REFRAMING THE PSYCHOLOGY OF REVENUE · THE VANCOUVER CANUCKS ·

The Canucks and the Cost of Belonging.

How sports organisations with deeply loyal fanbases can grow revenue without spending the one thing they can't replace

Aarianna Goswamy · Portfolio Work · July 2026

The Observation

Sports ticketing has gotten smarter. Algorithms have replaced fixed prices. Demand curve complexity has replaced season ticket simplicity.

Charge what the market will bear, when the market will bear it. This is a logic borrowed from airlines and hotels, where it has worked very successfully.

So sports fans should accept the logic. And they do. And it works. Until it doesn't.

FIFA 2026 arrived with dynamic pricing and an assumption that World Cup demand would hold at any price point. Public reporting surrounding the tournament ticket pricing suggests that seats have been cut in price and early buyers feel punished. The algorithm was right about demand in the abstract. It was wrong about what demand actually means when the product is **belonging**, not a flight to Cincinnati.

The Canucks have something FIFA organisers don't. A fanbase that has been showing up through bad seasons, coaching changes, and the particular heartbreak that only hockey can produce- for decades. That loyalty is the most valuable asset the organisation holds.

However, loyalty is also a non-renewable resource. If it gets spent wrong, no pricing algorithm brings it back.

The One True Thing

The Canucks don't have a demand problem. They have a monetization architecture problem.

The fans are there. The question is: how to build revenue layers around them (without the layers beginning to feel like separating walls).

The Psychology: Why This Is Harder Than It Looks

To understand why pricing decisions in sports carry consequences that hotel yield management doesn't, we need to understand what kind of relationship a core fan actually has with their team.

*It is not the relationship of a customer with a **product**. It is closer to the relationship of a person with their **own identity.***

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner) establishes that people derive a meaningful part of their self-concept from the groups they belong to. Canucks fans don't merely support the team. They *are* Canucks fans. It is a statement of identity, not a commercial transaction to find the best dates to travel. That distinction matters enormously for how pricing decisions land psychologically. For a sports fan, a price increase isn't just a financial decision. It's a signal about whether you still belong, and whether your years of commitment are worth anything to the organisation that received them.

Equity Theory (Adams) tells us that people constantly evaluate fairness by comparing what they put in against what they get out. And crucially, by comparing that ratio to what others around them receive. A season ticket holder who has renewed for twelve years, watching their seat sell on the resale market for less than they paid, is not doing math. They are asking whether their loyalty is worth less than a stranger's credit card. The injury is not *financial*, it is in fact *relational*.

Reactance Theory (Brehm) adds a further complication. When people feel that their freedom or status is being threatened, they feel upset and push back hard. For core fans, dynamic pricing can feel like it's working against them. Their resentment is usually not silent. It produces the kind of vocal, public, identity-driven anger that damages a brand in ways that can outlast the pricing decision that caused it.

Loss Aversion (Kahneman & Tversky) is perhaps the most important framework here. *People feel losses roughly twice as intensely as they feel equivalent gains*. For a core fan, a price increase that feels arbitrary is experienced as a **loss of belonging** and not just a cost. The asymmetry means that the revenue gained from squeezing fans is likely to be worth less than the loyalty cost of doing it.

Scarcity and Signalling (Cialdini) explains why the model that does work is the one where exclusivity signals belonging rather than restriction. When depth of access, like getting closer to the team earlier than anyone else can get is offered to core fans as recognition of their loyalty, it lands completely differently than a price hike. It is the same revenue potential. It is however, an entirely different psychological experience.

The insight that connects all five frameworks: **the core fan is not a customer to be priced. They are a stakeholder to be recognised.** The revenue opportunity lies in what recognition unlocks, not in what restriction extracts.

The Architecture

There are three distinct psychological relationships at play in any sports fanbase. This requires three distinct commercial approaches. What thus follows is a three-tier model.

Tier One: The Core Fan. *Stability, transparency, and depth*

These are the identity holders. The ones who make Rogers Arena what it is. Their commercial relationship with the Canucks is years of emotional investment, renewed season after season, through good runs and painful ones.

What they need is reciprocity, i.e. a commercial relationship as stable and transparent as their loyalty, accompanied by something dynamic pricing can never offer: depth of access. Through things like early entry, exclusive touchpoints with the team, limited merchandise that money alone cannot buy. The fans need to feel that *being here for a long time means something*.

The global evidence for this is compelling.

Borussia Dortmund built the Yellow Wall deliberately. Standing tickets reserved for the most passionate supporters, are priced among the lowest in the stadium *by deliberate design*. Dortmund understands that the Yellow Wall produces an atmosphere so intense it has become one of the most recognisable environments in world football. The core fan experience is protected because everything else depends on it.

The Green Bay Packers have a season ticket waitlist with over 100,000 names. Some of those names inherited their place on the list. When core fans are *treated as stakeholders rather than customers*, the result is a fanbase that doesn't erode. In a small market that should not sustain an NFL franchise, the Packers have one of the most durable supporter bases in American sport.

FC Barcelona's Socio membership model gives long-term members voting rights, priority access, and identity privileges that a single-game buyer cannot purchase at any price. The revenue comes from what membership unlocks. The seat itself is almost secondary.

Loyalty is a non-renewable resource. Once a core fan feels like a customer rather than a stakeholder, no pricing algorithm wins them back. The Dortmund model, the Packers model, the Barcelona model all protect this tier first, because they understand that everything else depends on it.

Tier Two: The Corporate and Premium Buyer. *High margin, bought for adjacency*

Here is something the corporate hospitality industry understands but rarely says out loud: *the premium buyer is not buying luxury. They are buying proximity to something real.*

What makes a Canucks corporate hospitality product worth purchasing is the building it sits inside- a building full of people who genuinely, visibly, sometimes painfully care about what happens on the ice. That atmosphere is the product. And it only exists because the core fan is in the building, loud and committed and emotionally invested in a way no hospitality package can manufacture.

This means the corporate tier and the core fan tier are not in tension. They are interdependent. Protect the core fan experience, and the premium product sells itself.

Manchester City's Tunnel Club sells access to the players' tunnel before matches. The price point is extraordinary. What is being sold is proximity to something real, at the moment it is most intense. It works because the atmosphere underneath it is genuine. Strip out the core fan, and the Tunnel Club is just an expensive corridor.

The All Blacks have built their entire corporate hospitality model around the cultural and emotional weight of the team. Corporate clients buy adjacency to one of the most psychologically loaded sporting identities in the world. An identity the haka makes visceral before every match. That resonance exists because generations of core fans invested in it emotionally.

The Canucks' version of this insight: corporate revenue at Rogers Arena is a function of what the core fan produces. Price and manage accordingly.

Tier Three: The Peripheral and Casual Buyer. *Dynamic pricing, applied correctly*

The casual buyer has little emotional contract with the team. They are attending a Canucks game the way someone attends a concert they discovered last week (because it sounds like a good night, because the seats were available, because someone suggested it and so on).

This is a perfectly good reason to attend. It is also a completely different psychological relationship to the one the core fan has. And it means that dynamic pricing (the model that can go so wrong in other contexts) is entirely appropriate here.

A higher price on a playoff game for a single-game buyer is supply and demand. It is not a betrayal. The casual buyer has no history with the organisation that the price increase can violate.

The Golden State Warriors applied this logic explicitly after their dynasty years. Dynamic pricing targets single-game buyers most aggressively. Season ticket holders receive price stability and exclusive benefits. The casual buyer funds the infrastructure. The core fan feels protected.

Real Madrid runs what are effectively two parallel products in the same stadium. Tourist-facing and single-game tickets are priced dynamically and at significant premium. Socios and long-term members receive protected pricing and privileged access. The stadium is simultaneously a premium tourist experience and a home ground for people who have been coming for decades. Neither product undermines the other because the tiers are clearly separated.

The key principle: dynamic pricing is a tool. It produces very different outcomes depending on whom it is aimed at. Aimed at casual buyers, it captures surge revenue without an emotional cost. Aimed at core fans, it spends something that cannot be replenished.

The Synthesis

The Canucks are not Live Nation. Live Nation's problem as examined on this site is that it has 500 million fan accounts and no meaningful relationship with any of them. The loyalty gap is structural as fans belong to artists, not platforms, and Live Nation has never built the infrastructure to change that.

The Canucks' problem is almost the exact opposite. The loyalty exists. It is deep, durable, and identity-level. The challenge is not building it. The challenge is building a revenue architecture around it that grows commercial return without treating the loyalty itself as a resource to extract from.

The three-tier model does that. It separates three genuinely different psychological relationships (identity-based, adjacency-based, transactional) and applies the right commercial logic to each. Core fans get stability, transparency, and depth. Corporate buyers get access to the atmosphere that core fans produce. Casual buyers absorb dynamic pricing without emotional consequence.

The teams that have figured this out have more durable revenue, stronger atmospheres, and corporate products that command premium prices because the authenticity underneath them is real.

The Canucks have that authenticity. The architecture question is whether the commercial model reflects it.

Loyalty, like this paper has stated, is a non-renewable resource. The organisations that treat it that way build something that outlasts any single season, any pricing cycle, any algorithm.

The ones that don't find out what it costs to replace it.

The Architecture of Evolution

The Canucks have already moved toward tiered categories and membership structures. This study isn't arguing they start from scratch.

What this study proposes is the transition from **Revenue Optimization** (using algorithms to capture surplus value) to **Relationship Architecture** (using data to reinforce fan identity). There are three distinct psychological relationships that require three distinct commercial logics. The infrastructure exists. The behavioral lens is what's being overlayed here.

The Canucks are essentially standing on the threshold of an **"Identity-First"** model. The current infrastructure (the tiered categories and the membership benefits etc.) provides the skeleton for the three-tier system described here. The necessary pivot is to stop treating these categories as inventory slots and start treating them as psychological segments.

By explicitly codifying this three-tier architecture of *Core*, *Corporate*, and *Peripheral*, the Canucks can transform their existing technological framework from a **"demand-capture"** engine into a **"loyalty-amplification"** platform. The goal is not to abandon current progress, but to apply a behavioral lens that ensures every algorithmic adjustment is viewed by the fan as "recognition" rather than "extraction."

Sources

All frameworks drawn from published academic research. All organisational examples based on publicly available information and independent analysis.

Tajfel & Turner (1979) |Social Identity Theory

Adams (1963) | Equity Theory

Brehm (1966) | Reactance Theory

Kahneman & Tversky (1979) | Prospect Theory / Loss Aversion

Cialdini (1984) | Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion

Note: This is and independent behavioral analysis based on publicly available information and established psychological research. The commercial recommendations are interpretive an not based on any proprietary organizational data.