

Original Article

Beautifying the History of A Sports Club In Periods of Low Sports Performance

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Abstract

Sport clubs rely not only on sporting performance but also on history, identity, and supporter attachment. This study examines how Universitatea Craiova uses historical heritage as a marketing and identity resource during periods of low sporting performance. The empirical research was based on a 23-item questionnaire administered to 150 respondents between April 5 and May 24, 2025. Results show that supporters primarily associate the club with professionalism (39.9%), followed by performance (25.2%), dedication (21.1%), and pride (13.8%). Stadium atmosphere was identified as the most significant element of the club's offer by 47.2% of respondents, while 49% reported remaining loyal regardless of sporting results. The findings suggest that historical heritage can contribute to maintaining supporter identity and attachment, but it should complement rather than substitute professional management, sporting performance, and credible strategies for future development.

1. Introduction

Sport has always played a central role in human societies. From the earliest forms of physical training to contemporary professional competitions, it has combined physical practice with symbolic meaning. Physical education has traditionally aimed at human development, while sport has emphasized the

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transformation of motor abilities into competitive results (Tendinha et al., 2021). Sport is more than competition. It is also culture, tradition, and identity.

Periods of poor results are inevitable in the life cycle of any sports organization. Not every season can end with trophies. Yet the meaning of sport is not limited to victories. Failure, understood as the inability to reach objectives, is a natural part of competition (Cuskelly & Hoyer, 2018). Athletes and clubs learn from failure, adapt, and find ways to preserve their identity. The question is how clubs manage to remain attractive to supporters during these low-performance periods.

The answer often lies in history and storytelling. Supporters need narratives that connect them to something greater than immediate results. Scholars have shown that sport organizations use heritage, symbols, and rituals to preserve identity and legitimacy (Smith & Stewart, 2010; Holt, 2004). In such contexts, “beautifying history” becomes a strategy of survival. By emphasizing past achievements, clubs compensate for present weaknesses and maintain loyalty among their fans.

Universitatea Craiova provides a relevant case study. Founded in 1948, the club quickly became a symbol of regional pride. It reached the semifinals of the UEFA Cup in 1983, the first Romanian club to do so, and produced generations of players who formed the backbone of the national team. These achievements continue to define the Universitatea Craiova brand, even when current results are modest. Historical moments such as the victories of the 1970s and 1980s are recalled constantly in public discourse, on official channels, and among supporters.

Marketing plays an essential role in this process. The marketing mix - product, price, place, and promotion - is not limited to tickets and merchandise. It includes the symbolic product of identity and history. The basic product is the football match. Yet the augmented product is the sense of belonging to a tradition, the memory of “Craiova Maxima,” and the pride of representing a city and a region (Ilioni, 2019). Promotion, both offline and on digital platforms, allows the club to recreate links with its supporters. Social media, in particular, is a space where memories of great victories are shared and reinterpreted (Apostu, Macra-Oșorhean, Șerban, Ciocoiu, & Bartha, 2025).

The relationship between clubs and fans is therefore based not only on present performance but also on cultural heritage. Giulianotti (2015) emphasizes that supporters construct their identity through symbols of continuity, not only through short-term results. This explains why many fans remain loyal even in seasons of decline. They support the club because it embodies values, pride, and community, not just because it wins matches.

The present study examines how Universitatea Craiova has maintained its identity during periods of low performance. It combines historical analysis, review of marketing strategies, and empirical research with supporters. Between April 5 and May 24, 2025, a questionnaire with 23 items was distributed to 150 respondents. The survey explored perceptions of promotional methods, symbolic associations with the club, and opinions on solutions for overcoming poor results.

This introduction highlights the dual dimension of the paper: theoretical and

empirical. On the one hand, it engages with literature on sport marketing, heritage branding, and supporter identity. On the other hand, it uses the case of Universitatea Craiova to show how history can be “beautified” to preserve loyalty. The objective is not to deny the importance of victories, but to underline that the survival of a sports organization also depends on its ability to transform memory into a marketing asset.

The Concept of “Beautifying History” in Sport

The history of a sports club is not a neutral archive. It is a resource. Clubs, supporters, and media continuously reinterpret the past. They select glorious episodes, highlight key victories, and minimize failures. This process can be described as *beautifying history*. Historical narratives can thus become strategic resources in managing the image of sports clubs during periods of declining performance (Barbu, Sandu, Țiu, Dumitru, & Costin, 2026).

Scholars note that sport is not only about performance, but also about identity, pride, and belonging (Holt, 2004; Giulianotti, 2015). When victories are absent, clubs rely on their symbolic capital. They emphasize tradition, heritage, and continuity. Supporters respond to these narratives because they need a sense of permanence. Sport becomes a cultural marker that exceeds short-term results.

Beautifying history does not mean inventing false facts. It means placing emphasis on positive elements, while contextualizing or overshadowing less favorable periods. For example, clubs may constantly recall historic titles, legendary players, or famous matches, even if the present season is disappointing. This strategy is visible in promotional campaigns, stadium choreography, and digital communication (Smith & Stewart, 2010).

Memory as an asset. History is a powerful brand resource. Holt (2004) argued that iconic brands are built on cultural myths. In sport, myths emerge from decisive games, heroic players, or symbolic achievements. Clubs curate these myths and present them as part of their identity.

Universitatea Craiova illustrates this mechanism. Although the team has alternated between peaks and crises, its official channels continue to celebrate the “Craiova Maxima” generation. The semifinal of the UEFA Cup in 1983 remains a milestone. The official website (CS Universitatea Craiova, n.d.) presents this moment as central to the identity of the club. The glorification of that period provides legitimacy, especially when present results are modest.

Psychological dimensions. Beautifying history is not only an institutional strategy. It has psychological implications. Athletes, managers, and supporters all need narratives that maintain confidence. Studies have shown that self-confidence is essential for athletes’ performance. Factors such as repeated defeats, injuries, or poor tactical choices can reduce motivation and trust in one’s abilities (Jekauc et al., 2023). According to a Romanian source, confidence declines when athletes interpret failure as proof of incapacity rather than as a step in learning (Romania for Gold, 2023).

By highlighting positive episodes from history, clubs provide a buffer against demoralization. They show that crises are temporary and that past resilience can inspire future success. For supporters, recalling glorious history mitigates the

frustration of defeats. It transforms present suffering into a narrative of continuity: “We are strong because we have always been strong.”

Marketing perspective. From a marketing point of view, beautifying history can be interpreted as part of the product and promotion strategies. The product is not only the game itself but also the symbolic heritage of the club (Kerr, 1997). Supporters buy tickets not only to watch a match but also to experience a sense of belonging to a tradition. Merchandise often displays references to historical players or famous matches.

Promotion exploits these symbols. Clubs design campaigns around anniversaries of titles or tributes to former legends. These strategies reinforce pride and maintain loyalty. Even if the team loses, the supporter feels part of a long and meaningful story. Scola and Gordon (2018) argued that maintaining ethical relations with fans requires continuous cultivation of this symbolic relationship.

Supporter identity. Supporters play a decisive role in beautifying history. They are not passive consumers. They actively reinterpret and reproduce memories. Giulianotti (2015) describes fans as carriers of cultural identity. Through chants, banners, and online discussions, they keep historical symbols alive.

At Universitatea Craiova, the ultras group *Peluza Sud* frequently recalls the great players of the 1980s through banners and choreographies that reproduce their images. By doing so, the supporters actively participate in the beautification of history, turning collective memory into a means of protection against present frustrations.

Limits and risks. Beautifying history can strengthen identity, but it also carries certain risks. Too much emphasis on past victories may cultivate nostalgia while leaving little room for renewal. A club that only recalls what it once achieved, without building new strategies, easily drifts into stagnation. Researchers have long pointed out that heritage branding needs to be supported by continuous innovation if it is to remain effective (Holt, 2004; Smith & Stewart, 2010). Supporters, for their part, enjoy the celebration of tradition, yet they also want to see visible steps toward the future.

This tension is evident at Universitatea Craiova. The heroes of the golden era are still glorified, but fans increasingly expect investments in new players, in modern infrastructure, and in youth academies capable of producing the next generation. What matters is the balance: memory must be honoured, but progress cannot be delayed. Beautifying history works as a strategy only when it is accompanied by clear and credible plans for long-term performance.

These observations help us understand how history is not simply remembered but actively used as a resource that legitimizes the present. The following section turns to the ways in which Craiova University embodies this process.

The Case of Universitatea Craiova

The history of Universitatea Craiova is deeply connected to the evolution of Romanian higher education and to the shaping of regional identity. Established in 1948, the club was created through the initiative of teachers and students from the Institute of Electrical Machines and Apparatus. From its earliest days, the team stood for both academic values and community pride. This dual identity - at once

scholarly and regional - has remained a defining element across decades (CS Universitatea Craiova, n.d.).

During its initial years, the club progressed without remarkable achievements, yet it laid the symbolic groundwork for what would follow. Early appearances in county competitions and the Romanian Cup offered the first chapters of a story built on resilience. Visibility grew after the promotion to the top league in the 1960s, but the true turning point arrived in the following decade. In 1974, Universitatea Craiova became the first student team in Europe to win a national championship. That triumph elevated the club from a local representative to a symbol of national pride, leaving a lasting mark on Romanian football.

The golden era of the late 1970s and early 1980s created the myth of *Craiova Maxima*. Under the leadership of coaches such as Constantin Oțeleanu and with players like Cămătaru, Lung, Negrilă, and Ungureanu, the team dominated the domestic scene. It won national titles and reached the semifinals of the UEFA Cup in 1983, after eliminating strong opponents such as FC Kaiserslautern and Girondins Bordeaux. This performance was unprecedented in Romanian football and remains a central pillar of the club's identity. Media of the time celebrated Craiova as "the pride of Oltenia" and even as "the pride of Romania" (CS Universitatea Craiova, n.d.).

History as capital. The decline that followed in the late 1980s and 1990s illustrates how history became capital. The team could not maintain consistent results, facing relegations and financial difficulties. Yet the memory of *Craiova Maxima* remained alive. Supporters continued to identify with the golden generation, while club officials referred constantly to that period. The victories of the 1970s and 1980s were retold in interviews, books, and commemorative events. In this way, the narrative of greatness was beautified and reinforced, compensating for present weaknesses.

This process falls within the broader framework of heritage branding. As Richelieu and Desbordes (2009) note, clubs often rely on their historical identity to stand out in highly competitive markets. Universitatea Craiova is a clear example. Its image is built not only on present players, but also on its heritage: the first student champion in Europe, a UEFA Cup semifinalist, and a cradle for national team legends.

Marketing strategies. The marketing mix of Universitatea Craiova should be read against this background. The core product is, of course, the football match. Yet what fans truly consume is an augmented product: the narrative of identity. A ticket offers access to ninety minutes of play, but at the same time it offers entry into a tradition. Supporters do not purchase mere entertainment; they buy the feeling of belonging to a symbolic community (Kerr, 1997).

Promotion reinforces this heritage. The club regularly marks the anniversary of the 1981 double (league and cup) on its official channels. Historic victories against rivals such as Steaua and Dinamo are remembered through social media campaigns. Former players are invited to events and celebrated as living legends. Merchandise often draws on retro designs and symbols from the golden era. None of these practices are incidental. They illustrate a deliberate effort to beautify

history and to transform memory into a marketing resource.

Sponsorship follows the same pattern. Cornwell (2008) stresses that sponsors are more attracted to brands that carry symbolic weight. For Universitatea Craiova, the glorification of its past enhances its appeal to commercial partners. Even in years when sporting performance is modest, the club presents itself as a historical institution with a devoted fan base. This credibility compensates for fluctuations on the field.

Supporters and identity. The role of supporters in beautifying history is decisive. The organized groups in the “Peluza Sud” stand are known for their loyalty and creativity. Their choreographies often depict legendary players or recall historic victories. Through chants and banners, they transmit stories that keep alive the myth of “Craiova Maxima.” In this way, collective memory is transformed into an active strategy of beautifying history.

Survey data provide additional insight into this dynamic. The 2025 questionnaire applied to 150 respondents revealed that 39.9% associate the club primarily with professionalism, followed by performance (25.2%), dedication (21.1%), and pride (13.8%). These findings suggest that supporters’ perceptions are not based exclusively on historical identity, but also reflect expectations regarding professional management and sporting performance. At the same time, the stadium atmosphere, identified by 47.2% of respondents as the most significant element of the club’s offer, highlights the importance of the collective fan experience.

Periods of crisis. The 2000s and 2010s brought instability. Management conflicts, relegations, and rival entities contested the legacy of the original club. Yet the strategy of beautifying history persisted. The official website emphasizes the continuity with the historic team, presenting titles and European performances as part of the current identity (CS Universitatea Craiova, n.d.). For many fans, this continuity is non-negotiable. The emotional capital of the past outweighed administrative disputes.

Recent performances, such as the Romanian Cup victories in 2018 and 2021, were presented as proof of revival. Although not comparable to the golden years, they were framed as steps in restoring greatness. Media campaigns linked these successes to the heritage of *Craiova Maxima*. This linkage is a clear example of beautifying history: modest victories are amplified by association with glorious tradition.

Heritage and risk. Beautifying history is not free of risk. When too much emphasis is placed on past triumphs, nostalgia may take the place of progress. Smith and Stewart (2010) underline that sport organizations need to maintain a balance between tradition and innovation. Universitatea Craiova illustrates this tension clearly. Supporters enjoy the celebration of legendary players, but they also call for investment in infrastructure and youth academies. Without visible action, the appeal to history may appear as little more than rhetoric.

Yet history also remains a vital resource. For a club whose results often fluctuate, the glorification of tradition provides stability. It sustains supporter loyalty, preserves sponsor interest, and keeps the brand in the public eye. This ambivalence - history as both a risk and a resource - captures the particular case of Universitatea Craiova.

Recognizing this historical foundation makes it easier to understand the club's marketing choices. The following section explores how Universitatea Craiova incorporates these symbolic elements into its broader marketing policy.

Marketing Policy of Universitatea Craiova

Marketing in sport goes far beyond the sale of tickets or merchandise. At its core, it is about shaping identity, cultivating image, and building lasting ties with supporters. For Universitatea Craiova, this dimension has been central from the very beginning. Periods of poor results have demonstrated that victories, on their own, are not enough to secure loyalty. What has kept the bond alive is the club's heritage and its symbolic capital. For this reason, elements of beautifying history have been woven into every aspect of the marketing mix.

Product policy. In sport, the notion of product is layered and complex. Kerr (1997) distinguishes four levels: the basic, the auxiliary, the additional, and the potential product. At the most fundamental level stands the football match itself. For Universitatea Craiova, this translates into access to ninety minutes of play inside the stadium. The auxiliary level refers to the surrounding infrastructure, from seating arrangements to the quality of stadium facilities. The additional product offers competitive advantages like merchandise, fan experiences, and promotional materials. The potential product refers to what the club could develop in the future - digital experiences, personalized memorabilia, or expanded community events.

For Universitatea Craiova, the symbolic dimension is central. Matches are framed as more than sport. They are events that celebrate identity. Merchandise often recalls historical symbols, such as retro jerseys of the 1980s or images of legendary players. These items allow supporters to consume not just football but also memory. Product design thus integrates beautifying history. By turning the glorious past into a tangible good, the club maintains loyalty even in seasons of modest results.

Price policy. Pricing in sport is sensitive. Fans interpret price not only as a financial cost but also as recognition of their loyalty. Solanellas, Petchamé, and Muñoz (2022) argued that pricing strategies must reflect the balance between demand, supply, and competition. At Craiova, ticket prices are relatively moderate compared to Bucharest clubs. This decision reflects both the economic profile of the region and the club's positioning as a community symbol.

During low-performance periods, the club avoided aggressive pricing. Instead, it focused on packages that emphasized loyalty. Season tickets often include symbolic advantages, such as invitations to events with former players or discounts on retro merchandise. By linking price to heritage, the club transforms a financial transaction into an act of identity. This strategy resonates with Richelieu and Desbordes (2009), who note that heritage can justify consumer engagement even when current performance is weak.

Distribution policy. Distribution in sport refers to how the product reaches consumers. For matches, the primary channel is direct: tickets sold through the club. However, digitalization has expanded opportunities. Online ticketing platforms and official mobile apps now allow supporters outside Craiova to remain connected. This is vital for the diaspora of Oltenians who identify with the club.

Distribution also applies to merchandise. The official store in Craiova is complemented by online sales. Products featuring historical symbols are available worldwide. This global reach amplifies beautifying history. Fans in Italy, Spain, or Germany can order items that remind them of *Craiova Maxima*. Distribution is therefore not only logistical but also symbolic. It transports memory beyond geographical limits.

Promotion policy. Promotion is the most visible area of beautifying history. The club invests heavily in storytelling. Social media platforms are filled with posts recalling victories, legendary players, and anniversaries of historic matches. Facebook and Instagram are particularly important. They allow the club to connect daily with supporters, reminding them of glorious moments.

Winell, Lundberg, and Nilsson (2025) stressed the importance of ethical relations with fans. Promotion at Craiova reflects this principle. The club uses history to strengthen bonds, not to deceive. Campaigns celebrate legends but also recognize the efforts of current players. This balance is delicate but essential.

Public relations events also illustrate the strategy. Meetings between supporters and former players are frequent. Documentaries and short videos recall the 1983 UEFA Cup semifinal. Even when current results disappoint, these stories maintain enthusiasm. As Funk and James (2001) showed, psychological connection to sport is built on long-term narratives, not only immediate results.

Sponsorship also benefits from this promotional approach. Cornwell (2008) argued that companies seek associations with symbolic brands. Craiova's historical identity makes it attractive. Even in seasons without trophies, sponsors value the strong emotional attachment of supporters. This emotional capital is renewed through campaigns that beautify history.

Integration with supporters. The effectiveness of marketing depends on its reception. Research with 150 respondents provides a more nuanced picture of supporter perceptions. Professionalism was the most frequently selected association with the club (39.9%), followed by performance (25.2%), dedication (21.1%), and pride (13.8%). In addition, almost half of the respondents (47.2%) considered the stadium atmosphere the most significant element of the club's offer. These findings suggest that supporters value both organizational and performance-related attributes and the collective experience surrounding the club.

Supporters also contribute actively. Choreographies, chants, and online content amplify official campaigns. The "Pelusa Sud" stand is known for banners celebrating *Craiova Maxima*. This grassroots promotion reinforces the official beautifying of history. As Giulianotti (2015) notes, supporters are co-producers of meaning in sport.

Challenges and risks. Despite these strategies, challenges remain. Excessive reliance on history can create nostalgia without progress. Smith and Stewart (2010) warn that heritage branding must be balanced with innovation. Supporters admire history but demand results. The survey showed that a minority would abandon loyalty if poor results persisted without visible effort.

The club is aware of this tension. Recent investments in youth academies and infrastructure attempt to complement heritage with future potential. New stadium

facilities, opened in 2017, symbolize modernization. Promotion often combines images of the new arena with references to the old heroes. This blend of past and present illustrates a balanced marketing approach.

2. Material and methods

The empirical investigation supporting this paper was designed to explore how supporters of Universitatea Craiova perceive the role of history during periods of low performance. The choice of this club as a case study is not accidental. Universitatea Craiova represents a unique blend of academic origins, regional identity, and national recognition. Over time, it has experienced both remarkable achievements and severe crises, which makes it a relevant setting for examining how historical memory functions as a marketing and identity resource.

The instrument of research was a structured questionnaire applied between April 5 and May 24, 2025. It contained twenty-three items, combining closed and semi-open questions. The formulation of the questions was guided by the central theme of beautifying history. Instead of focusing exclusively on present performance, the questionnaire was designed to capture the ways in which supporters interpret the club's past, the symbolic value they attribute to its heritage, and their expectations for the future. Some questions targeted brand associations by asking respondents to choose attributes such as "pride," "performance," "dedication," or "professionalism." Others examined perceptions of promotional strategies, the role of stadium atmosphere, and the extent to which historical references influence loyalty. A further set of items invited participants to identify the causes of poor results and to suggest solutions, thus highlighting whether the recall of past achievements helps them tolerate present difficulties.

The sample consisted of 150 respondents, selected on the basis of accessibility and availability to participate. Although not probabilistic, the sample was diverse. The age range extended from 20 to over 50 years, with the largest groups being between 20–30 years and 30–40 years. Men represented 75% of the respondents, while women accounted for 25%. Educational levels were well distributed: 27% had completed secondary studies, 48% higher education, and 25% postgraduate programs. This diversity provided a balanced picture of supporter perceptions across different social categories.

The questionnaire was distributed in both physical and digital form. Some respondents completed it at matches, while others accessed it through online supporter forums. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Prior to completing the questionnaire, respondents were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary and anonymous nature of their participation, and the use of the collected data for scientific purposes. By voluntarily completing the questionnaire after receiving this information, respondents provided their informed consent to participate in the study. Answers were centralized for analysis. Data were processed using Microsoft Excel, applying univariate, bivariate, and multivariate methods. This allowed for a detailed examination of frequencies, correlations, and tendencies within the responses.

The methodological design is consistent with existing research in sport marketing. Funk and James (2001) emphasized that consumer attachment in sport depends on a long-term psychological connection rather than immediate results. Cuskelly and Hoye (2018) also observed that loyalty is multidimensional and cannot be explained solely by victories or defeats. The present survey was built in line with these perspectives, focusing on identity, heritage, and resilience as key variables.

Of course, the study has its limitations. The sample size is modest and concentrated in one region, which makes generalization difficult. Nevertheless, the symbolic importance of Universitatea Craiova provides a strong rationale for the case study approach. The results offer valuable insights into the ways in which history is beautified and used as a resource for continuity, even when on-field performance is below expectations.

3. Results and Discussions

This study was conducted between April 5 and May 24, 2025, on a sample of 150 people, based on a questionnaire of 23 items designed to investigate how the club manages to preserve its image in times of low performance. The empirical results illustrate how supporters perceive the identity of Universitatea Craiova in relation to both current performance and the symbolic weight of history, showing how promotion, image, services, causes of failure, solutions, and loyalty are connected to the process of beautifying history.

The first set of questions examined the main methods of promotion used by the club. The results, shown in Table 1 (The method of sports promotion used by the club), indicate that the most important elements are the brand name (29.4%) and the support of the supporters (27.6%). Direct promotion (17.1%) and online promotion (9.7%) follow at a considerable distance, while the presentation of sports services at fairs and exhibitions (7.3%) and other methods (8.9%) remain marginal.

These responses suggest that supporters interpret promotion primarily through symbolic and collective resources. The strength of the brand is rooted in history, while the solidarity of the fans is expressed in their rituals and long-term loyalty. For Universitatea Craiova, beautifying history may function as an important promotional resource.

Table 1. *The method of sports promotion used by the club*

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Brand name	36	29.4	29.4
Direct promotion	21	17.1	46.5
Online promotion	22	9.7	56.2
Presentation of sports services at fairs and exhibitions	19	7.3	63.5
Supporting the supporters	34	27.6	91.1
Other methods of promotion	18	8.9	100.0
Total	150	100.0	

Respondents were also asked to associate the image of the club with a single attribute. The distribution, presented in Table 2 (Association of the image of the Craiova University club), shows that professionalism (39.9%) is ranked highest, followed by performance (25.2%) and dedication (21.1%). Only 13.8% associated the club with pride.

This outcome is significant. It indicates that, although the memory of Craiova Maxima has long been tied to pride, current supporters now emphasize professionalism and visible efficiency. Beautifying history is not rejected, but it is integrated into a broader expectation: fans want the tradition of the past to be complemented by professional management and credible sporting standards.

Table 2. *Association of the image of the Craiova University club*

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Performance	41	25.2	25.2
Pride	27	13.8	39.0
Dedication	34	21.1	60.1
Professionalism	49	39.9	100.0
Total	150	100.0	

The importance of different club services is reflected in Table 3 (Significant elements of the Craiova University club). Almost half of the respondents (47.2%) consider the atmosphere created during matches to be the most significant element. In comparison, custom equipment (13.8%), originality of the logo (14.6%), and originality of uniforms (11.4%) hold secondary places, while other elements were mentioned by 13%.

The result underlines the essential role of atmosphere as a living expression of history. The stadium is the place where chants, banners, and collective rituals revive past victories and heroes. Even in seasons without trophies, supporters can feel part of a continuing story. Beautifying history, therefore, becomes concrete in the atmosphere, reinforcing identity through shared memory.

Table 3. *Significant elements of the Craiova University club*

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Custom equipment	27	13.8	13.8
The originality of the logo	28	14.6	28.4
The originality of the uniforms	30	11.4	39.8
The atmosphere created during the matches	58	47.2	87.0
Other elements	26	13.0	100.0
Total	150	100.0	

When asked to identify the causes of poor performance, respondents primarily pointed to inadequate physical training (33%), followed by low motivation to train or play (24%), and the pressure associated with performance and lifestyle (23%). Injuries (15%) and tactical or interpersonal issues (5%) were considered less influential. These findings are illustrated in Figure 1 (Distribution depending on the factors that led to the reduced performance).

The emphasis on training and motivation shows that respondents perceive poor performance as being related not only to tactical factors, but also to preparation and psychological aspects. These perceptions suggest that supporters regard several of the identified causes as factors that may potentially be addressed through improved preparation and motivation.

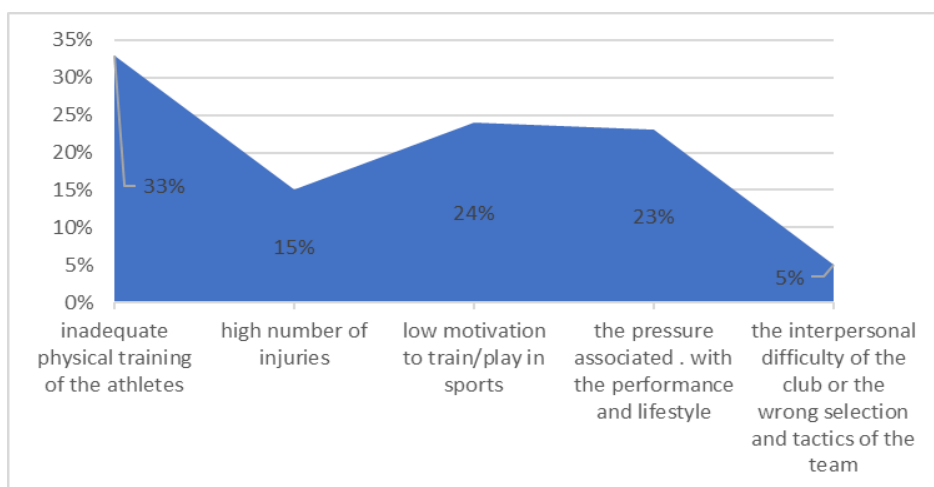


Figure 1. *Distribution depending on the factors that led to the reduced performance*

The suggested solutions for improvement are shown in Figure 2 (Distribution depending on the adopted solutions to get out of this period of poor performance). The main proposals include changing the daily routine (28%), finding the right formula for the team (23%), and granting extended time off to revitalize players (18%). Other suggestions refer to introducing play and variety in training sessions (15%), modifying training sessions directly (11%), or eliminating repetitive tasks (5%).

These proposals indicate that respondents favor renewal, recovery, and adaptability rather than simply increasing training intensity. Changing routines, identifying an appropriate team formula, and providing opportunities for recovery were perceived as important ways of addressing periods of poor performance.

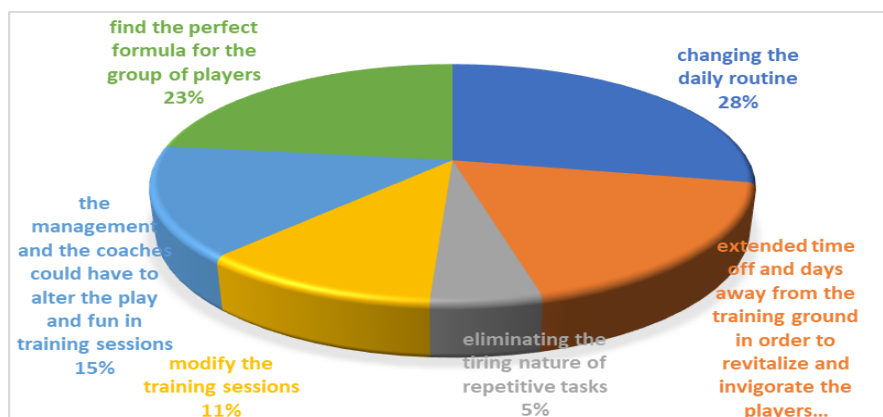


Figure 2. Distribution depending on the adopted solutions to get out of this period of poor performance

Finally, supporters were asked how poor performance affects their fan status. The results, presented in Figure 3 (The distribution of the respondents according to the fan status of the team), show that almost half (49%) remain loyal regardless of results. Another 28% continue to support but expect visible comeback solutions, while 23% do not remain fans in times of prolonged difficulties.

These answers demonstrate both the strength and the limits of supporter loyalty during periods of poor performance. A majority of respondents remain attached to the club despite sporting difficulties. However, a significant proportion expects visible solutions or may withdraw its support if poor performance persists. Historical identity may contribute to this continuity, but it cannot substitute for credible strategies aimed at improving future performance.

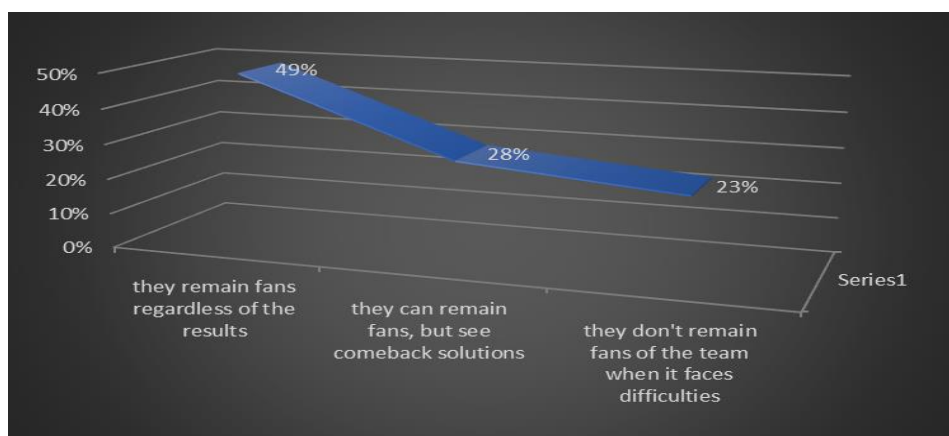


Figure 3. The distribution of the respondents according to the fan status of the team

Discussions

The findings indicate that supporters' perceptions of Universitatea Craiova combine historical identity with contemporary expectations. Although the memory of Craiova Maxima has long been associated with pride, respondents currently emphasize professionalism and performance. Beautifying history is not rejected, but is integrated into a broader expectation that the tradition of the past should be complemented by professional management and credible sporting standards.

The importance attributed to stadium atmosphere also underlines the role of collective experience in maintaining supporter identity. Chants, banners, and collective rituals contribute to keeping historical symbols alive, supporting Giulianotti's (2015) view of supporters as carriers of cultural identity. This is also consistent with Funk and James (2001), who emphasize that psychological connection to sport develops through long-term attachment rather than immediate sporting results.

Finally, the results concerning supporter loyalty reveal both the strength and the limits of historical identity. While 49% of respondents remain fans regardless of results, another 28% continue their support but expect visible comeback solutions, and 23% do not remain fans during prolonged difficulties. These findings are consistent with Smith and Stewart's (2010) argument that tradition must be balanced with organizational development. Beautifying history may contribute to maintaining identity and loyalty, but it cannot replace the need for renewal, professionalism, and credible strategies for future performance.

4. Conclusions

The case of Universitatea Craiova demonstrates that the history of a sports club is more than a record of past victories. It is a resource that shapes identity, sustains loyalty, and compensates for present shortcomings. The results of this study show that supporters perceive the club through both its symbolic capital and contemporary expectations regarding professionalism and sporting performance. Even in periods of modest performance, they remain attached to the brand because it embodies tradition, resilience, and community pride.

The findings show that the club's brand identity and supporter community represent important promotional resources. The atmosphere in the stadium is perceived as the most significant service, confirming that collective rituals are central to the fan experience. Respondents emphasized professionalism and performance as key attributes of the club, but they also acknowledged the enduring role of pride rooted in the golden era of Craiova Maxima.

The analysis of causes and solutions illustrates the psychological function of beautifying history. Poor results are attributed to inadequate training, low motivation, and performance pressure, yet supporters interpret these challenges through comparison with earlier generations. Proposed solutions emphasize changes in routine, recovery, adaptability, and the identification of an appropriate team formula. Loyalty remains strong, with nearly half of fans supporting the club regardless of results, while another segment continues to demand visible progress.

These findings highlight both the strengths and the limits of beautifying history. It is a powerful strategy for preserving legitimacy, ensuring resilience, and maintaining emotional ties with supporters. However, it cannot replace credible investments in management, training, and youth development. Supporters value history, but they also expect innovation and professionalism.

In conclusion, beautifying history should be understood as a complement rather than a substitute for performance. For Universitatea Craiova, the glorification of the past sustains loyalty and identity, but the future of the club depends on its ability to combine memory with modernization. The balance between tradition and progress remains the essential condition for transforming historical capital into a sustainable strategy of development.

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