



The Benefits of Phygital Marketing in Sports Events

Akbar Jaberi¹ , Kourosh Ghahreman Tabrizi^{1*}

¹Associate Professor in Sport Management, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman, Kerman, Iran.

ABSTRACT

Purpose: Considering the importance and ever-increasing growth of technology in sports, this study was conducted to identify the benefits of digital marketing in sports events.

Methodology: This study employed a qualitative, exploratory approach utilizing a thematic analysis method. The study's research population consisted of experts in sports and modern technologies, and 15 individuals were purposively selected as research participants based on their expertise. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter until theoretical saturation was reached.

Findings: Using thematic analysis in the interviews led to identifying 82 codes, 12 sub-themes, and four main themes. Summarizing and classifying the findings revealed that the benefits of phygital marketing in sports events included "Event brand development," "Deeper experience," "Service quality," and "Efficient interactions." Considering the growing trend of technology in sports, the findings of this research demonstrated that phygital marketing, as one of the key aspects of technology, can lead to significant benefits in sports events.

Originality: This research can be considered one of the first qualitative studies concerning the positive consequences of phygital marketing in sports events on both domestic and international scales.

Keywords

Digital Marketing
Physical Marketing
Sports Events

Article Type

Original Article

Received: 2024/06/20

Accepted: 2024/08/29

How to Cite this Article:

Jaberi, A., Ghahreman Tabrizi, K. (2025). The Benefits of Phygital Marketing in Sports Events. *Sports Business Journal*, 5(1), 13-31. <https://doi.org/10.22051/sbj.2024.47495.1167>



1. Introduction

Sports are an industry, and sports events, besides marketing approaches, have a close and mutual relationship. Due to periodic changes, marketing is a field that is constantly evolving and adapting to new conditions (Celik et al., 2023). These changes will always bring benefits and challenges to themselves, and organizations will be more successful in these changes that take the most advantage of the changes and adopt the best coping strategies. In today's rapidly evolving marketplace, one of the most significant marketing challenges is ensuring a seamless and cohesive customer experience across physical and digital channels. With the increasing prevalence of hybrid environments, where physical and digital elements coexist and interact simultaneously, marketers must find innovative ways to balance the unique demands of both worlds (Belghiti et al., 2018).

The dawn of the digital age in the 1990s brought about a key change in the world of marketing, as advances in computer and Internet technology reshaped the very foundations of the field. With each emerging technology bringing new opportunities and tools to marketers, the traditional marketing approach gave way to a digital-first strategy that leveraged the potential of digital platforms to transform the customer journey and reach more engaged audiences (Kotler et al., 2021). The dawn of the Internet revolutionized the marketing landscape, obliterating the limitations of distance and time to create unprecedented consumer comfort and demand. In today's fiercely competitive marketplace, businesses are under pressure to adapt to their customers' evolving expectations if they are to gain a competitive edge. One such innovative approach is phygital marketing, a term coined by Momentum, an Australian marketing agency, in 2013. Phygital marketing is a hybrid approach that integrates traditional marketing strategies with digital tactics, leveraging the strengths of both worlds to create a unique and immersive experience for consumers (Van Tichelen, 2019).

Phygital refers to an environment where physical and digital tools are applied simultaneously. Phygital experiences bridge the physical and digital worlds, providing consumers with a unique, holistic experience that builds trust, enhances value, and reduces confusion (Purcareau, 2018). These experiences are pertinent to next-generation technology, offering new opportunities that are unattainable without modern innovations (Hollebeck et al., 2019). With the inevitable rise of digitalization, a new path for consumers has surfaced, presenting a novel and efficient way for businesses to engage, interact, and create value in an increasingly connected world. Thus, in this era of digital transformation, companies must master the art of navigating both the physical and virtual realms. These integrated services have allowed companies to be proactive throughout the customer journey. As technology progresses, the global exchange of knowledge about goods and services and the collective sharing of experiential contact has improved (Kotler et al., 2021).

The turn of the millennium witnessed a significant shift in the marketing landscape as the focus transitioned from purely digital to the phygital realm. This paradigm shift initiated a new era in marketing research (Banik, 2021). Phygital is a term that describes the current period in which the physical, digital, and virtual worlds are intertwined using digital and ICT technologies, along with innovative technologies such as artificial

intelligence (AI) and big data (Huang et al., 2023). Phygital marketing is a modern, hybrid strategy that seamlessly blends traditional and digital marketing tools to create an engaging and interactive experience for the tech-savvy, experience-hungry consumers of the 21st century. Today's customers desire brands that distinguish themselves from the competition by crafting bespoke, emotionally resonant experiences that delight and excite while establishing a deeper, more meaningful connection between brand and consumer (Mamina & Tolstikova, 2020). Whether it's integrating digital elements into the physical realm through technology like augmented reality or transporting the real into the virtual world via tools like virtual shopping, phygital offers a dynamic and innovative approach to marketing that engages consumers on both a tangible and intangible level (Delinikolas et al., 2023). Phygital is a response to the need to adapt to customers' evolving behaviors and needs. In fact, customers of a brand continue to purchase products only when brands can surprise them and adjust to the environment and circumstances in which they live (Dal Colle, 2022). Phygital marketing presents an opportunity to meet the sophisticated and discerning needs of the modern consumer by seamlessly merging the tried-and-true tactics of traditional sales promotion with the innovative and immersive power of digital brand activation, crafting a cohesive and captivating customer journey that bridges the physical and digital realms (Singh et al., 2019).

By implementing phygital marketing strategies, we can offer individuals experiences that can only be delivered through digital tools. Moreover, entrepreneurs stand to gain significantly from embracing the technological revolution by leveraging new tools and techniques to cut costs, streamline inventory management, and uncover deeper consumer insights through data collection (Johnson & Barlow, 2021). Phygital marketing can also enhance customer satisfaction by reducing wait times (Delinikolas et al., 2023). Brands that embrace phygital marketing strategies aim to create unforgettable, unique shopping experiences, distinguishing themselves from the competition and establishing a leadership role in their respective markets (Bevolo & Amati, 2024). Interactive technologies can connect the physical and virtual realms, crafting a seamless, immersive phygital journey for customers (Siregar & Kent, 2019).

Phygital forges a profoundly personalized, interactive, and compelling experience that forges lasting bonds of loyalty between brand and consumer (Van Tichelen, 2019). Phygital marketing offers consumers a revolutionary shopping experience, enabling them to intelligently and intuitively engage with products and tools (Chang & Chen, 2021).

The adoption of innovative technologies in the virtual arena has exceeded the entertainment market and digital games, and this phenomenon in business and learning is still at the beginning of the transformation path (Huang et al., 2023). Digitization has dramatically affected the industry and has contributed to the emergence of new concepts to provide a unique experience for customers (Pangarkar et al., 2022). Digital transformation allows customers to move freely in different virtual channels (Cavalinhos et al., 2021). Environmental features entice customers to engage more actively with their surroundings and allow them to craft a unique, memorable experience that heightens their overall interaction with the environment (Mohd-Ramly & Omar, 2017). Phygital marketing transcends traditional boundaries, enabling consumers to inhabit both the

physical and digital realms simultaneously, creating an immersive and unforgettable shopping experience (Banik, 2021).

As an electronic company, Amazon also revealed that it will apply a multi-channel method to accomplish its mission and expand it gradually (Fung & Haddon, 2019). Companies like Nike and Adidas also guide and support their customers by developing a phygital environment and using different applications in their physical centers (Mishra et al., 2023). Digital technologies enable customers to plunge into a world of engrossing, interactive experiences that create indelible emotional moments and memories (Foster & McLelland, 2015).

Phygital elements appear to provide more personalized experiences for individuals, leading to greater loyalty, value creation, and customer-based brand equity (Singh et al., 2019). The rise of digitalization has shaken the foundations of luxury consumerism, fundamentally changing how consumers purchase and engage with high-end products. Consequently, luxury brands must adapt their marketing strategies to maximize the experiential value of the customer journey, blurring the lines between physical and digital realms through "phygital" approaches. In phygital conditions, consumers can search for and gather information about a product or service online, then interact with the physical environment to complete the purchase process (Mishra et al., 2023). Consumer empowerment depends on their trust and confidence in the accuracy and authenticity of information gathered from various online and offline channels (Broniarczyk & Griffin, 2014). Multichannel communication effectively fosters positive customer attitudes and enhances trustworthiness (Heinberg et al., 2018).

Phygital marketing helps to promote the brand and improve the brand image (Kwon & Lennon, 2009), and fosters positive changes in attitude, behavioral intention, perceived risk, word of mouth, satisfaction, and loyalty (Qin et al., 2021). From a business perspective, phygital marketing offers numerous advantages, including cost savings, enhanced customer data capture, diverse purchasing options, and improved shopping experiences (Celik et al., 2023).

The findings of Mele et al.'s study (2024) provided an integrated model for customer experience in the phygital space and revealed the dynamic nature of the phygital environment. A survey by Samat et al. (2023) examined the use of phygital marketing in the context of the Olympic Games and found that phygital marketing can effectively increase brand awareness and interaction with Olympic fans. Delinikolas et al.'s (2024) studies showed that combining physical and digital elements is essential to help audiences get used to immersive media. According to the findings of Celik et al. (2023), the evolution of marketing based on phygital marketing will continue. Bonfanti et al. (2023) believe that the phygital experience may provide a memorable experience that results in more significant customer interaction with the environment. The findings of Mishra et al. (2023) showed that phygital integration impacts consumers' phygital experience by increasing the feeling of power and satisfaction, and it helps retain consumers and leads to long-term relationships with them. Celik et al.'s findings (2023) showed that brand purchase intention, decision-making process, and dissatisfaction/satisfaction issues are raised in traditional marketing, and online reviews based on TAM theory have become essential in digital marketing. Based on the findings of (Van Tichelen, 2019), the

implementation and use of phygital channels can be a promising solution to fill the gap between physical and digital marketing. The research results of [Yuce et al. \(2021\)](#) showed that playing in the phygital space led to a sensory, interactive, pleasurable, and suspenseful experience. [Batat \(2024\)](#) showed that the phygital phenomenon has fluidized customers' journeys from online to offline and vice versa and responds to their tangible (quality needs) and intangible (emotional needs) needs according to consumers' values. The study of [Hyun et al. \(2024\)](#) revealed that emotional appeal, web design, and customer service in the phygital space positively affected customer-oriented brand equity and positively contributed to satisfaction and repurchase intention.

According to the literature review, the research on the phygital setting was primarily descriptive ([Shi et al., 2020](#)). Because phygital is a new concept, previous authors have defined it using relevant terms like omni-channel and multi-channel integration ([Batat, 2019](#)). Although the application of the phygital phenomenon is used primarily in business, this phenomenon lacks an academic conceptualization. The current studies explain this term according to the approach of the marketing domain, where phygital is mainly used in multi-channel, cross-channel, or omni-channel approaches. This narrow view of phygital marketing understates its full potential and undersells its ability to revolutionize customer experiences ([Batat, 2024](#)). [Del Vecchio et al. \(2023\)](#) pointed out that the studies published in the field of phygital lack coherence and a clear and specific concept, and therefore, the study of this concept in different fields can help to clarify this concept and coherence in definitions. Since creating phygital experiences for customers has become a "main priority" for marketing researchers and businesses ([Batat, 2024](#)), studying the dimensions of applying this marketing approach in sports events is considered a critical necessity for the future of sports.

Managing the customer experience requires a multi-faceted marketing approach that involves analyzing customer data, prioritizing marketing initiatives, deploying resources, monitoring performance, disseminating brand messaging, and designing visually engaging materials that align with customer needs and preferences ([Jacob et al., 2023](#)). Therefore, phygital marketing can be defined as one of the key tools for enhancing the customer experience in sports, providing them with a more profound and exciting experience of sporting events. In today's market, consumers are seeking experiences in mixed phygital environments rather than simply searching for products. This shift forces companies to move from a product-oriented model to a more experience-focused mindset by revising their marketing methods ([Batat, 2024](#)). Consequently, paying attention to these capacities in sports and sports events as an attractive and growing industry becomes essential. Given that customers' needs and expectations are constantly evolving ([Bonfanti & Yfantidou, 2021](#)), sports managers and marketers must carefully monitor these expectations among sports fans and spectators at various events, anticipating the necessary strategies to implement crucial and ongoing changes. A review of the research literature indicates that many marketing researchers believe that academic exploration of customer experience management in the phygital realm is minimal ([Klaus, 2024](#)). Since the implications of the combined phygital marketing approach remain largely unexplored, studying the potential benefits of phygital marketing at sports events can provide a clearer understanding of the long-term effects of this marketing strategy in the sports industry.

Therefore, recognizing the importance and necessity of phygital marketing in sports, this research aims to identify the benefits of phygital marketing within sports events.

2. Methodology

In This research was a qualitative-exploratory study that adopted an interpretive-constructivist approach and used thematic analysis. It is considered applied research and was conducted from March to June 2023. In the current study, we conducted [Braun & Clarke \(2006\)](#) thematic analysis model for content analysis. The research population consisted of specialists and experts in sports and emerging technologies. Fifteen experts were purposively selected as research participants based on research inclusion criteria. Participants were selected based on their research and educational and executive backgrounds in technology and sports. Participants were selected using the theoretical sampling method until reaching the theoretical saturation stage. Experience and background in conducting research and education relevant to the marketing field in sports events and mastery of theoretical foundations in new technologies were considered when selecting the participants. A semi-structured interview method was used in the research process, which involved direct face-to-face and virtual interviews through social media. Interviews were conducted over a duration ranging from 20 to 45 minutes, with an average duration of 28 minutes. To guide the interview flow, a central question was used based on the title and primary purpose of the research. The main question guiding the interview flow was: "What are the positive consequences of using the phygital marketing environment for sports events?". According to the answer given to this question, other questions were raised to extract the benefits and advantages of phygital marketing in sports events. The study used [Braun & Clarke \(2006\)](#) six-stage model for data analysis. The first stage involved becoming familiar with the data by reviewing the interviews. Then, initial coding was performed based on the main research question in the second stage. The third stage involved searching for central themes.

After identifying the main themes, the fourth stage involved a more accurate review of these themes, with several rounds of assessment and expert consultation leading to their classification and naming. In the fifth stage, the themes were clearly defined and titled. Finally, the sixth stage focused on interpreting the themes in relation to the main research question. Reliability, or trustworthiness, was used to evaluate the quality of qualitative findings based on four interrelated criteria: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability ([Guba & Lincoln, 2005](#)). Credibility pertains to the internal validity of qualitative studies, and methods such as utilizing multiple data sources, analysts, and techniques were recommended to enhance it—all of which were considered in this study. Dependability signifies the ability to trace the source of the data, its collection methods, and its application within a specific study. One way to bolster the reliability of the findings is through member checking, wherein the researcher reconciles their assumptions with one or more individuals knowledgeable about the subject being investigated. Member checking was integral to the data collection process, validating both the accuracy of the data and the researcher's interpretations as they developed. In this study, the feedback from two interviewees and the research team was used to refine the data and results at various

stages of the analysis. Additionally, re-testing can also be a crucial step in validating this study's findings. The transferability of the research results reflects their generalizability to other similar groups and contexts. By extracting and presenting the most comprehensive findings possible, the study aims to enhance this aspect of validity; in this case, by reviewing numerous interviews and gathering diverse and non-redundant content, an effort was made to adhere to this recommendation. The research findings can be confirmed if others can follow the researcher's methodology and process. This study also endeavors to present the various stages of the research with maximum detail to address this concern.

3. Results

The thematic analysis approach of [Braun & Clarke \(2006\)](#) was conducted to analyze the research data. Based on this, in the first step, the raw data related to the interviews were reviewed several times to get a complete knowledge of the raw data in the first stage. The second stage started with the initial coding to ensure that the data was carefully analyzed at this stage. At this stage, the primary codes were extracted based on the main research question in the form of 82 codes. After coding the data, the search was started to explore the main themes and possible sub-themes. Therefore, the codes were analyzed at this stage, and the codes with more semantic affinity were classified under a central theme. The themes in this stage include the major organized concepts ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)). "Event brand development," "Deeper experience," "Service quality," and "Efficient interactions" (four main themes). In the fourth stage, after different revisions and applying experts' opinions, the classification and naming of the main themes were ensured. By conducting several detailed revisions, the sub-themes relevant to each central theme were identified at this stage. By re-examining the codes and conforming to the main themes, sub-themes (12 sub-themes) were identified. At this stage, the sub-themes were extracted according to their semantic and conceptual affinity ([Table 1](#)). In the fifth stage, the themes were defined and labeled as presented in the following table.

Table 1. Codes, sub-themes, and central themes.

Main themes	Sub-themes	Participants	Codes
Event brand development	Brand awareness (9 codes)	P7, P8, P13, P10	• Gaining more information about events
		P3, P9, P12, P14	• Receiving more accurate information about clubs
		P5, P8, P11, P15	• Becoming more familiar with favorite sports
		P1, P6, P7, P13, P14	• Getting up-to-date and timely information
		P2, P4, P9	• Identifying favorite athletes better
		P2, P6, P8, P12	• Understanding better where events take place
		P3, P4, P7, P9	• Receiving news from various sources
		P5, P7, P14, P15	• Recognizing club logos better
		P5, P9, P10, P14	• Increased awareness of sponsors in sports

Main themes	Sub-themes	Participants	Codes
Deeper experience	Brand image (7 codes)	P2, P3, P7, P9	• Positive mindset towards the event
		P3, P6, P8, P11	• Receiving memorable images from events
		P8, P12, P13	• Positive image of events
		P9, P11, P14	• Positive mental image of sporting competitions
		P10, P13, P15	• Imagining exciting images in the mind
		P3, P4, P15	• Not forgetting events and events around them
		P6, P8, P11	• Unique and memorable image
	Brand loyalty (7 codes)	P2, P3, P8, P9	• Becoming attached to events
		P6, P7, P10	• Commitment to favorite clubs and events
		P7, P12, P15	• Returning to events
		P1, P8, P10, P11	• Repurchasing event tickets
		P3, P9, P11, P14	• Encouraging others to attend events
		P2, P5, P11, P15	• More follow-up of events
		P3, P4, P8	• Recommending events to others
	Brand identity (7 codes)	P4, P12, P13, P15	• Creating a distinct identity for the event
		P8, P9, P11	• Differentiating the event from similar events
		P5, P9, P10, P13	• Differentiation from competitors
		P1, P9, P11, P14	• Understanding the full dimensions and nature of events
		P1, P6, P11, P12, P13	• Gaining a more real understanding of events
		P2, P4, P5	• Understanding the details and nuances of events
		P3, P5, P12, P15	• Closeness of identity with sports events
	Sport experience (6 codes)	P6, P7, P9	• A greater sense of closeness to athletes
		P1, P5, P11, P12, P14	• A more colorful experience of being present at events
		P4, P5, P9, P12, P15	• Deeper sports experiences at events
		P2, P6, P10, P12, P14, P15	• A greater sense of participation in the flow of organizing events
		P2, P7, P11, P12	• A reduced physical distance between fans and members of sports events
		P5, P6, P9, P12	• More and better engagement with members of sports events
	Non-sport experience (5 codes)	P3, P4, P9, P12, P14, P15	• Deeper understanding of the Phenomena around sport events
P2, P5, P8, P9		• Greater involvement with side events	
P11, P13, P14		• Greater involvement with event marketing activities	
P5, P7, P9, P10		• Greater involvement with event sponsors	

Main themes	Sub-themes	Participants	Codes	
Service quality	Easy access (6 codes)	P1, P3, P4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deeper personal and social experiences. • Easy ticket purchase 	
		P1, P6, P7, P13, P14, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated product purchase 	
		P8, P9, P11, P13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy access to essential needs 	
		P3, P4, P6, P7, P12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy chair selection 	
		P1, P5, P4, P7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to news and information related to the event 	
		P5, P8, P11, P12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better access to athletes and members of sporting events 	
		P3, P9, P12, P13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combination of physical and virtual games 	
		P2, P3, P11, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased appeal of events 	
		P1, P4, P12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More enjoyment from events 	
		P10, P14, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater diversity in entertainment at events 	
	Entertainment and excitement (8 codes)	P7, P10, P11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More entertainment on event days 	
		P1, P3, P6, P11, P12, P13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater excitement at events 	
		P8, P11, P12, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More opportunities for attendance and participation 	
		P2, P9, P11, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wider variety of engaging and exciting games 	
		P7, P9, P10, P12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better guidance to places 	
		P5, P11, P14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating responsiveness to expectations 	
		P9, P13, P14, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of pre-event services 	
	Better support (7 codes)	P6, P7, P10, P12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of post-event services 	
		P1, P10, P13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faster review of complaints and problems 	
		P2, P8, P9, P14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faster provision of services 	
		P5, P11, P13, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faster provision of information and data related to the event 	
	Efficient interactions	Interaction with fans (7 codes)	P1, P9, P10, P14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting familiar with other fans
P2, P6, P13			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing more communication with the fans 	
P11, P13, P14			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closer communication with the fans 	
P3, P7, P9, P10			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher cohesion and coordination of the fans 	
P8, P10, P12, P13			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better management of fan bases 	
P1, P2, P10, P12			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of fan bases 	
P4, P9, P13			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting to know more about the fan community 	
Interaction with managers (6 codes)		P3, P5, P11, P13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The possibility of remote communication with managers 	
		P5, P6, P8, P11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closer communication with managers 	
		P7, P12, P13, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More communication with managers on a virtual platform 	

Main themes	Sub-themes	Participants	Codes
		P1, P13, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating multi-channel ways to communicate with managers
		P1, P9, P10, P11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better communication channels with managers
		P4, P5, P12, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing the prompt feedback from managers
	Interaction with sponsors and marketers (7 codes)	P10, P12, P14, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased visibility of financial supporters and sports marketers
		P3, P4, P9, P10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better visibility of financial supporters and sports marketers
		P2, P5, P6, P12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi-channel interaction with financial supporters and sports marketers
		P9, P10, P11, P15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased attention to financial supporters and sports marketers
		P3, P3, P9, P13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better communication with financial supporters and sports marketers
		P1, P2, P5, P7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More support from financial supporters and sports marketers
		P2, P6, P9, P11, P14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More purchases from sponsors
4 main themes	12 sub-themes		82 codes

After examining the content of the interviews, four major themes and several sub-themes were explored. The first theme was “Event brand development.” The importance of this theme is evident in the following statements by P3:

"By applying the phygital tools in sports events, the fans and spectators will have this opportunity to get more accurate information about different issues around the clubs, events, and athletes. This helps them to be more updated and have a pleasant image of the event".

The second theme was “Deeper experience”. The significance of this theme is evident in the following statements by P12:

"The fans and spectators enjoy attending the match with their friends. They can experience deeper excitement by experiencing virtual tools besides physical ones."

The next theme was “Service quality”. The following statements by P11 reinforce this claim:

"Applying both virtual and physical tools facilitate responsiveness to attendees' expectations because this environment is faster and more flexible."

The fourth theme was “Efficient interactions”. P9 expressed his view about this theme as follows:

"Phygital environment allows remote communication with managers, fans, and other spectators. This environment helps individuals have closer interactions".

The findings in Table One have been illustrated in the following graphic model (Figure 1).

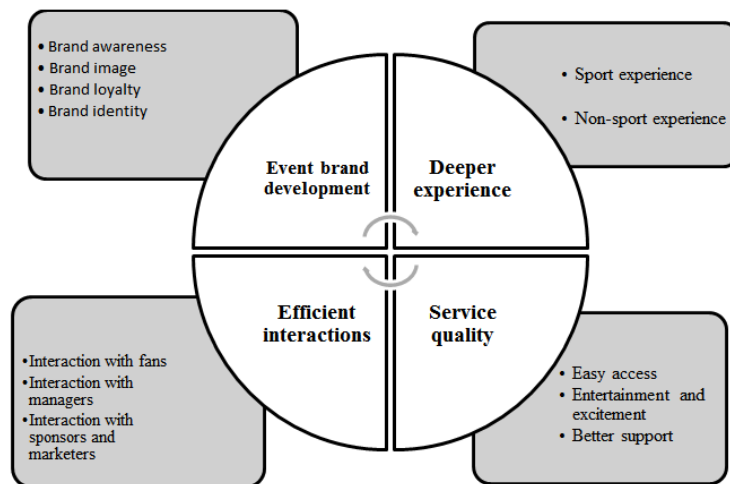


Figure 1. The model of the benefits of phygital marketing in sports events.

Figure 1 represents the research model based on the thematic data analysis, including four main themes and 12 sub-themes as the benefits of phygital marketing in sports events.

4. Discussion and conclusion

This research was conducted to identify the benefits of phygital marketing in sports events. This research can be considered one of the first qualitative research conducted about the positive consequences of phygital marketing in sports events on the domestic and international scale. The findings revealed that the benefits of phygital marketing in sports events included "Event brand development," "Deeper experience," "Service quality," and "Efficient interactions." Considering the growing trend of technology in sports, the findings of this research demonstrated that phygital marketing, one of the key samples of technology, can lead to the creation of significant benefits in sports events.

- **Event brand development:** Brand development of sports events was one of the key advantages of phygital marketing in the sport setting. Phygital marketing combines physical and digital experiences and can influence brand development. Samat et al. (2023) found that phygital marketing in Olympic Games can effectively increase brand awareness and interaction with Olympic fans. Phygital marketing helps to promote the brand and influence the consumers' behavior and attitude. The phygital elements offer personal

- experiences for buyers and lead to increased store interaction, loyalty, value creation, customer engagement, and customer-based brand equity (Singh et al., 2019). Hyun et al. (2024) demonstrated that emotional appeal, web design, and customer service in the physical space positively affected customer-oriented brand equity and positively contributed to satisfaction and repurchase intention. Digitalization plays a critical role in consumers' shopping behavior, and brands attempt to elevate the value experienced by customers via "phygital" marketing (Hyun et al., 2024). Phygital marketing can also increase customer satisfaction by reducing waiting time (Delinikolas et al., 2023). By integrating physical and digital channels, brands can reach a wider audience and raise awareness of their products or services. Phygital experiences can create a more immersive and engaging customer experience, leading to higher brand loyalty and customer retention. A consistent and well-executed phygital strategy can help establish a unique brand identity and differentiate a brand from its competitors. By blending the physical and digital realms, phygital events can create more engaging, immersive, and memorable experiences for attendees, which can help to reinforce the event brand and make a lasting impression. Phygital events offer opportunities for interactivity, gamification, and personalized content that can keep attendees engaged and involved, developing a sense of community and belonging around the event brand.
- **More profound experiences:** Deeper experiences in sports events were found to be other significant advantages of phygital marketing in a sport setting. Digitization has dramatically affected the industry and has contributed to the emergence of new concepts, such as Phygital, to provide a unique experience for customers (Pangarkar et al., 2022). Phygital helps customers live in the physical and digital environment simultaneously to gain more purchasing experience (Banik, 2021). Through phygital marketing, a variety of experiences involve a combination of physical and digital touch at the same time and in the same place (Belghiti et al., 2018). Consumers in the current age favor brands that distinguish themselves from rivals and offer personal, exciting, and unique experiences that stimulate feelings (Mamina & Tolstikova, 2020). Phygital experiences are a harmonious blend of the physical and digital realms, creating transformative, unique experiences that transcend the limitations of traditional methods (Hollebeek et al., 2019). Companies like Nike and Adidas also guide and support their customers by developing a physical environment and using different applications in their physical centers (Mishra et al., 2023). Digital technologies unlock the gateway to immersive, engaging customer experiences, where the virtual and physical boundaries dissolve, creating a heightened level of entertainment, interaction, and personalization (Foster & McLelland, 2015). Applying phygital marketing strategies may provide consumers with experiences beyond those that can only be provided through digital tools. Phygital experiences can create a more immersive experience for sports fans, blending physical and digital elements to allow them to engage with the event fully. Augmented reality technology can enhance the physical environment,

making it more interactive and engaging for customers. Phygital marketing can help events personalize fans' experiences, creating a deeper connection between the brand and sports fans. Phygital events often offer more opportunities for attendees to engage with the content, each other, and the event in creative and interactive ways. This can include everything from augmented reality exhibits to interactive displays and virtual networking platforms. By leveraging digital technologies, phygital events can offer personalized experiences tailored to individual attendees' preferences and demands. This can help create a more intimate, engaging experience that resonates deeply with attendees.

- **Service quality:** Service quality in sports events was another significant advantage of phygital marketing in a sport setting. [Yuce et al. \(2021\)](#) showed that playing in the phygital space led to a sensory, interactive, pleasurable, and suspenseful experience. Phygital marketing reduces costs, captures consumers' data, offers customers more purchasing options, and enhances the buying experience ([Celik et al., 2023](#)). [Batat \(2024\)](#) stated that the phygital phenomenon responds to their tangible (quality needs) and intangible (emotional needs) needs according to consumers' values. The phygital offers consumers a distinctive experience by providing value and trust while reducing confusion ([Purcarea, 2018](#)). Brands that follow phygital marketing approaches try to present a unique experience to their customers and stay on the cutting edge in the face of fierce competition ([Bevolo & Amati, 2024](#)). The findings of [Mishra et al. \(2023\)](#) showed that phygital integration impacts consumers' phygital experience by increasing the feeling of power and satisfaction, and it helps retain consumers and leads to long-term relationships with them. By integrating physical and digital channels, sports events can provide more responsive and personalized customer service, leading to higher fan satisfaction. Digital tools, besides the physical assets, can streamline processes and make it easier for sports events to deliver efficient and effective service to sports fans. Integrating digital and physical tools can enable the managers of sports events to collect and analyze data more effectively, allowing the personnel to identify opportunities for service improvement. Integrating digital technologies into physical environments, phygital environments can offer more channels for customer service, making it easier for attendees to get help, provide feedback, or engage with event staff in real-time. Digital technologies can automate processes and streamline operations, resulting in faster and more efficient service contributing to a higher quality experience for attendees.
- **Efficient interactions:** According to the findings, efficient interactions in sports events were another significant advantage of phygital marketing in the sports setting. [Bonfanti et al. \(2023\)](#) found that the Phygital experience provides indelible memories that result in more substantial customer interaction with the environment. Interactive technologies bridge the virtual and physical worlds, breaking down barriers and creating a seamless, intuitive phygital journey for customers ([Siregar & Kent, 2019](#)). Phygital marketing offers consumers a new opportunity to buy and intelligently interact with products and tools ([Chang &](#)

Chen, 2021). Environmental features serve as catalysts for enhanced customer participation and interaction, empowering them to co-create unique, memorable experiences that impact their perception of the environment (Mohd-Ramly & Omar, 2017). Consumers feel empowered when confident in the data from various online and offline channels (Broniarczyk & Griffin, 2014). Multichannel communication creates positive customer attitudes and increases reliability (Heinberg et al., 2018). The phygital experience transcends the realm of consumer preferences and tastes, instead delving into the psychological underpinnings of modern marketing. The harmonious blend of physical and digital elements shapes consumers' perceptions of products, brands, and values, driving individual interpretations and preferences that can be harnessed to create compelling, lasting experiences. The development of technology has opened the way for the widespread exchange of information about goods and services while sharing the experiences of contacting them. By integrating physical and digital channels, sports events can make it easier for fans and spectators to interact with other parts of the event, reducing the time and effort required to get information or receive assistance. Digital tools such as chatbots and self-service portals can enable fans and spectators to access information and resolve issues independently without direct interaction with a customer service representative.

Marketing has experienced a seismic shift in recent years, driven by rapid technological advancements, changing consumer behavior, and intense competition. This evolution, which shows no signs of slowing down, presents challenges for managers who must navigate uncertainty, volatility, and unpredictability to reach, engage, and influence today's consumers. In this constantly evolving landscape, businesses must remain agile, adaptable, and responsive, continuously monitoring trends, leveraging new technologies, and developing innovative strategies that resonate with customers and deliver tangible business value. A literature review indicates that many scholars believe academic research on customer experience management in phygital contexts is minimal (Klaus, 2024). While the consequences of the combined approach of phygital marketing remain largely unknown, this study contributes to the field by identifying the potential benefits of phygital marketing in sports events, thereby enhancing the understanding of the long-term implications of this marketing approach in the sports industry. The results of this research empower sports managers and marketers to grasp the significance of phygital marketing in a sports setting and to integrate physical and digital channels to boost revenue generation. Intense competition prompts clubs and sports organizations to rethink their marketing strategies to seize opportunities to reach more fans and to blend online and offline channels as a strategic move to enhance the phygital experience of their stakeholders. Providing exclusive phygital clubhouses that offer personalized, immersive experiences, including VIP access to players and coaches, unique merchandise, augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) technologies, can be highly effective. Hosting lives and virtual watch parties that combine real-world social interactions with interactive digital experiences can be crucial in fostering community and fan engagement. Moreover, developing

interactive digital platforms that allow fans to connect with their favorite teams and players, even when they cannot attend the game, through activities like virtual training sessions or video chats enables sports marketers and managers to efficiently leverage the benefits of a phygital environment in sports events.

Future studies can investigate phygital marketing in other sports research fields. In addition, the qualitative analysis used by this study cannot guarantee the generalization of this research's findings. Therefore, an essential way for future research can be to test the proposed framework on larger samples using quantitative methods. Future studies can focus on various phygital tools, such as artificial intelligence systems, etc., in sports on a case-by-case basis. Generation Z fans, consumers who do not see a difference between the virtual and real worlds compared to other generations, can be one of the essential populations for studying the phygital marketing activity dimensions. Concerns related to the privacy and data security of customers and sports fans in the phygital space can also be one of the interesting topics in future studies.

Disclosure statement and funding

There is no potential conflict of interest, and the present study received no financial support from any organization or institution.

Acknowledgment

We are sincerely grateful to all experts who participated in the process of conducting his study.

References

- Banik, S. (2021). Exploring the involvement-patronage link in the phygital retail experiences. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 63, 102739. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2021.102739>
- Batat, W. (2019). *Experiential marketing: Consumer behavior, customer experience and the 7Es*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315232201>
- Batat, W. (2024). What does phygital really mean? A conceptual introduction to the phygital customer experience (PH-CX) framework. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 32(8), 1220-1243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2022.2059775>
- Batat, W. (2024). Why is the traditional marketing mix dead? Towards the “experiential marketing mix” (7E), a strategic framework for business experience design in the phygital age. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 32(2), 101-113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2022.2129745>
- Belghiti, S., Ochs, A., Lemoine, J-F., & Badot, O. (2018). The Phygital Shopping Experience: An Attempt at Conceptualization and Empirical Investigation. In P. Rossi & N. Krey (Eds.), *Marketing Transformation: Marketing Practice in an Ever Changing World* (pp. 61-74). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68750-6_18
- Bevolo, M., & Amati, F. (2024). The future of business events in the “phygital” age: development of a generative tool. *World Leisure Journal*, 66(1), 92-115. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16078055.2023.2238275>
- Bonfanti, A., Vigolo, V., Vannucci, V., & Brunetti, F. (2023). Creating memorable shopping experiences to meet phygital customers' needs: evidence from sporting goods stores. *International Journal*

- of Retail & Distribution Management*, 51(13), 81-100. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRDM-12-2021-0588>
- Bonfanti, A., & Yfantidou, G. (2021). Designing a memorable in-store customer shopping experience: practical evidence from sports equipment retailers. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 49(9), 1295-1311. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRDM-09-2020-0361>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Broniarczyk, S. M., & Griffin, J. G. (2014). Decision Difficulty in the Age of Consumer Empowerment. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 24(4), 608-625. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2014.05.003>
- Cavalinhos, S., Marques, S. H., & De Fátima Salgueiro, M. (2021). The use of mobile devices in-store and the effect on shopping experience: A systematic literature review and research agenda. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 45(6), 1198-1216. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12690>
- Celik, Z., Özdemir, O., Sağlam, M., & Uslu, A. (2023). Comparative Analysis of Bibliometric Data Sources of Empirical Studies in the Context of Traditional, Digital and Phygital Marketing. *Marmara University İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Dergisi*, 45(2), 180-212. <https://doi.org/10.14780/muiibd.1388980>
- Chang, Y-W., & Chen, J. (2021). What motivates customers to shop in smart shops? The impacts of smart technology and technology readiness. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 58, 102325. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102325>
- Dal Colle, L. (2022). *Phygital. Where and how we could intervene in the customer journey to provide a better customer experience* [Master, Ca' Foscari University]. Venice, Italy. <http://dspace.unive.it/handle/10579/22390>
- Del Vecchio, P., Secundo, G., & Garzoni, A. (2023). Phygital technologies and environments for breakthrough innovation in customers' and citizens' journey. A critical literature review and future agenda. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 189(7), 122342. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2023.122342>
- Delinikolas, D., Hapek, M., & Wójciak, M. (2023). The Spectrum of XR Marketing – Collective Case Study. *Zarządzanie Mediami*, 10(4), 299-322. <https://doi.org/10.4467/23540214ZM.22.020.17964>
- Foster, J., & McLelland, M. A. (2015). Retail atmospherics: The impact of a brand dictated theme. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 22, 195-205. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2014.07.002>
- Fung, E., & Haddon, H. (2019, March 1). *Amazon to launch new grocery-store business: First outlet could open later this year; chain would be distinct from company's Whole Foods unit*. The Wall Street Journal. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/amazon-to-launch-new-grocery-store-business-sources-say-11551461887>
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3 ed., pp. 191–215). Sage. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2005-07735-008>
- Heinberg, M., Ozkaya, H. E., & Taube, M. (2018). Do corporate image and reputation drive brand equity in India and China? - Similarities and differences. *Journal of Business Research*, 86(7), 259-268. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.09.018>
- Hollebeek, L. D., Sprott, D. E., Andreassen, T. W., Costley, C., Klaus, P., Kuppelwieser, V., Karahasanovic, A., Taguchi, T., Ul Islam, J., & Rather, R. A. (2019). Customer engagement

- in evolving technological environments: synopsis and guiding propositions. *European Journal of Marketing*, 53(9), 2018-2023. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-09-2019-970>
- Huang, L., Gao, B., & Gao, M. (2023). *Value Realization in the Phygital Reality Market: Consumption and Service Under Conflation of the Physical, Digital, and Virtual Worlds*. Springer Nature Singapore. <https://books.google.com/books?id=zlrQEAAAQBAJ>
- Hyun, H., Park, J., Hawkins, M. A., & Kim, D. (2024). How luxury brands build customer-based brand equity through phygital experience. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 32(8), 1195-1219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2022.2052937>
- Jacob, F., Pez, V., & Volle, P. (2023). Shifting to phygital experience management with design science: a six-step method to manage customer journeys. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 31(5), 961-982. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2021.2016894>
- Johnson, M., & Barlow, R. (2021). Defining the Phygital Marketing Advantage. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research*, 16(6), 2365-2385. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jtaer16060130>
- Klaus, P. P. (2024). Viewpoint: phygital – the emperor’s new clothes? *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 32(8), 1172-1179. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2021.1976252>
- Kotler, P., Kartajaya, H., & Setiawan, I. (2021). *Marketing 5.0: Technology for Humanity*. Wiley. <https://books.google.com/books?id=ANfzyQEACAAJ>
- Kwon, W.-S., & Lennon, S. J. (2009). Reciprocal Effects Between Multichannel Retailers’ Offline and Online Brand Images. *Journal of Retailing*, 85(3), 376-390. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2009.05.011>
- Mamina, R., & Tolstikova, I. (2020). Phygital generation in free global communication. *International Journal of Open Information Technologies*, 8(1), 34-41. <http://www.injoit.org/index.php/j1/article/view/872>
- Mele, C., Di Bernardo, I., Ranieri, A., & Russo Spena, T. (2024). Phygital customer journey: a practice-based approach. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 27(3), 388-412. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QMR-08-2023-0102>
- Mishra, S., Malhotra, G., Chatterjee, R., & Shukla, Y. (2023). Consumer retention through phygital experience in omnichannel retailing: role of consumer empowerment and satisfaction. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 31(4), 749-766. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2021.1985594>
- Mohd-Ramly, S., & Omar, N. A. (2017). Exploring the influence of store attributes on customer experience and customer engagement. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 45(11), 1138-1158. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRDM-04-2016-0049>
- Pangarkar, A., Arora, V., & Shukla, Y. (2022). Exploring phygital omnichannel luxury retailing for immersive customer experience: The role of rapport and social engagement. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 68, 103001. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2022.103001>
- Purcarea, T. (2018). The Future of Retail Impacted by the Smart Phygital Era. *Romanian Distribution Committee Magazine*, 9(3), 34-46. <https://ideas.repec.org/a/rdc/journal/v9y2018i3p34-46.html>
- Qin, H., Peak, D. A., & Prybutok, V. (2021). A virtual market in your pocket: How does mobile augmented reality (MAR) influence consumer decision making? *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 58(4), 102337. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102337>
- Samat, H., Hadzic, M., & Jarvis, R. (2023). Phygital marketing at the Olympic Games: an exploratory study. *Journal of Brand Management*, 30(2), 119-132.
- Shi, S., Wang, Y., Chen, X., & Zhang, Q. (2020). Conceptualization of omnichannel customer experience and its impact on shopping intention: A mixed-method approach. *International*

- Journal of Information Management*, 50, 325-336. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2019.09.001>
- Singh, P., Singh, G., & Singh, M. (2019). Let's Get Phygital: M-Commerce as a Crusader for "Phygital" Retail. In P. Duhan & A. Singh (Eds.), *M-Commerce: Experiencing the Phygital Retail* (pp. 145-162). Apple Academic Press. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.1201/9780429487736-7/let-get-phygital-commerce-crusader-phygital-retail-priyanka-singh-gursimranjit-singh-maninder-singh>
- Siregar, Y., & Kent, A. (2019). Consumer experience of interactive technology in fashion stores. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 47(12), 1318-1335. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRDM-09-2018-0189>
- Van Tichelen, B. (2019). *The role and opportunities of Phygital in the digital omni-channel strategy* [Master, University of Louvain]. Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium. <https://dial.uclouvain.be/memoire/ucl/fr/object/thesis%3A21074>
- Yuce, A., Aydođdu, V., Yüce, S. G., & Katırcı, H. (2021). Phygitaly yours: Examination of virtual reality experiences in digital sports and recreational games. *Jurnal The Messenger*, 13(1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.26623/themessenger.v13i1.2481>



منافع فیجیتال مارکتینگ در رویدادهای ورزشی

اکبر جابری^۱، کوروش قهرمان تبریزی^{۱*}

^۱دانشیار مدیریت ورزشی، دانشکده تربیت بدنی و علوم ورزشی، دانشگاه شهید باهنر کرمان، کرمان، ایران.

کلیدواژه

بازاریابی دیجیتال
بازاریابی فیزیکی
رویدادهای ورزشی

نوع مقاله

پژوهشی اصیل

چکیده

هدف: با توجه به اهمیت و رشد روزافزون مصادیق تکنولوژی در حوزه ورزش، هدف کلی این تحقیق شناسایی منافع فیجیتال مارکتینگ در رویدادهای ورزشی بوده است.

روش: در این مطالعه کیفی و اکتشافی از شیوه تحلیل تماتیک استفاده گردید. جامعه مشارکت‌کنندگان پژوهش عبارت بودند از متخصصان حوزه تکنولوژی‌های نوین و ورزش که متناسب با هدف پژوهش ۱۵ نفر به عنوان شرکت‌کننده و به صورت هدفمند تا مرحله دستیابی به اشباع نظری مصاحبه شدند. به منظور گردآوری داده‌ها یک مصاحبه نیمه ساختارمند انجام شد. جهت ارزیابی پایایی یافته‌های مستخرج از مصاحبه‌ها، محاسبه توافق درون موضوعی در دستور کار قرار گرفت. همچنین جهت ارزیابی کیفیت و روایی یافته‌ها از معیار اعتمادپذیری یا قابلیت اعتماد که در برگزیده چهار معیار جداگانه اما به هم مرتبط می‌باشد (باورپذیری، اطمینان‌پذیری، انتقال‌پذیری و تأییدپذیری)، استفاده شد.

یافته‌ها: در تحلیل‌های انجام شده، ۸۲ کد، ۱۲ مؤلفه فرعی و چهار مؤلفه اصلی شناسایی شدند. تجمیع و طبقه‌بندی یافته‌ها نشان داد که منافع فیجیتال مارکتینگ در رویدادهای ورزشی عبارتند از: "توسعه برند رویداد"، "تجارب عمیق‌تر"، "کیفیت خدمات"، و "تعاملات اثربخش". با توجه به ظهور و توسعه مصادیق فناوری در ورزش، یافته‌های این پژوهش نشان می‌دهد که فیجیتال مارکتینگ به عنوان یکی از مصادیق تکنولوژی می‌تواند منجر به ایجاد مزایای قابل‌توجهی در رویدادهای ورزشی شود.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: این تحقیق را می‌توان یکی از اولین مطالعات کیفی دانست که در رابطه با پیامدهای مثبت بازاریابی فیجیتال در رویدادهای ورزشی در مقیاس داخلی و بین‌المللی انجام شده است.

تاریخ دریافت: ۱۴۰۳/۰۳/۳۱

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۳/۰۶/۰۸