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Transformations in the global sports industry: reality challenges and investment prospects - the english premier league as a model

Transformasi dalam industri olahraga global: tantangan realitas dan prospek investasi – liga premier inggris sebagai model

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ABSTRACT

The sports industry has emerged as a significant driver in the global economy and culture, often intertwined with tourism, telecommunications, and technology. The industry is growing fast but facing significant threats including global crises and digital disruption. This study takes the EPL as a case to discuss the sustainable and innovative development of the sports industry. It will consider the structure and dynamics of global sport and the world sports market and will focus on its strategic place in national development and economic stability. It is an empirical study that is conducted based on a case study approach and descriptive-analytical methods that extract best practices and pitfalls to identify challenges and opportunities. According to research, the worldwide sports market remains on a growth trajectory despite facing disruption from financial change, digital evolution, and changing consumer habits. The EPL provides evidence of how a strategic game plan, creativity and the practical application of technology empowers an organization to flourish in choppy waters. The sports segment is complex, but we can find interesting investments here, according to the report. It has advocated for organizations to be flexible and innovative and for the use of digital solutions to remain agile and resilient over the long term.

Keywords: English Premier League; incomes and costs; economic factors; digital and electronic evolution.

Bisnis olahraga telah menjadi pendorong utama dalam ekonomi dan budaya global, yang terkait erat dengan pariwisata, telekomunikasi, dan teknologi. Meskipun pertumbuhannya pesat, industri ini menghadapi tantangan besar dari krisis global dan gangguan digital. Studi ini menggunakan Liga Premier Inggris (EPL) sebagai kasus untuk mengeksplorasi pembangunan berkelanjutan dan inovatif dalam olahraga. Tujuannya adalah untuk mengkaji dinamika struktural dan pasar dalam industri olahraga global, yang menyoroti peran strategisnya dalam pembangunan nasional dan stabilitas ekonomi. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus dan metode deskriptif-analitis, penelitian ini menganalisis praktik terbaik dan mengidentifikasi tantangan dan peluang. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa meskipun industri olahraga global terus berkembang, industri ini harus mengatasi gangguan dari pergeseran ekonomi, transformasi digital, dan perilaku konsumen yang terus berkembang. EPL menunjukkan bagaimana perencanaan strategis, inovasi, dan penggunaan teknologi yang efektif dapat memungkinkan keberhasilan dalam lingkungan yang bergejolak. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa industri olahraga, meskipun kompleks, menawarkan peluang investasi yang beragam. Untuk keberlanjutan dan ketahanan jangka panjang, penelitian ini merekomendasikan agar organisasi mengadopsi struktur yang fleksibel, mendorong inovasi, dan mengintegrasikan sistem digital untuk beradaptasi dengan tantangan masa depan.

Kata kunci: Liga Premier Inggris; pendapatan dan pengeluaran; elemen ekonomi; transformasi digital dan elektronik.

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INTRODUCTION

1 The landscape of sports has evolved dramatically from its traditional role as mere entertainment and recreation to becoming a vital sector within the global economy (Lee & Kim, 2016). Today, sports play a significant role in enhancing national and international economic, cultural, and civilizational growth (Saliaga & Kraja, 2024). This shift has led countries across continents to invest heavily in the sports industry, driven by its vast potential for economic return, cultural influence, and global recognition. Hosting sports tournaments has become a strategic priority due to the multifaceted benefits they offer. As a result, the global sports industry's value has surged, growing faster than many other sectors (Hassan et al., 2024). For instance, the sector was valued at approximately \$388.3 billion in 2020 and is projected to reach \$599.9 billion by 2025, with an annual compound growth rate of 9.1%. This growth is deeply interconnected with other sectors such as tourism, media, marketing, health, and technology, forming a synergistic ecosystem (Research and Markets, 2021). However, industry is also vulnerable to global disruptions such as political conflicts, economic sanctions, and public health crises. The COVID-19 pandemic notably disrupted sports worldwide, causing massive financial losses and accelerating the adoption of digital and technological solutions in response. While this digital transformation introduced new challenges, it also opened unprecedented opportunities that have significantly enhanced the efficiency and reach of the sports industry (Celestin & Sujatha, 2024).

The importance of this study is that it can examine the involvement of the sports industry in developed and to-be-developed countries. The aim is to identify the driving forces, to overcome the challenges and to put into practice opportunities for successful business in this field, as well as to provide a clear strategic direction to stakeholders. Using the English Premier League (EPL) as a case example to make comparisons, this study anticipates providing a pattern for managers (organizations, clubs, federations, ministries and so on) of sport and granting them a model for full use of more comprehensive and strategic management forms. The objectives of this article are to identify key dynamics on the megatrend-driven fast-paced global sports industry, to analyze its current state, and to shed light on how digital and technological trends are transforming it.

1 Issue addressed This primarily relates to the obstacles facing sports industry growth at an international level which may be in the form of geopolitical instability, financial constraints, and health crises that disrupt the industry, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These obstacles and (the) digital transformation (revolution) have transformed the sports world and opened new challenges & opportunities. The most critical research question is in what way the world's transcendental changes and crises affect (and create challenges for) the sport

industry and what kind of prospects offer a basis for investment strategy and growth. The consultant also speculates that the industry is challenged like never before, but it also has significant potential waiting to be unlocked to contribute meaningfully to development. The paper turns its attention to the EPL and its business model since 2019 with widespread implications for the global sports industry ([Honorato et al., 2021](#)).

Theorization The development of the sports industry, from amateur and local activities to the global, digitized sector the sports industry: A historical view Sports, as a cultural oeuvre, had... This was characterised as occurring in three stages ([Tuomisto et al., 2018](#)): pre-1950 amateur era, 1950–1990 professional and marketing phase, and post-1990 globalization and digital era. [Savić et al. \(2018\)](#) Sports industry can be defined as services, products, persons and organizations related with sport production, consumption, marketing and management in general. Version the core elements of the sports sector are clubs, federation, competitions infrastructure, broadcasting, sponsoring, training and sports management ([Nagel et al., 2024](#)).

Several economic theories explain the behavior of the sports market ([Leeds et al., 2022](#)). [Szymanski \(2006\)](#) inelastic demand from loyal fans, economies of scale in large organizations, revenue sharing among clubs, and the platform economy linking stakeholders such as sponsors and media. Despite its growth, the industry faces persistent challenges. Financial constraints, pandemic-related disruptions [Alam and Abdurraheem \(2023\)](#) technological adaptation, athlete health, and administrative complexities continue to impede progress ([Frevel et al., 2022](#)). Finally, [Pittz et al. \(2020\)](#) identifies several business models in the sports industry, including the European model based on promotion and relegation, the American model of closed leagues, the Asian hybrid model, and the emerging economy model that emphasizes infrastructure and event hosting. These models highlight the diverse approaches to managing and growing the sports industry in different contexts.

The novelty of this research lies in its interdisciplinary approach to analyzing the global sports industry through the case of the English Premier League (EPL) as a leading international model. While many studies focus separately on sports economics, digital transformation, or organizational management, this study uniquely integrates economic theories, digital innovation, global disruptions, and strategic business models within a single framework. It offers a new perspective by evaluating how global crises (e.g., pandemics, economic sanctions) and rapid technological advances simultaneously pose challenges and create strategic opportunities for growth within the sports sector. The EPL is used not merely as an example of commercial success, but as a practical reference for how other leagues and organizations can adapt and thrive amidst transformation.

The primary purpose of this article is to investigate the dynamics, challenges, and investment prospects within the global sports industry considering contemporary global transformations. It aims to provide a holistic understanding of the sector's current landscape by studying key factors that drive or hinder its growth—such as digitalization, financial constraints, and health crises—and exploring strategic pathways for sustainable development. By analyzing the EPL, the research also aims to offer applicable insights for sports organizations across various regions, particularly in emerging economies, on how to develop resilient and adaptive strategies that align with modern global trends.

Contributions Made by this Article:

1. **Theoretical Integration:** This study contributes a novel theoretical framework that links the evolution of the sports industry with broader economic, technological, and geopolitical contexts, supported by both classical and contemporary economic theories.
2. **Strategic Insights:** It identifies and categorizes the major internal and external challenges affecting the global sports industry, including financial, health-related, administrative, and digital transformation issues, offering practical recommendations for overcoming them.
3. **Policy and Planning Guidance:** The findings provide valuable input for policymakers, sports ministries, federations, and clubs to develop strategic plans, improve governance, and enhance investment decisions within the sports ecosystem.
4. **Case Study Value:** By using the English Premier League as a reference model, the study showcases effective practices in commercialization, digital adoption, and stakeholder engagement that can be replicated or adapted in different cultural and economic contexts.
5. **Forward-looking Perspective:** The research highlights emerging opportunities and proposes a roadmap for the future of the sports industry, emphasizing innovation, sustainability, and integration with other sectors such as tourism, technology, and media.

In summary, this paper makes a significant contribution in both academia, the way we understand the sports industry, and the industry, a guide for practitioners to appreciate and leverage the dynamics of the global sports markets. While the sports industry has grown to an enormous size at the global level, it still lacks insight into how external interruptions, such as geopolitical uncertainty, public health challenges, and economic instability, interact with internal developments such as digitalization and. Previous works have generally focused more on these dimensions in isolation from one another rather than understanding them as part of a more systemic mapping and understanding of structural challenges and strategic responses. This paper fills that gap through

an integrative analysis based on the economic theory, organizational management and the digital transformation of an industry exemplified by the English Premier League (EPL). What sets this investigation apart is its interdisciplinarity and its focus on strategic adaptability in a post-crisis international environment, and it sheds new light beyond traditional sport management paradigms while serving both academic debate and policy practice.

METHOD

Research Method. Methodology This study employed quantitative research design under descriptive-correlational framework. One hundred twenty-five academic staff members of Dhi Qar University were included in the study, where the stratified random sampling was used to obtain reliable representations of different strata. Measurement Measurement was performed using a standardized questionnaire designed to measure three major constructs: institutional culture, institutional health, and institutional symmetry. The study applied multi regression tool and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) by using the SmartPLS application software to test the relationships and predictive power between variables going to study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

1. Global Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Sports Industry

The global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant negative impact on the sports industry. Revenues declined by 15.4% in 2020 compared to 2019, leading to substantial disruption, job losses, and financial insecurity for many stakeholders in the sector. This highlights the sector's deep interconnection with other areas of life. However, the industry demonstrated resilience and began to recover in 2021 ([Traynor et al., 2024](#)).

Table 1. Global distribution of sports industry revenue by type

No.	Type of Revenue	Percentage
1.	Broadcasting Rights	40.2%
2.	Sponsorships and Advertisements	29.3%
3.	Ticket Sales and Matchday Revenue	18.7%
4.	Licensing and Merchandise Rights	11.8%

Table 1 illustrates the major sources of revenue in the global sports industry, with broadcasting rights accounting for the largest share (40.2%), reflecting the critical role of media in delivering sporting content. Sponsorships and advertisements follow with 29.3%, supporting clubs through commercial partnerships. Ticket and matchday revenues contribute 18.7%, vital for daily

operations, while licensing and merchandise represent 11.8%, showcasing brand value through merchandise sales.

In terms of sports disciplines, football dominates global revenues with a 43% share of the market, followed by basketball (13%), American football (10%), and baseball (8%), while all other sports combined contribute approximately 27%.

The data highlights the massive economic potential of the sports industry. If optimized, especially in developing countries, the sector could play a key role in economic revitalization, offering an alternative to reliance on natural resources. The experience of Iraq hosting the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup in 2023 demonstrates this potential, boosting tourism and national visibility.

2. Digital Transformation in the Sports Industry

Digital transformation has reshaped the traditional business model of the sports industry. In 2021, digital broadcasting revenues accounted for 42% of total broadcasting revenue, with forecasts suggesting a continued upward trend beyond 2025 (Dašić, 2023). The emergence of platforms like Facebook Watch, Amazon Prime, and DAZN has disrupted the traditional media landscape. For example, DAZN secured the Italian Football League rights for €2.5 billion over three years, while Amazon invested \$1.2 billion in NBA broadcasting rights (Chalaby, 2024).

Online ticketing and digital fan experiences also saw rapid growth. Online ticket sales rose from 52% in 2015 to 78% in 2021, highlighting the increasing reliance on digital tools for revenue generation.

3. Investment Trends in the Sports Industry

Investment in the sports industry has surged in recent years. In 2021, direct investments reached \$32.9 billion, representing a 24% increase compared to previous years (Hiten, 2024). The main investment sectors are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Key investment areas in the sports industry

No.	Sector	Value	Year (s)	Source
1.	Clubs and Competitions	\$12.8 billion (Private Equity)	2018–2021	PwC, 2021
2.	Technology	\$8.3 billion (+57% YoY)	2021	SportsTechX, 2022
3.	Infrastructure	\$7.6B (2021); Est. \$10.9B (2025)	2021 & 2025	Statista, 2022
4.	Smart Fitness (IoT-based)	\$4.2 billion (+65% YoY)	2021	CB Insights, 2022

4. Case Study: The English Premier League (EPL)

The English Premier League (EPL) stands as a global model of commercial and financial success. In the 2021–2022 season, it generated £5.9 billion in revenue—an 8% increase from the previous year (News Team, 2024).

Table 3. Strategic elements of the english premier league

No.	Element	Statistics/Details
1.	Fair Revenue Distribution	50% equally shared; 25% by ranking; 25% by televised matches
2.	Global Audience Reach	3.2 billion people in 212 countries
3.	Digital and Technological Investments	£215 million (2019–2020); 62% digital growth
4.	Financial Regulation	Implementation of Financial Fair Play policies

EPL’s strategic balance between fair revenue distribution, technological integration, and financial sustainability makes it a global benchmark. It operates in a financially disciplined and transparent environment, contributing to long-term stability and growth (Chen & Xie, 2022).

5. EPL Revenue and Expenditure Breakdown

Table 4. EPL revenue sources (2021–2022)

No.	Source	Revenue	Currency	Percentage
1.	TV Broadcasting Rights	£3.5 billion	Pounds Sterling	59.3%
2.	Commercial Sponsorship	£1.6 billion	Pounds Sterling	27.1%
3.	Matchday Revenue	£765 million	Pounds Sterling	13%
4.	Other Sources	£34 million	Pounds Sterling	0.6%

Table 5. EPL Expenditures

No.	Category	Expenditure	Currency	Percentage
1.	Staff and Player Salaries	£3.6 billion	Pounds Sterling	61%
2.	Player Transfers	£1.8 billion	Pounds Sterling	30.5%
3.	Operating Costs	£450 million	Pounds Sterling	7.6%
4.	Facility and Stadium Investment	£50 million	Pounds Sterling	0.9%

EPL significantly contributes to the UK economy, supporting around 100,000 full-time jobs, contributing £7.6 billion to GDP, and paying £3.6 billion in annual taxes. Additionally, it invests £200 million annually in community development (Ernst & Young, 2022).

6. Future Opportunities in the Sports Industry

Emerging trends present vast opportunities for the continued expansion of the sports industry:

1. Digital Sports (eSports): The eSports market grew at an annual rate of 21.7%, reaching \$1.8 billion in 2022, with projections of \$3.2 billion by 2025 ([Statista, 2023](#)).
2. Emerging Markets in Africa and Asia: A significant rise in sports content consumption, particularly in Asia (38% growth between 2018–2022) ([Nielsen Sports, 2022](#)).
3. Digital Economy and NFTs: The market value of digital sports assets like NFTs reached \$2.6 billion in 2022, alongside rapid developments in virtual reality applications ([Deloitte, 2023](#)).
4. Women's Sports: Broadcasting and sponsorship revenues in women's sports grew by 146% between 2020 and 2022 ([Women's Sports Trust, 2022](#)).
5. Sustainable Investment: Investments in eco-friendly sports infrastructure reached \$3.8 billion in 2022 ([Green Sports Alliance, 2022](#)).

7. Key Factors for Sports Industry Success (EPL Model)

Based on the analysis, the following critical factors have been identified:

1. Technological Advancement: Organizations that embraced digital transformation experienced faster and more sustainable growth.
2. Integrated Business Model: EPL's success stems from balancing diverse income streams and equitable distribution mechanisms.
3. Financial Sustainability: The pandemic emphasized the importance of financial discipline and prudent resource management.
4. Demographic Reach: Expanding global fanbases and engaging diverse audiences, including youth and women, have enhanced sustainability and global influence.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the growing economic, technological, and strategic importance of the global sports industry. The significant revenue losses during the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the sector's vulnerabilities but also highlighted its potential as a resilient economic driver. The subsequent recovery and transformation signal a paradigm shift in how sports are consumed, managed, and monetized.

One of the most critical insights is the centrality of digital transformation. As traditional revenue streams such as matchday sales were disrupted, the industry's pivot to digital broadcasting, fan engagement platforms, and e-commerce provided alternative and scalable revenue sources ([Deloitte, 2023](#)). The EPL serves as a prime example: by investing heavily in digital infrastructure, it not only maintained global fan engagement during the pandemic but also expanded its reach across emerging markets ([Badmus, 2019](#)). The growing importance of digital platforms such as DAZN, Amazon

Prime, and social media integrations points to a broader convergence between sports and entertainment ([Chalaby, 2024](#)).

Moreover, investment trends reflect a changing investor outlook. Private equity interest in clubs, media rights, and smart technologies indicates that sports are now viewed as long-term, high-yield investment assets. This aligns with global capital flows seeking stable returns in sectors with strong brand loyalty and cross-generational appeal ([Leeds et al., 2022](#)). Particularly in the EPL, a balanced revenue distribution model, financial fair play regulations, and competitive transparency have created a stable and attractive ecosystem for investors and sponsors.

Another important discussion point is the role of sports as a soft power and national economic tool, especially in developing countries. The case of Iraq hosting the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup, for example, illustrates how major sporting events can stimulate tourism, enhance national identity, and foster international cooperation. This aligns with, who argue that sports mega-events serve not only as economic catalysts but also as platforms for cultural diplomacy ([Choudhary, 2018](#)).

Furthermore, the diversification of sports markets, including the rapid growth of women's sports and eSports, reflects evolving consumer demographics and values. The increasing investment in women's leagues and the rising audience share among younger fans suggest a generational shift in preferences ([Women's Sports Trust, 2022](#)). This is consistent with the idea that future sports strategies must be inclusive, diverse, and digitally integrated to remain sustainable.

The EPL's success offers valuable lessons for other leagues and policymakers. Its business model balances global commercial appeal with domestic talent development and community reinvestment. Importantly, the EPL allocates significant revenue to grassroots initiatives, supporting both social development and long-term athlete pipelines. This supports the theory of symbiotic development between elite sports and local participation ([Green Sports Alliance, 2022](#)).

Despite these strengths, there are challenges that require critical attention. The rising cost of media rights may create access inequality, particularly in lower-income regions. Moreover, environmental sustainability remains a concern, with large-scale sporting events contributing to carbon emissions unless countered by green investments ([Green Sports Alliance, 2022](#)). Addressing these issues will require cross-sector collaboration and innovative governance models.

However, this study is not without its limitations. One major constraint is the reliance on the English Premier League as a single case study, which, while highly representative, may limit the generalizability of findings to other sports

or regional contexts. Additionally, the study primarily employed a descriptive-analytical method, which may not fully capture the dynamic, real-time economic fluctuations and digital transformations occurring in other leagues. Future research should consider comparative multi-league analyses or integrate longitudinal data to enhance validity and scope.

By recognizing these limitations, the study paves the way for more nuanced and holistic future investigations. Strategic solutions include expanding the research framework to include diverse case studies across different continents, employing mixed methods to gain deeper insights, and integrating environmental and social impact metrics to evaluate sports business sustainability. As noted by reviewers, research weaknesses are essential components of any scholarly work—when acknowledged and addressed thoughtfully, they serve as a catalyst for innovation, refinement, and stronger strategic outcomes.

CONCLUSION

While it might suffer digital disruption, shifting consumer habits and international chaos, the global sports industry is growing at an astonishing rate. One notable offering of the current study is its identification of the English Premier League (EPL) as a model of success in adaptation and innovative response. This league on the other hand, with its strategic mindset, deliberate usage and implementation of technology, and optimum utilization of resources has somehow found a way to become part of the new world order and set an example of how a sports organization can adapt to the changing times and evolve.

As a case that supports theory and praxis, the study showed that the health promotion strategy, with sustainability in sight, including alternative revenues models, social responsibility, and environment through the diversification of the revenue model and the promotion of environmental awareness with the inclusion of women and the LGBT group can, consistently, promotes the resilience and the inclusion in sustainability way in the industry. The Premier League experience demonstrates that commercial goals must be properly balanced with the principles of sport if durability and credibility over time are to be produced.

One strong aspect of this paper is that it utilizes the diversity of disciplines in analysing economic theoretical perspectives, digitalisation and concrete business models all through one set of lenses. This allows a broader view on interactions between dimensions affecting the dynamics and governance of the sport sector.

Practically, the clues from EPL matters for any advancing football country particularly Iraq, to build their sports-ecosystems stronger. Policy-makers and

stakeholders are recommended: (1) to give proper weight to the “goodwill” value of certain (personal) relations/offers (not to cover only the economic aspect of it); (2) to redesign the present structures toward flexible forms while being in crisis; (3) to design public–private service partnerships for the (infrastructure) development and management of events; (4) to realise governance frameworks that are transparent and accountable.

In future studies, similar research that compares other successful leagues or models that come from different geographies must be conducted to enhance a broader understanding of the best practices. Furthermore, it could offer additional insights into the migration to a new equilibrium for the global sports industry by digging further into digital innovation and fan engagement dynamics.

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