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ONLINE SPORTS VIEWING AND FAN ENGAGEMENT THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA: A USES AND GRATIFICATIONS STUDY

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Abstract

The study investigates whether personalization offered through digitally mediated sports applications shapes fans' negative attitude toward stadium attendance, and whether the negative attitude subsequently envisages online sports viewing behaviour. Based on uses and gratifications theory, this study extends its conventional application to digitally mediated sports applications adoption through determining how gratifications drawn from one medium of consumption reshapes evaluation of another mode of viewing. Data were collected from 700 sports fans in Pakistan and 677 were retained who used digitally mediated sports applications and had attended at least one live match during the last one year. SPSS was used to apply data screening and descriptive analysis while PLS-SEM was applied through Smarts PLS 4 to test the hypothesized relationships. The outcomes of the study depicted that personalization had a significant positive effect on negative attitude toward stadium attendance ($\beta = 0.466$, $p < .001$), while negative attitude significantly enhanced online sports viewing behaviour ($\beta = 0.616$, $p < .001$). Further, the mediation analysis endorsed that negative attitude toward stadium attendance played an important mediating role between personalization and online sports viewing behaviour ($\beta = 0.288$, $p < .001$). The findings extend the explanation of UGT to the comparative evaluation of different consumption mediums and provide sports organizations and digital platforms with empirical evidence of how personalization shapes fans' attitudes toward stadium attendance and their subsequent behaviour.

Keywords: Uses and Gratifications Theory; Negative Attitude; Online Sports Viewing Behaviour; Stadium Attendance; Fan Engagement

1. Introduction

Sports fans experience a significant change in live sports consumption as mobile applications and livestreaming platforms have become primary channels for following these sporting events. Within the broader scope of social media, digitally mediated sports applications provide specialized platforms through which fans consume, socialize with, and engage with sports content in real time. These digitally mediated sports platforms account for a substantial share of sports viewing, contributing towards a broader shift in how fans consume live sports alongside stadium attendance. This shift reflects a change in fans' behaviour about viewing experience due to tailor-made sports content, match highlights, recommendations on the basis of previous watch history, notifications and viewing options (Wu et al., 2025).

Particularly, personalization has emerged as a defining feature of these digitally mediated sports platforms shaping what spectators view, how much time they spend on the platform, and how much they use the platform (Eg et al., 2023). Recent research has identified personalization as gratification-oriented feature of social and digital mediated platforms, focusing on how personalization affects users' perception towards

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these platforms, particularly in relation to adoption, satisfaction, or loyalty toward the app, and fan engagement. Despite the growing importance on personalized digital experiences, limited attention has been given to whether the gratification extracted from these experiences influences fans' perceptions of alternative forms of sports consumption (dela Peña et al., 2025). This gap matters since the decline in stadium attendance does not merely mirror the adoption of digitally mediated sports platforms; in several contexts, both modes of viewership have become empirically entangled in ways that are not yet well understood (Liu et al., 2025).

Recent research reveals that structural and experiential frustration associated with attending matches in person exist alongside with the growing appeal of alternative viewing options and partly influenced by these alternatives (Çakmak & Çiftçi, 2021). Similarly, marketing research states that unfavourable evaluations of a consumption experience do not straightforwardly convert into avoidance of that specific experience. Instead, negative and positive evaluations influence behaviour as an independent factor rather than as opposite ends of a singular phenomenon (Do & Bowden, 2024). This distinction is theoretically important for sport consumption as negative attitude toward stadium attendance is separate from actual attendance behaviour, then the process connecting digital gratification to fan behaviour deserves to be examined directly rather than an assumption.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) offers a suitable framework for examining the hypothesized relationship. The theory considers spectators as active media users to satisfy their particular wants (Ahmed & Ahmed, 2026; Hossain, 2019). The feature of personalization in socially mediated sports applications support these needs by increasing relevance, sense of individual control, and creating a perception that the medium responds to the users' personal preference (Neyah & Vijayakumar, 2024). However, it is still not examined whether meeting these needs through social and digital media platforms changes how fan's view stadium attendance and whether this change affects their decision to watch sports.

The current study bridges this gap by exploring whether personalization in digitally mediated sports applications affects fans' negative attitudes toward stadium attendance and whether these attitudes, in turn, influence their online sports viewing behaviour. The research broadens the scope of UGT, explaining why users adopt a given platform, toward explaining how gratification from one mode of consumption reshapes evaluation of another viewing mode. This research paper is systematized in five sections. Section examines related literature to propose the study's hypotheses; Section 3 outlines the research design and data collection procedure; Section 4 explains the statistical results; and Section 5 interprets the findings, theoretical and practical implications, and future research directions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Application of UGT

UGT proposes that audiences use media actively rather than as passive recipients of content, selecting a specific media based on particular needs they seek to fulfil (Ahmed & Yousaf, 2023; Ferris et al., 2021). Among these needs, personal-integrative needs are critical in digitally mediated sports viewing environments, as users value content that is related to their preferred interests, recognizes their individual favourites, and responds to their personal interests. Platforms increasingly compete on their capacity to individualize the user experience rather than on content delivery alone (Menon, 2024). In the context of sport consumption, UGT suggests that fans make choices between attending a match in stadium or watching it through social and digital media platforms. The selection of medium depends on which option is better able to satisfy the particular gratifications they seek at a given time. This study extends this perspective to consider how those gratifications influence evaluations of alternative forms of consumption. Specifically, when personalization on a digital platform fulfils a personal-integrative need, the absence of a comparable gratification in an alternative setting, such as the stadium, influence how fans positively evaluate attending the sporting event in person.

2.2 Personalization and its Role in Digital Consumption

Social media and digitally mediated applications are increasingly considered as overlapping instead of varied categories in media and marketing research. Gazi et al. (2024) define social media as digital platforms, services, and mobile applications built around the conjunction of content development and sharing, public communication, and social interaction, positioning the broader term as an umbrella covering social

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networking sites, content-sharing platforms, and interactive applications. This conceptualization supports treating digitally mediated sports applications as part of the broader social media ecosystem, as these platforms similarly merge content delivery with interactive, socially embedded features such as on-demand highlights, professional commentary, sharing views on match, and real-time fan engagement.

Personalization involves adapting content, recommendations, and interactions to the specific preferences and behaviour of an individual user. Unlike general audience segmentation, which categorizes users according to shared characteristics, personalization focuses on adapting the experience to the preferences and needs of each individual (Chandra et al., 2022). In digital sports platforms, personalization includes customized highlights, algorithmically ranked content, individualized notifications, and viewing recommendations shaped by a user's previous activity. Industry evidence indicates that sport organizations are increasingly building integrated digital ecosystems to provide this individualized experience, making personalization a central part of how they build and maintain fan relationships (PwC, 2026).

Recent work shows that repeated exposure to personalized content measurably shifts users' attitudes over time, including how favourably they evaluate their consumption choices and the alternatives to them (Wu et al., 2025). This suggests personalization is an attitude-shaping mechanism. Since the stadium environment cannot provide the same level of customized content and interaction as digital platforms, the experience is largely shared across attendees rather than tailored to individual preferences. Fans who are accustomed to personalized digital engagement increasingly perceive stadium attendance as comparatively generic and less responsive to their preferences. This explanation provides the study's first hypothesis:

H1: Personalization has a significant positive effect on fans' negative attitude toward stadium attendance.

2.3 Negative Attitude toward Stadium Attendance as a Construct

Research has viewed positive and negative evaluations as opposite ends of the same scale. The Evaluative Space Model proposes that positive and negative evaluations can coexist instead of existing as different concepts of a unified continuum (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994). This means people can simultaneously value an experience while also recognizing specific difficulties or disadvantages linked with it. Complementary evidence from services marketing shows that negative evaluations of a consumption experience often act as a behavioural outcome, shaping avoidance, disengagement, or substitution, independently of whatever positive affiliation a consumer simultaneously holds toward the same experience (Do & Bowden, 2024).

This literature supports treating negative attitude as a distant construct that reflects inconvenience, discomfort and the fatigue of in-person stadium attendance (Biscaia et al., 2024). Fans retain positive feelings toward their team while simultaneously holding negative evaluations of specific aspects of the experience at stadium. Thus, negative evaluations of the stadium experience arise from specific negative evaluation associated with attending matches in stadium.(Quansah, 2024). In the present study, the focus is on these specific negative evaluations rather than on a general or combined measure of attitude.

2.4 Online Sports Viewing Behaviour and the Shift toward Digital Consumption

From UGT perspective, online sports viewing can be understood as a form of media use through which fans seek to satisfy particular needs and gratifications (Katz et al., 1973; Sundar & Limperos, 2013). When digitally mediated sports platforms effectively satisfy fans' desired gratifications, these gratifications encourage continued platform usage and sustained online sports viewing behaviour. In this study, the behavioural response is considered alongside the attitudinal pathway discussed in Section 2.2. Specifically, fans who develop an unfavourable evaluation of the stadium experience are more inclined to view sports online as an alternative mode of consumption. This yields the study's second hypothesis:

H2: Negative attitude toward stadium attendance has a significant positive effect on online sports viewing behaviour.

2.5 Mediating Role of Negative Attitude

Sections 2.2 to 2.4 suggest that the relationship between personalization and online sports viewing behaviour follows a sequential pathway. The effect of personalization on online sports viewing behaviour is

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not proposed to operate independent of attitude; rather, it is theorized to operate through the attitudinal shift it generates. This mirrors the broader pattern identified in research, where the behavioural consequences of a consumption experience are frequently transmitted through an intervening evaluative judgment rather than acting as a direct stimulus-response link (Do & Bowden, 2024). In the present study, personalization is therefore expected to influence how fans evaluate stadium attendance, while this evaluation is resultantly expected to influence their preference for online sports viewing. This logic yields the study's third and central hypothesis:

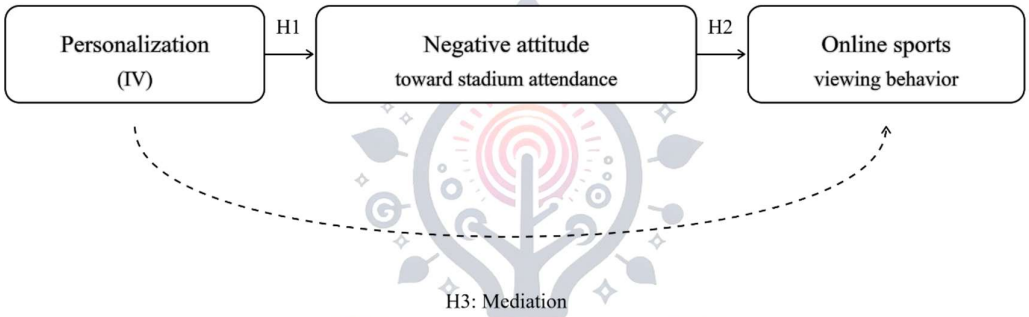
H3: Negative attitude toward stadium attendance significantly mediates the relationship between personalization and online sports viewing behaviour.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

The hypothesized relationships are summarized in a single mediation model: personalization is proposed to influence negative attitude toward stadium attendance (H1), which in turn influences online sports viewing behaviour (H2), with the indirect path from personalization to online viewing behaviour, transmitted through negative attitude, constituting the mediation effect under examination (H3).

Figure 1

Research framework of the study



3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research paper adopted a positivist, deductive, and quantitative study design to test the hypothesized relationships among the study constructs. A cross-sectional investigation was applied to determine the link among personalization and fans' negative attitudes toward stadium attendance, and the subsequent relationship between negative attitude toward stadium attendance and online sports viewing behaviour.

3.2 Population and Sample

The target population consists of sports fans in Pakistan who used digitally mediated sports applications to follow live sporting events and had attended at least one sporting event in a stadium within the twelve months preceding data collection. This dual-criterion population was selected since the study examines how digital gratification reshape evaluation of sports consumption in stadium. Respondents needed recent experience with both modes of consumption to make a meaningful comparison.

A non-probability, criterion-based purposive sampling method was used to get sample of the study who qualify the predefined eligibility criteria. A target of 700 responses was set for data collection. After data screening, 677 valid responses were included for statistical analysis, which is more than the required sample of 652 respondents determined through an a priori power analysis ($\alpha = .05$, power = .95, $f^2 = .02$), as presented in Table 1. The sample size of the research paper was measured using G*Power, with the analysis specified as F tests: Linear multiple regression, fixed model, R^2 increase.

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Table 1
*G*Power calculation*

Parameter	Value
Effect size f^2	0.02
α err prob.	0.05
Power (1−β)	0.95
Number of tested predictors	1
Total number of predictors	2

3.3 Measurement Instrument

A structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) was applied to gather data against the study's constructs. The measurement instrument was adapted through already verified scales and was also examined by academicians and subject specialists to ensure the language clarity and relevance of the measurement items. A pilot study (n = 110) was then conducted to assess the questionnaire's accuracy and consistency. Cronbach's alpha values across the research constructs varies from 0.801 to 0.930, indicating good internal validity and exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Taber, 2018). On this foundation, the instrument was considered appropriate for the main survey. The responses of pilot study were not included in the main data analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis Technique

Before conducting the main analysis, descriptive statistics and preliminary data screening were conducted using SPSS. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4 was used to analyse data. PLS-SEM is selected for its suitability in measuring predictive, theory-based models involving indirect relationships. The analysis was conducted in two phases. First, the measurement model was assessed for indicator reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity. Second, the structural model was estimated to test the direct paths specified in H1 and H2, followed by a bootstrapping procedure (5,000 subsamples) to check the indirect (mediated) path's significance as mentioned in H3, consistent with contemporary PLS-SEM mediation-testing guideline (Hair et al., 2019, 2024).

3.5 Demographic Analysis

Table 3
Respondents' Demographic Profile

Respondents' Demographic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	424	62.6
	Female	253	37.4
	Total	**677**	**100.0**
Age	18–24 years	203	30.0
	25–32 years	258	38.1
	33–40 years	152	22.5
	41 years and above	64	9.5
	Total	**677**	**100.0**

The final dataset consists of 677 respondents, including 62.6% male and 37.4% female participants. The largest proportion of respondents (38.1%) aged 25–32 years, followed by those aged 18–24 (30.0%), 33–40 (22.5%), and 41 and above (9.5%) respectively. These results reveal that younger and mid age sports fans formed the major portion of the sample, consistent with the demographic profile typically associated with users of digital and social media applications.

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4. Results

4.1 Assessment of Measurement Model

The assessment of measurement model was conducted through indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, and convergent validity. Since constructs of the study were measured, outer loadings were first tested to measure the degree to which individual indicators represented their respective constructs. Cronbach's alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) were then assessed for internal consistency, while Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was used to establish convergent validity.

Table 4

Indicator Loadings

Construct	Indicator	Outer Loading
Personalization	PER1	0.805
	PER2	0.817
	PER3	0.801
Negative Attitude toward Stadium Attendance	NA1	0.696
	NA2	0.744
	NA3	0.726
	NA4	0.717
	NA5	0.744
	NA6	0.718
	NA7	0.702
Online Sports Viewing Behaviour	OSB1	0.817
	OSB2	0.815
	OSB3	0.833

Note. *PER = Personalization; NA = Negative Attitude toward Stadium Attendance; OSB = Online Sports Viewing Behaviour.*

As is depicted in Table 4, the outer loadings varied from 0.696 to 0.833 and were retained. Outer loadings for all indicators surpassed the 0.70 threshold, with the exception of NA1 (0.696). Following Hair et al. (2019), NA1 was retained as its loading was near the cutoff value and the construct maintained satisfactory composite reliability and AVE. Therefore, no indicator was excluded from the measurement model.

4.2 Internal Consistency Reliability and Convergent Validity

Table 5

Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha (CA)	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Personalization	0.733	0.849	0.652
Negative Attitude toward Stadium Attendance	0.846	0.884	0.520
Online Sports Viewing Behaviour	0.759	0.862	0.675

Internal consistency reliability was measured through Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability. Values of 0.70 or above show acceptable internal consistency. Convergent validity was evaluated through AVE, for which a value of at least 0.50 shows that a construct describes at least 50% of the variance in its indicators. These results are presented in Table 5 disclose that internal consistency reliability for all constructs is satisfied. Cronbach's alpha varies from 0.733 to 0.846**,** while Composite Reliability is between 0.849 to 0.884**,** with all values exceeding the endorsed standard of 0.70. Similarly, AVE values are from 0.520 to 0.675**,** more than the minimum standard of 0.50. The results therefore confirm that the three constructs confirmed satisfactory internal consistency reliability and convergent validity.

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4.3 Assessment of the Structural Model

After validation of reliability and validity of the research paper's measurement model, the structural model was evaluated to test the hypothesized linkages.

4.3.1 Multicollinearity Assessment. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was assessed before interpreting the structural relationships to ensure that the estimated path coefficients were not affected by problematic collinearity.

Table 6

Collinearity Statistics (Inner VIF)

Structural Relationship	VIF
Personalization → Negative Attitude toward Stadium Attendance	1.000
Negative Attitude toward Stadium Attendance → Online Sports Viewing Behaviour	1.000

Since both VIF values are 1.000 as each endogenous construct has a single predictor in the specified structural model. Therefore, no structural multicollinearity was observed.

4.3.2 Coefficient of Determination. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was assessed to determine the variance degree in each endogenous construct explained by its predictor.

Table 7

Coefficient of Determination

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Variance Explained
Negative Attitude toward Stadium Attendance	0.218	21.8%
Online Sports Viewing Behaviour	0.380	38.0%

Personalization explained 21.8% of the variance in negative attitude toward stadium attendance (R^2 = 0.218)**.** Negative attitude toward stadium attendance subsequently explained 38.0% of the variance in online sports viewing behaviour (R^2 = 0.380)**.** These results show that the proposed model effectively interprets the endogenous constructs

4.3.3 Direct Effects and Hypothesis Testing. To determine the statistical significance of the structural relationships bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was applied. The results were measured through standardized path coefficients (β), standard deviations, t-values, and p-values.

Table 8

Structural Model and Direct Hypothesis Testing

Hyp.	Structural Relationship	β	STDEV	t-value	p-value	f^2
H1	Personalization → Negative Attitude toward Stadium Attendance	0.466	0.028	16.659	< .001	0.278
H2	Negative Attitude toward Stadium Attendance → Online Sports Viewing Behaviour	0.616	0.023	26.315	< .001	0.613

Note: β = standardized path coefficient; STDEV = standard deviation; f^2 = effect size.

H1 proposed that personalization influences negative attitude toward stadium attendance. The results revealed statistically substantial and a positive relationship between personalization and negative attitude toward stadium attendance (β = 0.466, t = 16.659, p < .001). The effect size was f^2 = 0.278, indicating a meaningful contribution of personalization to explaining negative attitude toward stadium attendance. Therefore, H1 was supported.

H2 proposed that negative attitude toward stadium attendance influences online sports viewing behaviour. The findings demonstrated statistically significant and a positive linkage (β = 0.616, t = 26.315, p < .001). The effect size of f^2 = 0.613 further indicates a substantial contribution of negative attitude toward stadium attendance in explaining online sports viewing behaviour. Therefore, H2 was supported.

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The results reveal that higher levels of personalization linked with digitally mediated sports applications correspond with stronger negative attitudes toward stadium attendance, while stronger negative attitudes toward stadium attendance is connected with greater online sports viewing behaviour.

4.4 Mediation Analysis

Mediation analysis was performed to measure whether negative attitude toward stadium attendance serves as an intervening mechanism between personalization and online sports viewing behaviour. The statistical significance of the indirect effect was tested using a 5,000-resample bootstrapping procedure**.** Bootstrapping is particularly suitable for mediation analysis since the sampling distribution of an indirect effect cannot essentially be supposed to follow a normal distribution.

Table 9

Mediation Analysis

Hyp.	Indirect Relationship	β	STDEV	t	p	CI
H3	Personalization → Negative Attitude toward Stadium Attendance → Online Sports Viewing Behaviour	0.288	0.023	12.480	< .001	[0.245, 0.335]

Note: β = standardized indirect effect; STDEV = standard deviation; t = t-value; p = p-value; CI = Confidence Interval. The 95% CI refers to the bootstrapped confidence interval for the indirect effect.

The indirect impact of personalization on online sports viewing behaviour through negative attitude toward stadium attendance was positive and statistically significant (β = 0.288, t = 12.480, p < .001). Furthermore, the 95% bootstrapped confidence interval spans from 0.245 to 0.335 and does not contain zero. Therefore, the results establish a significant mediating effect of negative attitude toward stadium attendance and provide support for H3.

5. Discussion

5.1 Explanation of Findings

The findings support all three hypotheses of the research paper and provide a consistent explanation of how personalization influences fan behaviour through an underlying attitudinal mechanism. H1 verified that personalization enhances fan's negative perception of attending the stadium. These results align with recent research representing that algorithmic personalization meaningfully alters users' evaluative assessment over the time, beyond just their satisfaction with the platform providing it (Wu et al., 2025). From the perspective of personalization, which customizes content, recommendations, and interactions according to individual preferences (Chandra et al., 2022). The findings further suggest that fans who become accustomed to personalized digital experiences evaluate the conventional and less personalized stadium experience less favourably. This reflects the growing emphasis on personalization within digital fan-engagement platforms, where tailored experiences have become a critical way of building relations among fans.

H2 verified that a negative perception of attending stadiums considerably enhances online sports viewing habits, representing the most substantial effect noted in the model. This significance corresponds with previous research that digital platforms have become as the main source for live sports viewing in various settings (Chang et al., 2022; Hsu & Lin, 2023; Kim & Kim, 2020).

H3 verified that a negative evaluation on stadium attendance mediates the connection between personalization and online sports viewing behaviour. The major contribution of this study is the impact of personalization on fans engagement through online sports viewing behaviour is largely conveyed through the negative attitude. This pattern reflects results in services marketing that demonstrate the behavioural outcomes of a consumption experience are often mediated by an intervening evaluative judgment instead of influencing behaviour directly (Do & Bowden, 2024).

5.2 Theoretical Implications

From a UGT perspective, the findings suggest that gratification gained through one consumption medium can also influence how fans evaluate another mode. When personalization feature of digital platforms satisfies fans' personal-integrative needs, their expectations alter, leading them to evaluate the less

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personalized stadium experience in a different way. These findings also support the view that negative evaluations can influence behaviour independently rather than simply representing the absence of positive attitudes (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994). In this study, negative attitudes were directed specifically toward the stadium experience rather than toward the sport or team.

5.3 Practical Implications

For digital sports platforms and application developers, the findings show that personalization goes beyond improving user gratification and influences subsequent fan behaviour, making it an important part of product development and engagement strategies (PwC, 2026). For sports organizations and policymakers, the findings have a different implication. Although they cannot directly control the personalized experiences offered by digital platforms, they can improve the way fans experience live events. If negative attitudes toward stadium attendance partly develop due to the stadium experience feels less personalized, stadium managers and organizers can respond by introducing more tailored services, digital interactions, customized offers, and other fan-centred features. This suggests that digital and stadium experiences do not necessarily have to compete; instead, elements of personalization can be incorporated into the physical experience to maintain the appeal of stadium attendance.

5.4 Limitations

The research paper is a cross-sectional study, measuring respondents' negative attitude toward stadium attendance and behavioural engagement during a specific time period. Therefore, the present study does not establish the causal or temporal direction of the relationships among personalization, negative attitude, and online sports viewing behaviour. Second, the use of criterion-based non-probability sampling bounds the generalization of the results, as the study included only sports fans who met the specified eligibility criteria.

5.5 Future Research Directions

Future studies might implement a longitudinal approach to determine if the attitudinal change observed in this study occurs before or after alterations in actual viewing habits over time. Qualitative research would also be helpful in identifying which particular elements of personalization, content curation, notification timing, and tailored recommendations have the most significant attitudinal impact, as the current study assessed personalization as one aggregated construct. Ultimately, conducting replication in various sports markets and digital platforms would determine if the extent of this effect is unique to the current situation or indicative of a broader trend in digitally mediated sports consumption.

5.6 Conclusion

This study examined whether personalization offered by digitally mediated sports applications influences fans' negative attitudes toward stadium attendance and whether these attitudes subsequently affect their online sports viewing behaviour. Using PLS-SEM on survey data gathered from 677 sports fans, the findings supported the proposed relationships and confirmed the mediating role of negative attitude toward stadium attendance. The results indicate that personalization not only improves the digital viewing experience but also shapes how fans evaluate stadium attendance, which in turn influences their online viewing behaviour. The findings extend UGT explanation by showing that gratifications received through one mode of sports consumption can influence the evaluation of another. Practically, the study suggests that sports organizations need to consider the personalized expectations developed through digital platforms when designing and improving the stadium experience.

Contribution of Authors

All the authors participated in the ideation, development, and final approval of the manuscript, making significant contributions to the work reported.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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Data Availability

This study relies exclusively on publicly available secondary sources, including corporate disclosures, industry reports, and peer-reviewed literature, all of which are cited in the References section.

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