Digital Platforms Reshape Sports Fandom

Idea In Short

A match used to run from kickoff to the final whistle. It no longer does. Fans now check team news on the commute in, track live data on a second screen throughout the game, and spend another hour afterward working through clips, reactions and ratings. The action on the field is still the center of it, but the digital activity surrounding that action has grown into an experience of its own, one that starts hours before a ball is kicked and continues well into the following week. Broadcasters, clubs and platforms that still treat the broadcast window as the entire fan relationship are missing most of it. The real opportunity sits in the pre-match build-up, the second-screen minutes during play, the short-form reaction that follows, and the data and content that keep fans engaged between fixtures.

A match no longer begins at kickoff and ends at the final whistle. Supporters check team news on the way home, follow live statistics while watching, and spend another hour afterward working through clips, reactions and player ratings. The action on the field is still central to the experience, but the digital activity built up around it has grown far larger than the broadcast window that used to contain it.

Fans rarely rely on a single sports service during a match anymore. In the space of a few minutes, the same supporter might check the live score, open a team statistics page, glance at fantasy points and read a betting preview such as rexbet, all without setting the phone down. Most of this activity now happens in the same short window, especially once a game is actually underway. What used to be a single broadcast relationship, one screen and one feed of information, has quietly become a small cluster of overlapping services that a fan moves between without much conscious thought. None of these individual services is new on its own, but the habit of running several of them at once, continuously and in parallel with the live broadcast, is a genuinely recent shift in how sport gets consumed.

Matchday Now Starts Long Before The Teams Walk Out

A few years ago, most supporters waited for the television broadcast to confirm the starting line-up before kickoff. Today, an official team sheet can reach a phone within seconds of being published, often well before any pre-match television coverage has begun. That shift alone has changed the rhythm of the hours leading into a game.

Rather than one long pre-match session, the build-up now involves several small checks spread across the day. A typical supporter might look at:

- Confirmed starting line-ups
- Injury and suspension updates
- Recent form across recent fixtures
- Expected formations and tactical setups
- Weather and venue conditions
- Reactions from reporters and fellow supporters

This pattern has sped up pre-match discussion considerably. A surprising team selection can become the dominant talking point well before the television broadcast has even started, driven entirely by fans sharing and reacting to the news themselves.

It also means supporters walk into the match carrying far more context than they used to. They already know who has been left out, which player has shifted into midfield, and where the tactical questions of the day are likely to surface once the whistle blows.

The Phone Has Become A Second Match Screen

Watching a game is no longer a single-screen activity for most fans. A television or streaming service typically shows the action itself, while a phone in the same hand handles nearly everything happening around that action.

During a live match, supporters routinely switch between several distinct types of information. The most common include:

- Live scores from other fixtures
- Player and team statistics
- Possession and shot data
- Social media reactions

- Group chats with friends
- Short replays of key incidents

This kind of second-screen behavior is especially useful when several matches are being played at the same time. A supporter can follow one game closely on the main screen while keeping track of three or four others through a phone, without ever switching away from the primary broadcast.

The growth here has been rapid, particularly among younger fans. Reported multi-screen activity during sports viewing has climbed across the general fan population, but Generation Z has roughly doubled that rate compared with fans overall, and nearly half of fans aged 16 to 29 now consume sports content such as highlights and recaps through digital channels at a rate that almost matches live viewing itself.1 The tradeoff is those two things pulling in opposite directions. A controversial refereeing decision can send viewers into statistics, clips and comment threads for several minutes while the match itself continues on the main screen in the background, splitting attention right when the broadcast most wants it.

Short-Form Video Has Changed What Happens After The Whistle

Post-match coverage used to run almost entirely through highlights programs, next-day newspaper reports and formal manager interviews. Those formats still exist, but they now compete directly with clips that surface within minutes of the final whistle, sometimes before it has even blown.

A single goal can be dissected from several different angles before the official match highlights package is even available. Tactical accounts isolate one specific passage of play, supporters share their own stadium footage from the stands, and former players post instant reactions from wherever they happen to be watching. The share of fans who say they have watched live sports moments on social media has grown sharply in recent years, alongside a similarly steep rise in fans turning to those same platforms specifically for highlights and recaps rather than full broadcasts.2

This shift gives fans far more choice in how they consume a match, but it also changes the pace of the conversation around it. Analysis and debate now develop while the moment is still fresh in everyone's mind, rather than waiting for the next morning's papers or a

scheduled highlights broadcast to set the agenda.

Statistics Are No Longer Just For Analysts

Detailed match data once belonged almost exclusively to coaching staff and specialist publications willing to pay for access to it. That has changed considerably over the past decade. Supporters now see metrics like expected goals, heat maps and shot locations displayed directly inside mainstream sports apps and broadcast graphics, often in real time as a match unfolds.

Expected goals is a useful example of how far this shift has traveled. The metric started out as a niche tool used by betting companies and professional clubs, and has since become a regular fixture on major broadcasts, discussed openly by television pundits and even by managers in post-match interviews.3 These numbers still need context to be useful, since a high expected-goals total does not always match the scoreline everyone just watched. What they give supporters, though, is another lens for judging what actually happened in a match beyond the final result alone. A team that dominates the underlying numbers but loses the game is a very different story from a team that was outplayed and got fortunate, and fans now have the data in front of them to tell the two apart for themselves rather than relying entirely on a pundit's read of the game. That shift has changed the tone of fan debate too, since arguments now regularly reference a specific number rather than staying purely in the realm of opinion.

The Sports Experience Now Continues Between Fixtures

The relationship between a supporter and a club no longer pauses once the final whistle blows. Transfer speculation, training ground clips, tactical podcasts and fantasy sports decisions all keep fans engaged throughout the week, well outside the boundaries of matchday itself. More than half of fans say that being a supporter now leads them to engage across multiple platforms rather than just one, and that figure rises to roughly seven in ten among Gen Z and millennial fans specifically.4

Audio has held its ground through all of this, even as video and short-form clips have taken up more attention. Roughly two in three sports fans say they listen to sports content through formats such as radio, podcasts or satellite audio over the course of a year, which suggests that longer-form conversation still has real staying power alongside faster-moving video and

social content.5 Fantasy sports decisions add another recurring touchpoint of their own, since a lineup swap or a waiver-wire pickup mid-week keeps a supporter checking news about players and teams they might otherwise ignore between fixtures. Taken together, these mid-week habits mean a club's digital presence gets tested constantly, not just on the eighteen or so matchdays that make up a season.

The match itself remains the central event of the week, but following a club has become something closer to a continuous relationship that starts well before kickoff and keeps running long after the final whistle fades.

- 1Consumer behavior shifts and new experiences are broadening fan engagement
- 27 sports viewership trends
- 3What is expected goals (xG)?
- 4Deloitte survey: digital media trends and consumption habits
- 5Sports audio report

Summary

Digital platforms have not replaced the match. They have surrounded it. A supporter's relationship with a club or a competition now runs continuously: pre-match line-up checks, live statistics and social reaction during play, short-form clips and instant analysis afterward, and transfer news, podcasts and fantasy decisions in the days between fixtures. Each of these layers competes for the same attention that once belonged solely to the broadcast, which fragments focus but also deepens engagement, since a fan checking three other scores or watching a tactical breakdown is still, by every meaningful measure, a more invested fan. What is changing is not whether people care about sport, but how many channels that care now flows through at once. Organizations that treat the digital layer as a genuine part of the experience, rather than a distraction from it, are the ones building the deeper relationship with supporters.