



Original Contribution

THE ROLE OF VIRTUAL SPORTS PRODUCTS IN ENHANCING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF SPORTS ORGANIZATIONS: ANALYSIS OF STRATEGIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Sports organizations face the challenge of maintaining or increasing their competitive advantage in the digital era, where consumers increasingly turn to virtual and online experiences. Establishing a strong business presence in this context requires adaptation and innovation, including the use of virtual sports products to attract and engage customers. Integrating such products into the strategies and plans of sports organizations presents an exciting opportunity for innovation and adaptation to the rapidly evolving market. By leveraging these products, sports organizations can enhance their services, attract new customers, and stand out in an increasingly competitive environment.

The scope of this study includes analyzing strategies and opportunities for integrating virtual sports products into the product policy of a sports organization. The research tasks are related to:

1. Study of the theoretical and methodological foundations for the development of virtual sports products as a new tool in the product policy of sports organizations.
2. Research, analysis, and justification of models for implementing virtual sports products as a means to enhance the competitive advantage of production structures.
3. Analysis of the promotional policy used to promote virtual sports products in marketing practice.

The results of the study include an assessment of the impact of digital services on the activities of sports clubs, as well as an analysis of an adapted model applied in the sports sector.

Keywords: innovation, virtual sports products, marketing, sports organization

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the sports industry has undergone a profound transformation. All active stakeholders who work together to shape its overall vision are operating under the influence of technological progress and changes occurring within the digital sphere. Initially, the adoption of computerized databases and basic software applications helped streamline administrative tasks such as membership management, event planning, and financial reporting (1).

The emergence of cloud computing, big data analytics, artificial intelligence, and remote

learning has revolutionized every aspect of sports management - from talent identification and athlete development to fan engagement and marketing strategies (2).

Innovations in marketing play an increasingly important role in the policies of sports organizations. The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and online learning offers new opportunities for personalizing marketing campaigns and optimizing their effectiveness (3). Big data and analytics enable sports organizations to gain valuable insights into audience behavior and preferences, leading to more effective marketing decisions.

Innovation lies at the core of the marketing policy of sports organizations, driving creativity, differentiation, and competitiveness in an ever-evolving digital environment. In the

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context of rapidly advancing technologies and shifting consumer expectations, sports clubs and organizations must adapt their products and services to remain competitive.

With technological advancements, sports organizations are increasingly integrating innovative products and services to enhance the fan experience and expand their markets. Digital technologies, mobile applications, and social media have significantly transformed the way fans interact with sports organizations (4). These technologies provide new opportunities for accessing sporting events and content, thereby increasing fan engagement and generating additional revenue streams.

Sports organizations, especially those with an entrepreneurial orientation, often face the complex economic challenge of enhancing their competitiveness. This competitiveness,

ATANASOVA N., et al. however, is difficult to observe, assess, and manage at both the organizational and product levels (5).

The word 'competition' originates from Latin and literally means 'running together toward a goal.' In specialized economic literature, it is defined as the interaction between economic entities, each striving to fulfill their own interests regardless of the actions of others (6).

Competitive advantage can be defined through various theoretical frameworks. One of the fundamental theories identifies two main types of competitive advantage: cost leadership and differentiation (7).

Empirical research in the field of sports management highlights the importance of several key factors in achieving competitive advantage (**Figure 1**).

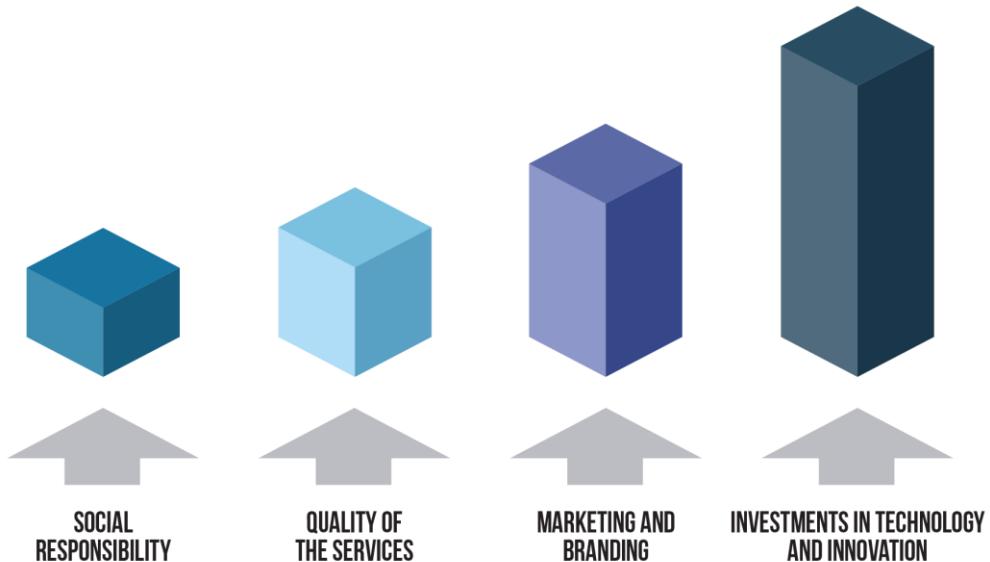


Figure 1. Factors for achieving competitive advantage

Social Responsibility: Participation in social and environmental initiatives can significantly strengthen the reputation and competitive advantage of sports organizations. Clubs that demonstrate a strong commitment to social responsibility often enjoy greater public support and attract more sponsorship. This shows that values-driven behavior is not just ethically commendable, but also strategically beneficial in the long-term development of sports entities (8).

Service quality: This is a critical factor for building sustainable competitive advantage in the sports sector. Sports clubs that deliver high-quality training, personalized experiences, and professional customer care are more successful in both attracting and retaining clients.

Marketing and Branding: Effective marketing and a strong brand are key drivers of competitive advantage. Sports organizations that clearly communicate their unique value proposition and build a recognizable, trustworthy brand are more likely to attract a wider audience and foster long-term loyalty (9).

Investment in Technology and Innovation: The adoption of new technologies - such as digital platforms, data analytics tools, and virtual training - can significantly enhance the efficiency and appeal of sports services. Sports clubs that actively invest in innovation report higher member satisfaction and retention rates (10).

METHODS

The main objective is to analyze the business model used in the creation and distribution of virtual sports products. Within the context of this research, these products are viewed as a strategic tool for enhancing the competitive advantage of sports organizations. The focus is on how digital solutions, when properly structured and implemented, can serve not just as a technological innovation but as a sustainable business opportunity for growth, differentiation, and long-term resilience in the sports sector.

The research tasks related to the objective are:

1. Studying the theoretical and methodological foundations for creating virtual sports products as a new tool in the product policy of sports organizations.
2. Researching, analyzing, and justifying models for the implementation of virtual sports products as a means of enhancing the competitive advantage of organizational structures.

To carry out the overall research, a methodological toolkit was used, including the following scientific research methods:

1. Theoretical analysis of specialized academic sources.
2. Content analysis of specialized financial and marketing documents and tools.

3. Case study research.

The use of the method forms the foundation of the research, as it enables the examination of the business model applied in sports marketing practice. Tracking key metrics and indicators over time related to the distribution and sale of virtual sports products helped reveal essential aspects of managing the product policy within a sports club.

4. Included Observation

Targeted observation was carried out in a real-world environment during the promotion and distribution of virtual sports products.

RESULTS

In the current era of rapid technological change and digital transformation, sports organizations require innovative marketing strategies to adapt to the evolving needs and preferences of their audiences.

During the research, Jeff Walker's "Product Launch Formula" (PLF) model was analyzed. The application of PLF in the context of sports clubs can support the successful launch of new digital programs and services, while increasing member trust and engagement.

Jeff Walker's Product Launch Formula consists of several key phases (Figure 2).

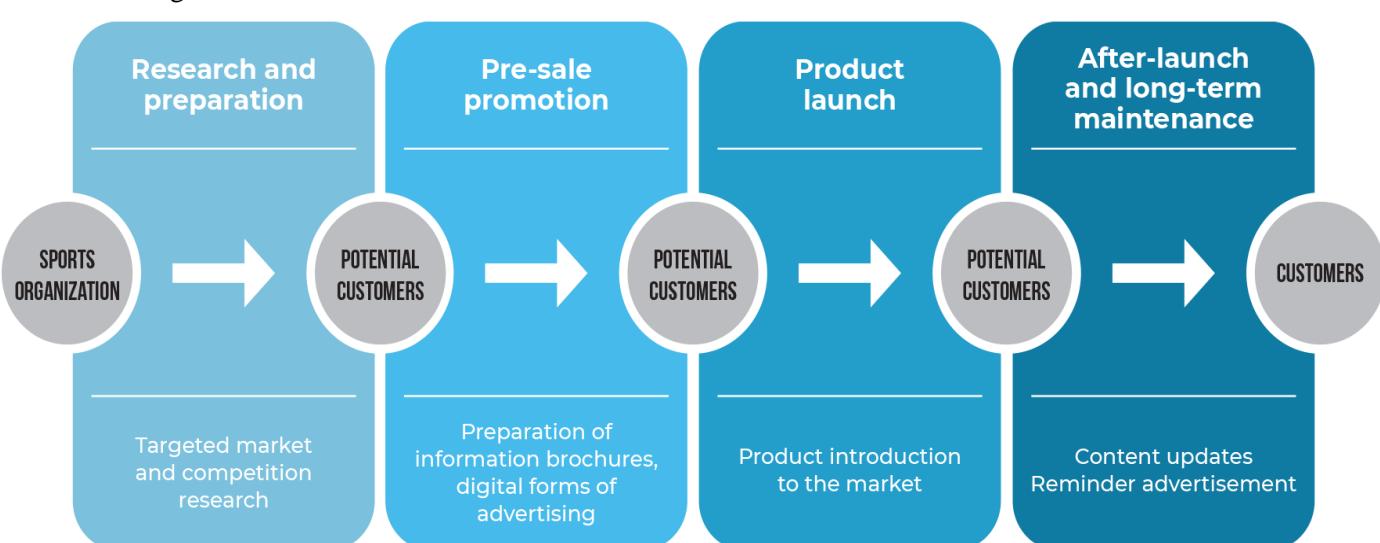


Figure 2. Product Launch Formula – phases (Walker, J. (2014))

Each of these phases is structured with specific activities and objectives that ensure a smooth and successful process for launching a new product or service. The main principles of PLF include building anticipation through pre-launch marketing campaigns, creating a strong connection with the audience through valuable

and relevant content, and utilizing social media and other distribution channels for maximum impact.

The advantages of using the Product Launch Formula include:

- A systematic and structured approach to launching new products.
- Increased customer engagement and loyalty through targeted marketing campaigns.
- The ability to adapt the strategy based on user feedback.
- Boosting sales and expanding the customer base.

At the center of the study is the business model of VSP (Virtual Sport Projects), which offers sports clubs the opportunity to implement digital products without any upfront costs.

The strategies most commonly used by managers for the implementation of digital products are presented in **Figure 3**. In practice, they can be applied either in combination or individually.

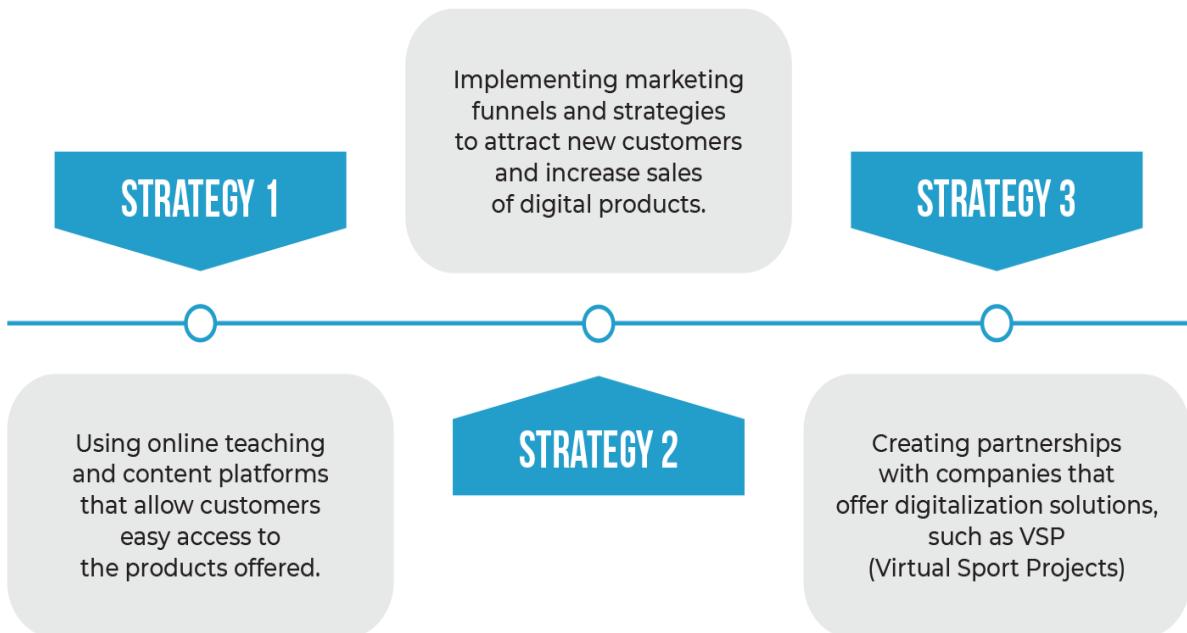


Figure 3. Digital product implementation strategies (VSP, Online industry report 2022-2023)

In global practice, there are various models for the implementation of digital products, many of which are developed with a focus on technological integration and digital transformation. Models such as the "digital marketing mix," which includes online sales, digital advertising, and the use of social networks, are widely applied across different industries. However, for the sports sector, it is necessary to adapt these models to meet the unique needs and requirements of sports clubs and organizations.

VSP has developed a successful model for the implementation of digital services, combining elements from existing approaches, but specifically adapted to the sports sector. This model aims not only to digitalize services but also to create new revenue opportunities through online platforms and high-quality content, without requiring upfront costs from the clubs. As a result, sports organizations can

implement digital services with minimal risk and maximum return.

The adapted VSP model consists of 9 main stages or 'building blocks', which form the complete process of implementing digital services in the sports sector. The model is aimed at sports organizations (clubs, federations, foundations, etc.) that wish to create and distribute online content based on video training and programs, with minimal financial risk. At its core, the model is focused on:

- Creating high-value content that attracts clients and increases the competitiveness of sports clubs.
- Ensuring easy access to the content through online platforms, thereby increasing sales opportunities and expanding the customer base.

The VSP model consists of the following 9 main components (**Figure 4**).

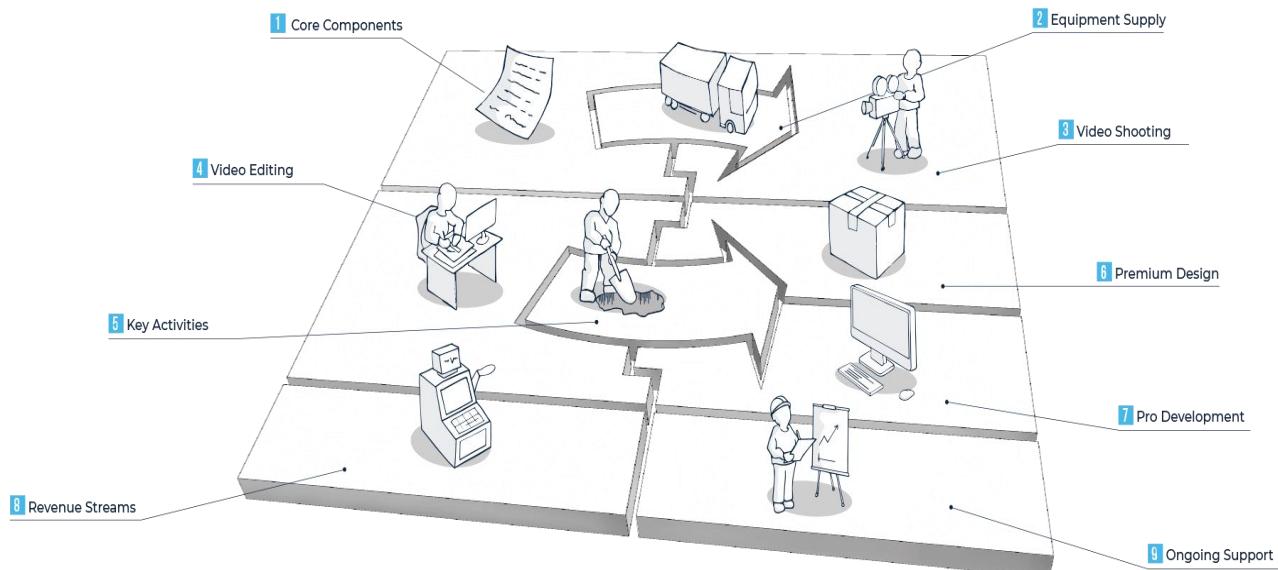


Figure 4. Components of the VSP model (author's concept for process visualization)

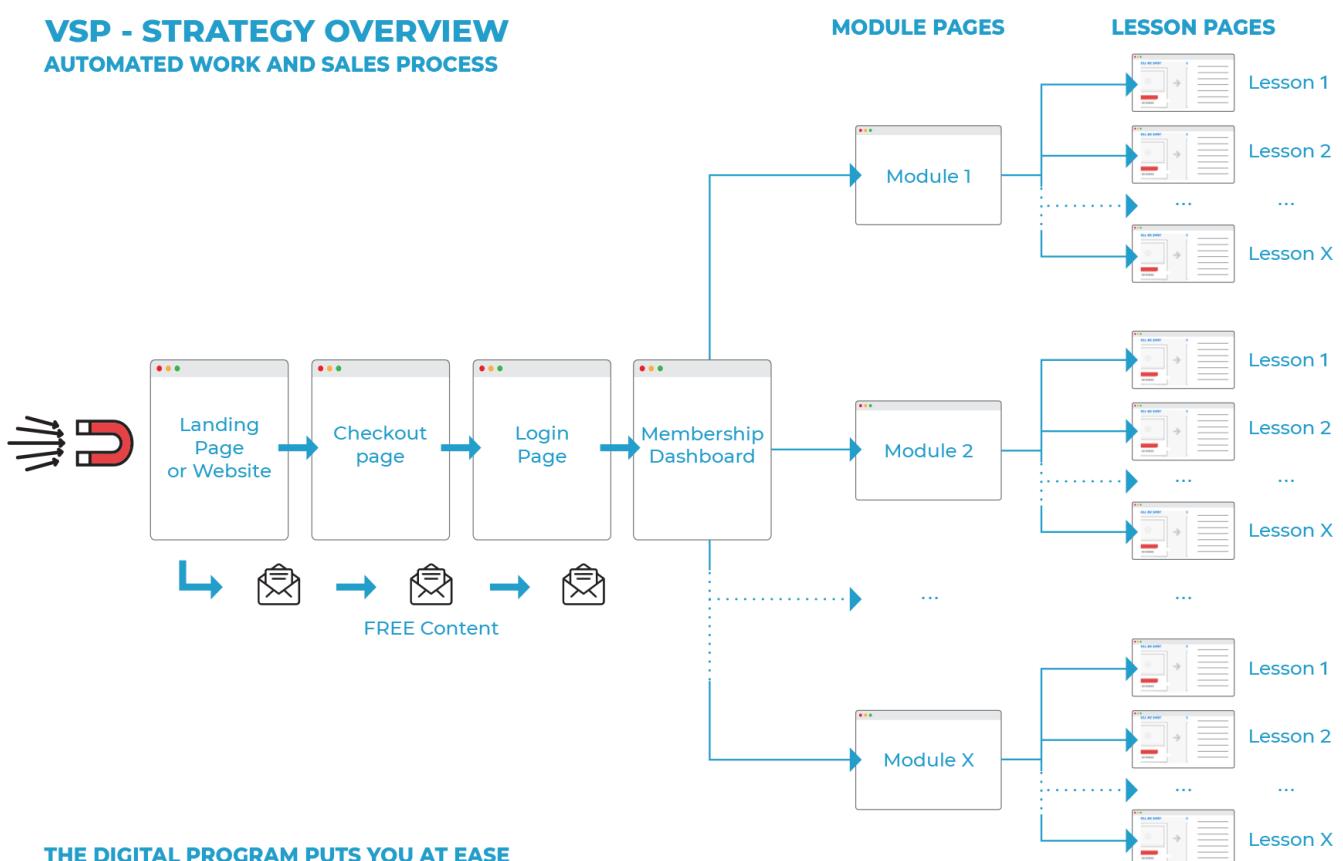


Figure 5. VSP Marketing Funnel (author's concept for process visualization)

The effectiveness of the VSP model is demonstrated by several factors: the increased digital presence of sports clubs, growing revenues from subscriptions and online course sales, and long-term customer engagement. According to analyses, sports clubs that apply this model report

a significant revenue growth of up to 20% annually, as confirmed by VSP data. In addition, the high quality of the created content and the unique product design play a key role in the long-term success of sports organizations.

The conclusion from this analysis is that the VSP model is an effective tool for implementing digital products in the sports sector, enabling athletes and sports clubs to adapt to new market trends and use digitalization for growth and success.

Figure 5 presents an overview of the overall funnel for implementing virtual sports products in the product policy of sports production structures.

The first step in the process is the creation of a strategy, which includes defining a unique value proposition and **the key benefits of the program**. These benefits must be presented in a way that clearly shows potential clients why they need the program and how it will help them.

Next, a **webpage** is developed where this proposition is visualized and described to engage visitors and motivate them to make a purchase.

Following this, there is a **checkout page** where the transaction is finalized. After completing the payment, clients receive a password that they enter on a **login page** to access a **platform** where the content is organized into **modules and lessons**.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the modernization of sports clubs and the implementation of online programs and products are key elements for their future development and competitiveness. Although the digitalization process presents a challenge for some organizations, the success of proven models like that of VSP clearly shows that investment in high-quality content and technological solutions can lead to significant benefits.

With the right approach, sports clubs can not only adapt to new realities but also position themselves as leaders in the digital space.

The successful results of sports clubs using VSP's services prove that this model is effective and sustainable.

The key stages of the VSP process - from content creation to technical support - provide sports

ATANASOVA N., et al. organizations with high-quality digital products without financial risk.

This leads to the expansion of their client base, revenue growth, and long-term success in the digital era.

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