qualitative method to get access to SIG fans. Responses obtained from the sample have been supplemented by insights on engagement with six pre screened fans (focus group).

- SIG fandom and engagement

First, SIG fans are an heterogeneous group of supporters. Considering the transactional aspect of fans, the half of them purchased an annual subscription to attend SIG games during the season 2018-2019 (see Figure 4.8). Findings suggest that highly identified fans are more likely to attend games, pay more for tickets, spend more money on team merchandise and remain loyal to the team (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998).

Independently of their behavior, some fans have specific emotional feeling regarding the team. For Rappaport (2007, p.138), engagement centers on “two key ideas: high relevance of brands to consumers and the development of an emotional connection between consumers and brands”. In the research, when supporters were asked to give a grade to their fandom, a lot of respondents choose the higher grade (see Figure 4.10).

The outcome of the study is that SIG fandom is based on a strong feeling of closeness with the team. It is important to emphasize that this majority of participant are SIG fan for more than six years. Thus, the research proves that SIG fandom is a lifetime commitment. This pattern reinforces conceptual material as Bhattacharya and al. (1995) theory which highlights that “the more consumers feel like they are part of the organization, the more identified they become and the more likely they are to form a lasting relationship with the organization”.

This important factor can be correlated with the high average age of SIG fans. Mainly composed of males, the sample is representative of SIG fans in general. Mainly, they live in the Grand Est region (France) with a quite high purchasing power. Furthermore, given their long term SIG fandom, they have witnessed the professionalization of the local basketball club through years. In this way, their loyalty and engagement become stronger with time. However, primary researches have shown that some fans attend games mainly for the entertainment provided. As a matter of facts, they are less engaged with the team.

Moreover, the construct of engagement has been disrupted by new media. The researcher observed that the basketball customer journey starts on the official website of the club. Findings prove that the platform embodies the core of SIG online strategy. According to the interview led in the study, the sport organization website is doing well with effective periods of engagement which are aesthetics, novelty, interest, affect and interactivity (O. Brien’s and al., 2008). Ioakimidis (2010) highlighted that “the increasing websites sophistication” is a consequence of user engagement. But, nowadays fans are hard to please. They ask for an up-to-minute interactive content. Thus, user interaction and user empowerment are the keys for marketers to increase their multimedia strategy. Also, social media are part of the process (see Objective 3).

Indeed, despite fans distinct behaviors and feelings, they share experiences in social group/gathering scenarios. In addition to be a strong brand community, SIG fans can be defined as “a fraternity of people who diligently and over a prolonged period of time display their allegiance to a specific sport team of which they are fervent supporters” (Wann et al., 2001).

5.3 Objective 2: Explain the role of team identification when it comes to enhance fans engagement

As shown previously in 5.2, it exists different levels of attachment to the team among SIG fans. The study led enables the researcher to draw findings based upon demographics but also upon social and psychological needs. Indeed, it is important to note that there may be moderating variables (as gender) that could explain differences in the relationships between motives and identification. Considering the nine motives for team identification (Fink et al., 2002), physical attractiveness (sex appeal) is mainly preferred for women. However, theories assume that there is a small correlation between physical attractiveness and team identification. Besides, men are more likely to attend a game for aesthetics (beauty of the game). Thus, finding shows that the excitement and artistic aspects of the performance of a specific basketball team can increase identification with the team.

Also, findings reveal that self esteem and vicarious achievement were highly related to team identification (Fink et al. 2002). The survey administrated to SIG fans provides the researcher the confirmation that these motives are mainly chosen by fans that can be defined as “fanatics”. Hunt et al. (1999) described them as the “strongest, most loyal and longest term-relationship a fan/participant can have with a sport/team”.

To illustrate the findings related to fan and identification, the researcher designed a typology for SIG fans. This categorization is inspired by conceptual framework from Fink et al. (2002) and Hunt et al. (1999).

SIG fans transactional behaviors	SIG fans non transactional behaviors	Motives for team identification	Type of fan	Fan identification
They attend games for special games or when they have time	They have a connection with SIG based on geographical location. Also, games are an entertainment to them. They came to spend time with their family or friends	Physical attractiveness, family, social interaction, (escape)	Local	Low – Social Fan
They might purchase an annual subscription to attend games. They also buy SIG red apparels	Significant relationship with the team. They love basketball and enjoy game performance.	Escape, drama, aesthetics, acquisition of knowledge, appreciation of physical skills of athletes	Devoted	Medium – Focused Fan
They have an annual subscription to SIG games and convince friends or family to buy it too. They purchase up-to-date red SIG apparel (new one each season). They also travel together to attend SIG away games. Finally, they spend a lot of money and time for SIG.	They have an emotional connection with SIG ARMY. They attend to all the games seated behind their team hoop to sing and make noise to show their support. They follow SIG team almost anywhere and recruiting participant to join them. They are part of the family SIG.	Self esteem, vicarious achievement,	Fanatical	High – Vested Fan

FIGURE 4.20 SIG FAN CATEGORIZATION J. SCHNEIDER (2018)

Findings do not reveal the existence of dysfunctional fans among SIG supporters.

Then, the pattern emerging is that team identification influences behaviors. Highly identified fans would be more involved with the team and would have a greater investment of time and money in following it (Sutton et al., 1997). In addition to higher attendance rates at games, the most fans are identified with the team, the most they are likely to consume merchandise and media.

Further research will also show that team identification can be enhanced with online media. Indeed, in the next sections, findings related to fans will be correlated with offline and online media analysis.

5.4 Objective 3: Focus on offline communications in sports and investigate the SIG fans engagement to them.

Even if the sport consumption has shifted over years with digital, findings highlighted the importance of offline.

According to both survey and focus group, the essence of the game is offline, in the stadium. Offline, loyal supporters attend games on a regular basis. Therefore, data analysis enables the researcher to understand an emerging pattern when it comes to SIG fans. Indeed, in general, when attending games, fans feel like part of a community. Further, together they form a “Big family”. The fandom is quite contagious in local as the team embodies a pride in Strasbourg and surroundings. Considering this attachment, word of mouth is important. The survey shows that almost each respondent affirmed that they sometimes-to-often talk to family of friends of SIG.

However, when SIG fans were asked to think about their venue, experience and on what could be improved, many responses converge: in-game entertainment. Excitement that fans feel is fueled not only by the players but by the environment that is created by mascots, famous hosts, DJ etc. Fans agreed that the club needs to work on entertainment to provide innovative, interactive content post and in-games.

Concerning traditional media, research revealed that sport is a product. Half of respondents watch SIG games on TV. Despite the fact that the French championship (JeepElite) is broadcasted on paid channels, a significant number of respondents among SIG fans watch games on TV. Thus, findings demonstrate that live TV coverage is more than “a complement to stadium attendance” (Buraimo): it is a fan builder. It enables highly identified fans to watch their favorite team when they can’t make the trip. Therefore, if traditional media is all about reach (Hannah R., and al., 2011), no more precise data has been collected in primary research. At last, offline drive social media engagement.

5.5 Objective 4: Investigate SIG fans engagement to online Medias.

As previously seen in Objective 1 above, a brand website “generates and reinforces positive brand, product, service messages and have become a primary source of information for consumers whether they purchase on or offline” (Karson and Fisher, 2005, p.3). With the digital era, SIG fans can meet in the boundless and non physical platforms which composed the World Wide Web. Online provides an enriched sport fandom experience. Further, the survey highlights that the digital enables SIG fans to be aware of the events of the club and to analyze team statistics in live.

In fact, online content distribution mechanisms, particularly broadband video streaming and download technologies, are restructuring the media sport content economy. Findings show that 75,7% of respondents are using the internet to follow the team. More precisely, according to figure 4.1, more than the half of the sample is often checking news on the official SIG website. In literature, B.J. Calder and al., (2009) stated that “consumer engagement with a website is the collection of experience with the site”. Here, findings highlight that the fan experience with online is more active, participatory and interactive than it is with traditional media.

Nonetheless, users would like to be even more engaged online. Indeed, the researcher observed that respondents want more co creative content. Ali Acar O. and al. (2016) proves that this changing demand is a direct consequence of the empowerment of the consumer.

Fans are craving for exclusive content and interactions with the team itself (interviews, trainings videos etc). They want to feel part of the club and build an exclusive relationship with players. Social media are a brand extension providing to “the Feel or having been there as participant or spectator” (D. Rowe, 2004). As a matter of facts, the half of the sample gave 3 on the Likert scale for SIG online presence. The grade illustrates the fact that fans wish to have more “interaction, participation, entertainment and innovative creativity” (Gambetti, R. & Graffigna, G., 2010). Also, findings suggest that through online, fans want to build a real connection with the team offline.

In practice, the survey demonstrates that 39% often logging in on them to follow the team SIG. In theory, researches show that fans like to immediately share their reactions or feelings related to the game on them. To this extend, SIG fans mainly use Facebook (69,7%) where SIG has a very interactive fan page. In addition, when the researcher analyzed individual completed questionnaires, she figured out that Instagram was preferred by young online users like students for instance. Another important point suggested by findings is the quite weak ratio of SIG TV subscribers on Youtube. There is a real inconsistency when we consider the wish of fans for more video content and the current lack of engagement on this platform. Finally, even if social media provide users an extension of the game (D. Rowe,

2004), they are not the favorite online medium for SIG fans to follow their team. Thus, we can link this phenomenon with the relatively high average age of SIG supporters.

Furthermore, in general, fans believe that the online presence of the club doesn't enhance their loyalty to the team (figure 4.18). But, indirectly, it leads to a better identification and increases their emotional connection with SIG which is an engagement factor (Rappaport, 2007).

In correlation with the extensive use of internet by SIG fans, the researcher noticed that mobile usage is significant as it was mentioned by the half of respondents (Figure 4.5). Therefore, the official brand-new mobile application was greatly expected by both fans and the club.

5.6 Objective 5: Analyze SIG fans' omni-channel experience and engagement considering the digital transformation of the club.

Previous objectives helped the researcher to understand the omni channel process. Indeed, a mix of offline and online strategies may be employed for connecting and interacting with customers in different stages of the customer engagement cycle and facilitating transition to the next stage of the cycle.

SIG club works to create a unique and coherent experience across multiple channels. Offline for instance, apparel and point of sale advertising promote SIG with #SIGARMY. Part of the omni channel strategy, the specific hashtag enables fans to gather, share and react on their favorite team's social media. Thus, customer engagement strategies are developed using both online and offline technologies and tools. (C.M Sashi, 2012). However, fans still miss a seamless experience and consistent messaging across each channel.

In this context, the French professional sport organization launched its mobile application. The digital platform unifies the experience by giving a turnkey solution to fans. According to Castells (2009), mobile communication devices are "the multipurpose, multi-channel connecting points of the network of communication of which everybody becomes a personal node". SIG app offers an online ticketing solution, an access to the e-shop and news, a link to social media, a stadium map, after games reactions, in-stadium seat food delivery etc. In addition, the app embodies a viral communication tool itself. Findings show that almost the half of respondents already downloaded the app (48%). In total, around 3 000 fans has downloaded the app for the moment. Focus group's participants agreed that the tool will enhance their fan experience. In line with the numerical development of the club, SIG app facilitates the creation of a strong fan data base. With data gathered from the app, the club's executives can collect important information about who's sitting in their stadium.

Further, the launch of the brand new digitally-oriented stadium for SIG club, expected in 2021, will transform and enhance the spectatorship experience. Advanced technologies will be integrated at each step of the customer journey. In consequences, the current multi channel approach of SIG will be completely replaced by a real omni channel strategy.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS/ RECOMMENDATIONS

The main purpose of this chapter is to answer to the research question: How do French professional basketball clubs engage fans on a new playing field across both offline and online strategies?

6.1 Conclusions

Sport spectatorship is one of the largest forms of leisure behavior in the world today (James and Ridinger, 2002). Large numbers of individuals attend sporting events and refer themselves as sports fans. However, their consumption of sport has changed with online platforms. In this context, it is the entire actual sport environment which has shifted with the emergence of new media. Particularly, French professional basketball has recently undertaken this digital transformation.

The present study aimed to better understand the relationship between new media and offline to enhance French basketball fans experience on match day, whether they are in the stadium or at home. Indeed, secondary data collection highlighted that the key to the future of sport media is the link between screens (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012, p. 76) and offline. To overcome this challenge, sport organizations redesigned the entire customer experience.

Firstly, primary researches enable an understanding of the structure and of the operation of French professional basketball clubs. Further, a deep examination of SIG fans has been led to analyze their identification to the team and whether divergent fan behaviors were emerging.

Thus, the researcher observed that the average age of SIG fans were relatively high. Mainly, they are loyal long term fans attending to games at home. With a high purchasing power and strong attachment to the team, they can't be a neglected target. Thereby, the main difficulty for SIG communication department is to make them adopt digital technologies to increase their fan experience. To this extend, executives leverage traditional and digital media tools. For instance, a special SIG 90 year's anniversary book was released in November 2018. By retracing history, the club wants fans to remember how the team came from scratch and reach the top of professional French basketball. The storytelling is also promoted online to acknowledge and engage new supporters. Indeed, considering the digital transformation of the club, the team developed interactive web spaces to extend fans experience and build loyalty.

Thus, research has found that online media have the greatest effect on the association between fan identification and self-esteem, followed by broadcast, mobile Phua, J. (2010). Consequently, findings show that the fan journey can be represented by an infinite loop.

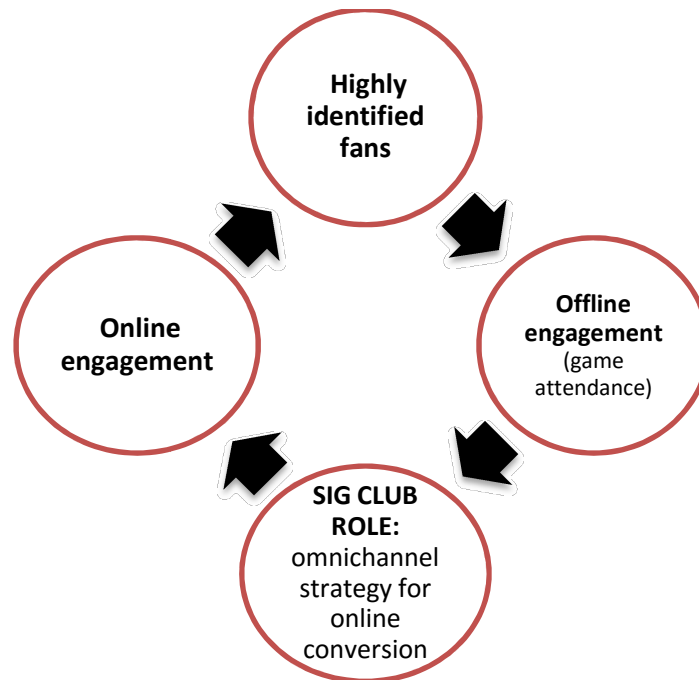


FIGURE 6.1 OFFLINE TO ONLINE INFINITE LOOP (J. SCHNEIDER, 2018)

Secondly, findings demonstrate the fans awareness regarding the benefits of their favorite team online presence. Indeed, "digital media and associated technology now provide a more direct link between fans and their favorite teams, athletes and other fans and allowing new relationships and interactions that were not possible before" (A. Pegoraro, 2012). A real SIG online community was born and enables fans to immediately share their reactions or feelings related to the game. Instantaneity, interactivity, exclusive and personified content... online succeed where offline failed. Today, the reconfiguration process of the spectatorship experience is based on the complementary relationship of offline and online media (D. Rowe, 2012).

Finally, SIG club pursues its fan experience enhancement by taking advantage of the data and by fostering a brand new omni-channel strategy. If the official mobile app participates to this model, the future all-digital stadium will go even further by giving birth to the fan 4.0.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Recommendations for the industry / business practice

In the 21st century, sport organizations have started to manage spectators of sport events more professionally by using modern techniques and strategies in customer relationship management. Thus, the main recommendation for practitioners in professional clubs and leagues is to understand the real importance of their customers and their behaviors. Indeed, they have to recognize their lucrative aspect given that sport is a product. It was proven multiple times that customer's engagement and customer's satisfaction are interdependent. As consequence, a satisfied customer will have a positive impact on the profitability and the growth of a company. In this context, sport organizations rather have to explore the characteristics and the customer profiles of fans in order to design their marketing activities and provide positive enhanced sport event experiences.

To sum up, club's marketers need to take into account the following recommendations to implement a strong relationship with fans:

- To understand consumer behaviors in order to allocate the right content to the right fan type.
- To build a strong positive omnichannel experience.
- Engage consumers by providing enjoyable offline experience.
- Matching consumers' expectations by providing both exclusive and interactive content on the team.

Indeed, as shown above in the study, the empowerment of the customer has emerged with new technologies. In a sport context, fans do not just want to be listened to, but want to share their opinions and visions which could be helpful for the company's future. Thus, clubs gather insightful data to better understand their supporter's preferences and behaviors. Fan engagement digital touchpoints represent opportunities to collect data.

6.2.2 Recommendations for Regulatory bodies

According to the EU General Data Protection (2018), provides a data protection legal framework in order to harmonize organization's data and enhance transparency. As for any company, sport clubs has to ensure individuals privacy with processes and controls.

Moreover, the respect of new regulations (RGPD) and a strong vigilance for the security of online payments are necessary for professional clubs as SIG.

6.2.3 Recommendations for Future Research

For the reason of the study, the questionnaire was done face to face by the researcher and one of her colleague during a game time. Nevertheless, as the mechanism for this primary research was time consuming, the population reached was a little bit small. Despite the quality of the sample, a larger population could be considered for the quantitative study. Indeed, for future research, face-to-face online questionnaires would be administrated with the assistance of at least 4 persons during a game. The second solution for the researcher would be to administrate the questionnaire to fans during at least 3 games. The two options would require anticipation and a deep evaluation of time and costs.

At a larger scale, further research could contain more individual depth interviews with French basketball communications professionals. Thus, details about the LNB communication's department structure would provide more contextualization and relevance for the research.

Moreover, the research is limited as during the time of the dissertation phase, a lot of innovations has disrupted SIG club. As shown earlier, two years after the dissertation is released, the SIG fan experience will be deeply different as it is now, thanks to all digital new Arena in Strasbourg. Notwithstanding, the researcher herself is looking forward to experience digital oriented SIG games for future venue. Once again, substantial investments will reinforce the fruition of French professional basketball within France. Finally, an analysis of SIG 4.0 fan experience and digital-stadium can be considered as a future research.

CHAPTER SEVEN: SELF-REFLECTION ON OWN LEARNING AND PERFORMANCE

7.1 Introduction

This last section of my dissertation is an overall self-reflection on my experience as a student at Dublin Business School. By choosing this MSc Degree in Marketing, I decided to challenge myself intellectually. In this Research Logbook, I used the model of Reflective Cycle (Gibbs, 1988) by describing what happened.

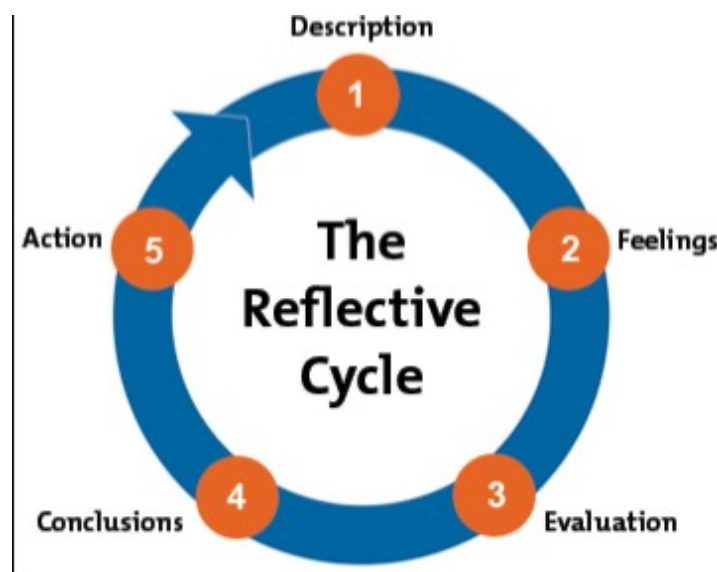


FIGURE 7.1 GIBBS REFLECTIVE CYCLE (Graham Gibbs ,1988).

Firstly, I will start with an introduction and description of the Degree undertaken. Secondly, I will examine my feeling, the skills developed during the dissertation phase before analyzing the communications and languages knowledge acquired in the semester. An overall conclusion will be drawn to highlight the main challenges and achievements.

7.2 The Degree: MSc Marketing

In the first place, the MSc Degree in Science of Marketing seemed like a foregone conclusion to me. Since the beginning of my marketing and communications studies at ISEG Strasbourg in France, I knew I wanted to go study abroad. As a travel's lover, it was a chance to discover a new culture by being totally immersed in a foreign country.

Concerning my education background, I've been studying marketing for 4 years in France and spent one semester Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary, in 2016. This experience as a student abroad enhanced my will to reiterate it for the last year of my studies. Indeed, experiences like those are rare opportunities. As an open minded person, I haven't hesitated

one single minute to take the chance of this big step in my independence path. Also, this episode of my life permitted me to get out of my comfort zone, to develop cultural sensitivity, to meet international students but overall to build self confidence.

Thus, I choose Dublin Business School to gain a deeper understanding of my specialist subject: marketing.

On the one hand, I believe that an international degree is essential in today's business world. Being a fluent English speaker embodies more than a competitive advantage to me; it's a logical skill according to our economic environment. Moreover, since I've taken my first English lecture a long time ago, I've always appreciated the beauty of the language. English courses have always been my favorite subject during my studies. On the second hand, the expertise in Marketing offered by this degree was very attractive to me. This Master enabled me to broaden my scope and to develop, update my advanced knowledges and skills in marketing. Indeed, the examination of today's brand strategies and global markets are part of the path to become an expert. The challenges of this degree were also to strengthen analytical, critical-thinking communication and decision-making skills.

As a matter of facts, an MSc Degree represents real assets and will enhance my career opportunities. Even If I don't know for the moment if I want to work abroad or not, I'm sure that I don't want any job opportunity to be closed to me. I hope that this Degree will permit me to differentiate myself from other candidates. Nevertheless, I'm aware that for recruiters, the work experiences internships and practices are making the Diploma more valuable. Above all, the candidate's motivations and personality make the distinction.

Besides, as I've always wanted to work in the Sport industry, I hope that the combination of my internships but mostly of my degree and dissertation will enable me to be a sports marketer and expert. Therefore, according to my personal and professional objectives and with a strong motivation, I pushed my limits and did my best to graduate from this MSc Degree. I will now describe some learning outcomes and a few challenges I've overcome.

7.3 Dissertation skills development

- ***Challenge to find a topic***

Choosing a topic on sports was logical to me as true sports passionate since forever. Moreover, writing on a topic in which I am interest in and which is at my image was my objective. First, I wanted to bring together my passion for travels and sports in my dissertation title by writing on the globalization of sport. Indeed, sports have gone across boundaries and the globe unifying cultures. Global sport events as the Olympics have the power to gather people around the world and promote peace. Then, after submissions and the lecturer's feedback, I understood that I had to be more specific and concentrate on one

sport. As a basketball player since 14 years, I decided to pick up my favorite sport as a research topic. However, I choose France as my geographic context, as too many authors examined the famous National Basketball Association. Through, none of this research is oriented on French Basketball which is a fast evolving sport within France regarding they recent media exposure.

In this purpose, I decided that I will work on a French basketball team in my home town, Strasbourg: SIG. The team is really active on social media and shine in France by its latest great performances. By finding this “last” version of my topic and reflecting on what my starting point was, I thought I was quite proud of the evolution and maturity of it. At the end, the evolution is the result of perpetual reconsiderations, questioning and listening.

To illustrate the changes in my dissertation working title, here is a compilation of the ones submitting in Research Methods 1 and 2.

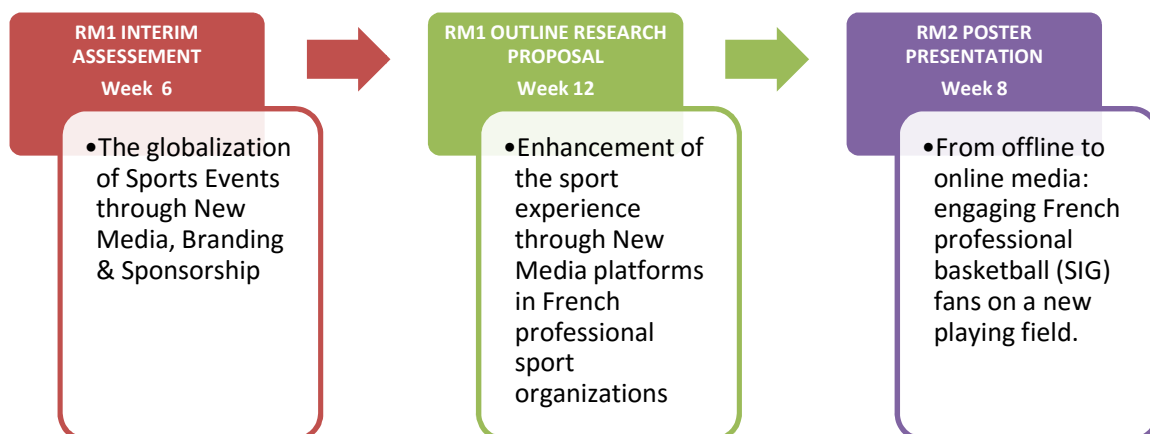


FIGURE 7.2 DISSERTATION’S TOPIC EVOLUTIONS (J. SCHNEIDER, 2018)

Thus, my topic grew over time. Thanks to the help of the Research Methods lecturer, I made the topic more relevant and professional.

- ***Academic literature***

The second main challenge for me as a student was the academic research. As I have studied 4 years in a French school, it was brand new for me to refer some authors and academic article. The difficulty was to learn to be critical and to link information together in order to build a strong and relevant analysis.

For this purpose, I spent a lot of time in the Dublin Business School library. The librarians helped me a lot with the methodology. The access to the online database, books and e-Source permit me to enhance my academic research skills in the dissertation phase. Also, new tools as Zotero was useful to classify my references for my literature review.

- ***Planning skills***

At the beginning of the year, I must admit that I struggled with managing my time. The workload was important and I was not used to it. But, I figured out very fast a good rhythm by planning different work tasks every day. By going two hours per day in the library, I was always up to date with my assignments and could enjoy free time in Dublin. Finally, I was very organized and I submitted the different assignments in time with no stress.

Therefore, I developed strong planning skills for the dissertation phase. However, the 12 weeks before dissertation were dense. After being in touch with my supervisor, Gary Bernie, I revisited and improved my three first chapters (Introduction, Literature Review and Methodology) before beginning primary research. Furthermore, my supervisor provided me a very tight and precise schedule which helped me a lot to organize my work. Even if some deadlines were challenging, the schedule gave me a real strong framework.

Nevertheless, once back in France, I've been surprised that the month of September was not optimized for dissertation. Indeed, I wished to have some instructions and news from Dublin Business School in this month whereas later in October. On my opinion, this was a precious time lost. I believe that if the supervisor allocation would have been done in September, researchers as me would have more time for primary research (before Christmas) and would be less stressed by the submission delay.

- ***Primary research***

Primary research was the phase I apprehended. Indeed, as I intended to use several qualitative and quantitative data collection methods and as each steps was interdependent, I struggled with the time allocated. Mid August, I got in touch with SIG club to explain to my contact person the purpose of my research. However, when my supervisor told me that I was ready for primary research, the club agenda was very busy. I met the head of SIG digital communications early November but for the survey, an approval from the club's executives was needed. Despite my anticipation, I've learn to be patient and to adapt myself. The approval took a very long time and I've been very anxious during this time. At the end, if the

online questionnaire to fans was not accepted by the club, they offered to me an alternative: a face to face administration during a game at home, end of November. The advantage of this method was the proximity with the respondents and the quick data collection.

The focus group was a very intense and rich experience, in a friendly atmosphere. Indeed, participants were a mix of my personal contacts and of respondents of the questionnaire, willing to participate to a further study on the subject.

7.4 Communication and language skills

By being a French girl studying in Ireland, I had to get used to an entire new life. January was both rich and intense at the same time. Non native language, new culture, new habits, independence, new people, new school... I had to adapt myself very fast to a lot of changes in my student life. Hopefully, by traveling a lot and being open minded, I get used to think differently and have developed strong adaptation abilities. Living abroad has been a rewarding experience to me.

Furthermore, I am much more confident with my English language today. Studying at Dublin Business School was a challenge as Level 9 expectations are high. Over time, I really developed my abilities to speak and to write in English. But above all, the oral presentations enable me to gain confidence in myself. Indeed, as a shy and introvert girl, individual oral presentations usually made me uncomfortable. Thus, I train myself to overcome this obstacle.

In consequence, I quitted each Research Methods' oral presentation stronger and more confident even if there was still work to do on my proposals. This was such a victory for me. Also, I truly believe that oral presentations are necessary for this module. In addition, confronting your topic with others (lecturer, classmates...) enables the researcher to be more confident with the subject. Feedbacks and other's points of view are valuable for the research's improvements. For me, poster's presentation was revealing as I realized that my topic was reliable and suited me. The main difficulty at the end of RM2, was to refine and find the right, meaningful and well wordy in English proposal. Moreover, I have learned that a lot of drafts proofreading's were necessary to improve sentences.

7.5 Overall Conclusions

Today, I can affirm that I am much more confident as a researcher. Deadlines, grades and feedbacks push me to make more and more progress to better my subject and go outside my comfort zone and push my limits.

As a student, there no doubt that the experience in Dublin Business School and Research Methods enhances my career opportunity as it broadens my mind. Personally, those lasts months enable me to gain maturity and confidence. I have developed strong adaptations abilities. In fact, I have learned and understood that often, best decisions come from changing the way that we think about problems, and examining them from different viewpoints, perspectives according to the "Six Thinking Hats" model (Edward de Bono, 1985).

At the end of the dissertation phase, I can tell that I am proud of the work accomplished as the research highlighted interesting findings and patterns. Thus, meeting professionals and friendly SIG fans, learn more about sport theories were very fascinating for me. Finally, one of the most important aspects of this year in Dublin Business School is the maturity that the master brought to me. Now, I feel ready to build the career that I always dreamt about.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Gantt Chart for time management

Activity/Month	OCTOBER				NOVEMBER				DECEMBER				JANUARY			
Week number	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Holidays																
Read literature																
Design draft questionnaire																
Run Individual Depths Interviews																
Pilot test (questionnaire) administration																
Revise questionnaire																
Final questionnaire administration																
Update literature read																
Data analysis																
Focus group 1																
Focus group 2																
Enter data in computer and data analysis																
Draft findings chapter																
Complete remaining chapter																
Submit to tutor and await feedback																
Revise draft format for submission																
Print, bind																
Submission																

Appendix 2: Cost chart for cost management

Costs	
Focus groups (food and beverage)	30 €
TOTAL	30 €

Appendix 3 : Individual Depth Interview questions

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

- Could you introduce yourself and explain me your professional background?
- How is articulated the communication department of SIG?
- Could you describe me your tasks and objectives about your position as Chief of Digital Marketing and Communication of SIG Strasbourg?

BASKETBALL CLUBS CONTEXT

- What main evolutions have knew the French basketball league (LNB)? What about marketing and communications in this sector?
- Smart cameras, PRO A games live stream on TV... How the digital has changed the way French basketball clubs interact with fans?
- Do you think digital technologies have participated to democratize French basketball?

SIG CLUB STRATEGY

- Do the FFBB and LNB communicate you some instructions concerning the promotion of the club? If yes, which are they?
- How do you work with your collaborators concerning the launch of the SIG strategy?

DIGITAL STRATEGY & FANS

- In which way do you think online media supplement offline media?
- Which social media are you using to interact with fans? Which strategy do you use on them?
- Which content are the most engaging for fans?
- How do you measure SIG fan's engagement and loyalty online?
- Do you classify SIG fans? How?
- What is the main objectives of the brand new SIG mobile app (launched October 2018), for both fans and the club?

FUTURE PROJECTS AND AMBITIONS

- Today, digital is also present in stadiums to better the fan experience during games. The new *Credit Mutuel Forum* will be launched in 2021. What in-stadium experiences and innovations are expected for fans attending SIG games?

Appendix 4 : Focus group guidelines

SIG engagement & fandom

- Which fan are you?
- For how long?
- Why SIG?
- Did you notice any evolution regarding the development of the club? (media, price, Rhénus Stadium...)

SIG offline & online communications

- On which support do you follow the team? Why?
- What do you think about the club online strategy? Which content do you prefer? Why?
- What do you think about the club offline strategy? (during the game itself)

SIG overall experience

- How do you describe your overall experience as SIG fan?
- What could participate to increase your overall experience?

Appendix 5: Original questionnaire

The questionnaire was translated in English as part of the dissertation submission.

Section 1 of 4



FAN EXPERIENCE & MEDIA ENGAGEMENT - Dissertation Questionnaire

Thank you for taking time to answer this survey. My name is Jessica SCHNEIDER and this survey is part of my Master's Dissertation of Marketing & Communication at Dublin Business School.

In the next pages, you will find questions asking you about your interest in professional basketball and SIG team in particular. You will be asked questions about your feeling toward SIG, your media habits, your engagement to team and some personality and demographic information.

Please answer all the questions to the best of your ability. You are not being judged or evaluated by your answers and as this survey is confidential, please be as truthful and honest as possible. To assure confidentiality, your survey responses will not be linked to any identifying information. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. The survey should take about 20 minutes to complete. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

If you have any question about the study, feel free to contact me (Jessica SCHNEIDER, schneijes@gmail.com).

On which support do you follow JeepElite, the french professional basketball *
championship?

- ☐ TV
- ☐ Mobile
- ☐ Press
- ☐ Internet
- ☐ Radio
- ☐ Tablet

How many hours a week do you spend watching french professional basketball
(on television/online)?

- ☐ Less than an hour
- ☐ 1-2 hour(s)
- ☐ 2-4 hours
- ☐ 4-6 hours
- ☐ More than 6 hours

What are the reasons for you to attend a professional basketball game? *

- ☐ Vicarious achievement: self-esteem through a successful team
- ☐ Aesthetics: beauty of the game
- ☐ Drama: need for stress and stimulation
- ☐ Escape from everyday life
- ☐ Family: spend time with relatives...
- ☐ Acquisition of Knowledge: basket culture
- ☐ Appreciation of physical skills of the athletes: performance
- ☐ Social interaction: socialization
- ☐ Physical attraction to the athletes: "sex appeal"

Section 2 of 4



SIG FANDOM

Description (optional)

Do you have an annual SIG subscription to attend games?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

How often do you attend SIG basketball games during the regular JeepElite season?

- ☐ Every game home (excepted impediment)
- ☐ Around once a month
- ☐ When the time allow me to or for special games

Which grade would you give to you loyalty as a SIG fan ?

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Not loyal at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very loyal

For how many times do you follow the SIG team?

- ☐ A few months ago
- ☐ Two years
- ☐ Five years
- ☐ More than 6 years

Do you participate to social events organized by SIG (excluding games)? (open day, Fan Day, trainings...)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Section 3 of 4



MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

Description (optional)

Usually, to follow SIG team you... *

	Never	Sometimes	Often
Read local newspapers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Check news on official web...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Listen to radio or watch TV	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Talk to family and friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Logging onto social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Watch the game live stream	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

On which online networks do you follow SIG?

- ☐ Youtube (SIG TV)
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ LinkedIn

Which grade would you give to the online presence of SIG ?

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Low	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strong

On your opinion, professional basketball club's digitalisation as SIG enables... *

- ☐ To have better identification to the team
- ☐ To follow statistics, performance and results live
- ☐ To be aware of events of the club
- ☐ Is useless

Did you download the brand-new SIG mobile app? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you consider that SIG online presence makes you a more loyal fan?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

According to you, what should be improved in SIG online and/or offline communications?

Long answer text

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Description (optional)

You are ? *

☐ Woman

☐ Man

The city you live in? *

Short answer text

Your age? *

☐ 18-25 years

☐ 26-30 years

☐ 31-38 years

☐ 39-45 years

☐ 46-55 years

☐ 56-65 years

☐ 66 years or more

Your occupation? *

☐ Student

☐ Unemployed

☐ Retired

☐ Executive

☐ Employee

☐ Auto-entrepreneur

Appendix 6: DBS Ethical Form

Dublin Business School

Research Ethics Review Application Form

Title of Research *From offline to online media: engaging French professional basketball fans on a new playing field*

Applicant Details

- Name: SCHNEIDER Jessica
- Status: Postgraduate student
- Address: 1 rue de la pierre polie, 67550 VENDENHEM / FRANCE
- Telephone: +33 6 47 84 12 47
- E-mail: schneiyes@gmail.com

Research Supervisor (where appropriate)

- Name: Gary Bernie
- Department: Click here to enter text.
- Telephone: Click here to enter text.
- E-mail: gary.bernie@dbb.ie

- **Supervisor's qualifications**
Research Methods lecturer
- **Supervisor's specialisations**
Click here to enter text.
- **Supervisor's experience**
Click here to enter text.

Ethical Guidelines

All applicants MUST have read and understood the DBS guidelines before submitting an application.

- **Have you read the DBS Ethical Guidelines for Research with Human Participants?**
☒ Yes ☐ No

Research Proposal

In the research, the researcher ask herself : How professional basketball clubs accommodate the digital transformation ? In which way do they rise the challenge of supplementing offline with online media to enhance the fan's experience?

The research will focus on a French basketball club in the researcher hometown: the club of Strasbourg: SIG.

On the one hand, an analysis of how the club manages to engage fans with the team, the club and the game on media before and after the starting bell whistle will be led. On the other hand, a study among SIG fans will be done thanks to both quantitative and qualitative methods.

The final research question is the following:

How do French professional basketball clubs engage fans on a new playing field across both offline and online strategies?

Proposed starting date and duration

The dissertation phase will be 12 weeks long (from October 2018 until submission, mid January 2019).
--

Research aims and objectives

5. The objective of this dissertation is to analyze the engagement of fans in the context of a French professional basket team: SIG Strasbourg. How do fans consume SIG basketball games? How do they behave regarding their favorite team?
6. The research will also explain the role of team identification when it comes to enhance fans engagement
7. One of the research objective will be to focus on offline media in sports (press, TV, radio, event...) and investigate the SIG fans engagement to them
8. Along with objective 4, we will investigate SIG fans engagement to online medias (social networks, blogging...)
9. The last objective of the dissertation is to a analyze SIG fans' omni-channel experience and engagement

Rationale

Cf. Appendix 1 (Gantt Chart), 2 (Cost management), Chapter 7 Research Logbook).

Research design

Study on SIG Basketball Club

3 STEPS:

1. Qualitative Data Collection: One individual depth interview with a French basketball specialist (SIG)
2. Quantitative Data Collection of SIG fans by administrated to them face to face, an online questionnaire. The administration has been done during a SIG game directly to fans who volunteered.
2. Qualitative Data Collection: one focus Group of 6 pre screened SIG fans met during the questionnaire administration. Respondents agreed to take part to the study and enabled a deep understanding of sport fandom and engagement to media.

Methods of data collection

The research will undertake both primary and secondary research.

Secondary research will acknowledge the researcher and add different theoretical perspectives to the study. For the purpose of the dissertation, the researcher will analyze deeply the subject as from various sources. The majority of the relevant articles and sources come from reliable web sources. To access to these data, the DBS Online Library and Google scholar were used.

To access primary data, the researcher “will require access to the organization and your research participants on more than one occasion.” (Saunders and al., 2009) Thus, the researcher met both SIG organization and SIG fans.

Saunders and al. (2009), specify that “multiple-methods research design” is the better alternative when it comes to research methods.

Then, according to my research strategy, there will be three steps in the data collection process combining qualitative and quantitative, which are the following:

- Qualitative Data Collection: one individual depth interviews
- Quantitative Data collection (with a qualitative aspect): online questionnaire administrated face to face by the researcher and a MSc colleague.
A pilot test has been designed to this extend.
- Qualitative Data Collection: one focus Groups composed of 6 pre screened SIG fans. Participants chosen will be SIG fans met in the questionnaire administration phase.

Research sample

The researcher will use Random/probability sampling as the research question is concern with one organization in a particular sector.

Indeed, the researcher will access SIG organization by meeting the head of digital communications. Then, the organization will enable the researcher to administrate to fans an online questionnaire face to face during a game at home. Respondents will be chosen randomly. Of course, the sample will be composed of volunteers only.

To sum up, the research population

- Elements: Spectators and fans of SIG basketball club attending a specific game, aged from 18 years old.
- Units: 5 400 people were attending the game.
- Extent: SIG fans attending a game at home ("Rhénus Stadium") in Strasbourg and living in France.
- Time: Friday, November 23th, 2018.

The size of the sample was hard to define as it was done on voluntary basis. A minimum of 50 responses will be useful for the study. The sample is not only quantitative but qualitative.

Moreover, participants chosen for the focus group will be SIG fans met in the questionnaire administration phase. Volunteers will be chosen by the researcher given specific demographic criteria. The aim is to have an heterogeneous sample among SIG fans to see if differences exist regarding fandom and media habits. To this extend, the sample will be composed of both males and women, from different ages and with different professional situation.

Nature of any proposed pilot study

First, the preliminary step will be to design of a pilot test to ensure the suitability of the questionnaire.

Indeed, for the purposes of this research, a pre-test will be executed. The researcher will obtained the assistance of 6 SIG fans (from contacts persons and researcher's basketball team) given their demographic characteristics that made them fit the population for this study. The participants will be the instructions to complete the questionnaire in order to identify problems with either understanding or interpreting a question, as well as any other aspect of it. After the feedback from this pre-test will be obtained, the researcher will make the last changes and developed the last version of the questionnaire.

Methods of data analysis

One the one hand, concerning qualitative data collection, the researcher chooses "Categorisation" (grouping of meanings) as she will draw a summary of the key emerging point of the focus group and IDIs.

As manual analysis is time consuming, computer will enable the structure of the work. Thus, it will ensure the closeness, accessibility, exploration, organization of the data, the search, and the ability to export it on hard copy, or other software.

On the other hand, for quantitative data analysis, the researcher chooses ranked (ordinal) data included in the categorical group. Thus, the online software *Google Forms* will be used to treat and analyze data. Likert scales will be necessary for the research in order to measure opinions, perceptions, and behaviors. To summarize and illustrate answers, the tool will show percentages and design pie, bar charts to highlight relevant data and if differences exists among those.

Ethical Issues and Risk

Please identify any ethical issues which will arise and how you will address them.

For primary data, the main ethical issue that can be faced is to be sure of obtain the informed consent (provided by DBS). Indeed, to respect the privacy and confidentiality, each participant that is going to be part of the research (focus group and IDI) has to fill out a consent form.

For the questionnaire, the researcher described the dissertation process by oral and also, a written presentation for the study was presented in the first section. Questionnaires were anonymous. The participant can omit the question if the question makes them feel uncomfortable and any participant has the right to withdraw at any stage. Even if the research itself does not contain risks of harming participants, this step is crucial for the researcher.

Concerning qualitative research, more precisely for focus groups, it might seem stigmatizing for some people. Indeed, as described below, the overall participants for the focus groups have to be representative of the population by having different ethics, age, beliefs... However, none of those aspects will be communicated to them directly. Participants will be reached privately and will be told that they correspond to the research as SIG fans.

Also, for IDI and focus group, it is important and fundamental to let the participants talk freely and not interrupt them, to refuse to manipulate the person that it questioned and to refuse to lie to the person.

In addition, one major ethics obligation will be to respect the privacy of SIG company data. The organization might be willing to give the researcher access to their private data. Thus, it is the research duty to inform SIG that the data collected will only be used for researcher's current master dissertation.

Finally, ethical issues can come from the interpretation of data due to answers taken out of context, non authenticity due to a non understanding and the translation in another language.

Please indicate any risk of harm or distress to participants.

The research will not include private or intimidating questions which risk to harm participants as it is anonymous and focus on their fan experience.

Please specify the participant group

SIG fans chosen will be French males and females, between 18 and 90 years old as fandom behavior might differ with the person's age when it comes to media.

The sample will be relevant, up to date and qualitative as the researcher met SIG fans directly during a SIG game at home (questionnaires). Furthermore, to be even more representative of the population, the selection of participants (focus group) will take into account a specific segmentation among demographics, geographic, psychographic and behavioral criteria. Indeed, for the purpose of this research, participants will be pre screened by the researcher in order to obtain a heterogeneous sample.

How will the research participants in this study be selected, approached and recruited?

The researcher will reach participants thanks to SIG authorization to administrate an online questionnaire during a game at home. Thus, the researcher and a colleague were present in

the stadium the 23 November 2018. Before the game, the researcher welcomed spectators by asking them if they would agree to answer a questionnaire on the “fan experience”. Moreover, the administration continued during half time. Some people were very interested by the study. Thus, the researcher wrote the name and email address of these people, who were willing to participate to a further study.

Then, the next step for the researcher was to analyze the data collected in questionnaires. At this stage, the researcher contacted by email the persons who gave their names earlier during questionnaire administration. In the email, they were invited to participate to a focus group on the SIG fan experience on 26th November 2018. Six pre screened fans were selected. Moreover, the researcher also took into account some demographics (provided by the questionnaire) to select focus group’s participants.(see above)

What inclusion or exclusion criteria will be used?

As mentioned before, the researcher will only select SIG fans met during the questionnaire administration phase and who were willing to participate to a further study. Then, people were also selected according specific criteria (as seen above). Thus, for instance, if two French student girls from the same school, with the same age and with the same nationality/hobbies... are willing to participate to the focus group, the researcher will unfortunately exclude one of them.

Of course, the researcher will be politely explaining to them the reasons of her choices. Moreover, a section below my questionnaire will be informing respondents that an “**Probability sample**” was used when it comes to the choice of participants. Thus, for this design, each element in the population has an equal and independent chance of selection in the sample.

How will participants be informed of the nature of study and participation?

For IDI, the researcher inform the interviewee by email.

For the questionnaire, the researcher took the time to explain the process of the study and aim of the dissertation to each.

For focus group, the researcher informed participants of the nature of the study by email. As they were already reached before (in the questionnaire administration phase), they knew a little about the study.

What procedures will be used to document the participants’ consent to participate?

All participants will receive the DBS “Info consent sheet”.

Anonymity/Confidentiality/Data Protection

Please indicate the form in which the data will be collected.

☐ Identified

☒ Potentially Identifiable

☐ De-Identified

What arrangements are in place to ensure that the identity of participants is protected?

Questionnaires were anonymous as no name or email/phone/address etc were required.

The data the researcher collected does not contain any personal information about the participants.

Focus group participants and the interviewee were identified but completed the info Consent sheet in which the anonymity was specified.

Who will have responsibility for the data generated by the research?

The researcher will have the responsibility for the data generated by the research. Also, the supervisor of the dissertation will also have access to the data.

Please describe the procedures of the storage and destruction of data.

The data will be stored in the researcher' own computer so will be private.

Dissemination and Reporting

Please describe how the participants will be informed of dissemination and reporting (e.g. submission for examination, reporting, publications, presentations)?

Participants will be informed by email (if they want to) by the researcher when the dissertation will be submitted. Indeed, a form will be available after the focus group, in order for participants to inform the researcher of their willingness to receive up-to-date news about the research. Thus, if they check the box "Yes", the researcher will take them inform of submission, dissemination, reporting, publications, presentations.... If the participants check the box "No" and don't to receive email about the research(er) anymore, her/his wish will be respected by the researcher.

Declaration

We confirm that we have read the DBS Ethical Guidelines for Research with Human Participants, and agree to abide by them in conducting this research. We also confirm that the information provided on this form is correct and accurate.

Signature of Applicant Jessica SCHNEIDER **Date** 21/12/2018

Signature of Supervisor _____ **Date**
/ /

Declaration by Head of School

I have read the application form and agree that the study described is suitable for exemption from ethical review.

Signature of Head of School _____ **Date**
/ /

Applications will not be considered for review until the application is signed by the Applicant, the Supervisor and the Head of School.