

Chapter 76

Differences in Perceptions and Attitudes of Singaporean Female Football Fans Towards Football Marketing

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ABSTRACT

Though global, it is known that female participation in football lags behind their male counterparts. Football marketers have highlighted this laggardness as a source of growth for the clubs. However, when it comes to female fans' perspectives towards marketing practices, little is understood. Therefore, this exploratory article has been conducted to analyse the differences in fans' perceptions and attitudes towards both traditional and social media marketing. The article shows that Singaporean female fans can be separated into 'hot' (avid) and 'cool' (casual) fans. These two groups exhibit both similarities and differences in perceptions and attitudes towards different parts of traditional and social media marketing. The findings reveal that social media is the preferred channel of football consumption even if its potential has not been tapped fully. For now, it is best to construe social media marketing as a platform which enhances traditional marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Football is arguably the biggest global sporting phenomenon. Its reach and influence is ubiquitous judging from the level of mass participation and media attention. Such sporting sensation is further aided by the rising popularity of social media in recent years (Chew & Leng, 2014). A decade back, the 2006 'Big Count' carried out by FIFA shows that there are over 270 million direct participants in the game. These direct participants are spread out across all continents with the most – 85 million – in Asia (FIFA, 2007). In terms of indirect participation, there is no comparable data due to a lack of reliable measures. However, to have a sample of the mass appeal of football, one can consider the latest edition

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of football's premier event – the 2014 World Cup held in Brazil. Kantar Media reported that the final between Germany and Argentina attracted over a billion TV viewers.

Over the course of the past two to three decades, football has certainly evolved further from solely about winning competitions. This holds true although Dempsey & Reilly (1998) have previously argued that sporting success is still very important as solid financial returns may be cascaded down from championship wins. Nevertheless, the commercialisation aspect of football has garnered significantly more attention over this period as the popularity of the game grows with technological advances. Due to this business potential, a corollary development is that ownerships of clubs have attracted major foreign capital investments (Garcia & Amara, 2013; Rabasso, Briars & Rabasso, 2015). As such, Buhler (2006) has described football today as an international business. On its own, football is a distinctive business with exceptional media and public interest; with its major export flow from Europe to the rest of the world. This reflects the shift from saturated football markets towards new consumer segments (Manzenreiter & Horne, 2007). As a result, targeted marketing towards new solvent territories with newfound purchasing power, the young children, the disabled and the female participants in particular becomes critical. This main flow, also observed in both the nature of academic research work as well as the clubs' marketing activities, provides the overarching direction for this study.

As a contact sport, football has traditionally been constructed as a male dominated game from a direct participation viewpoint (Manzenreiter, 2004), and viewed as an extension of 'masculine hegemony' in the modern era (Pope, 2012a). As a result, both Caudwell (2011) and Jones (2008) have asserted that the female footballing experience have been tainted with unfair and inequitable treatment. Due to such cultural underpinnings, much pioneering work by Western academics were usually centred on the sporting, historical and socio-cultural aspects of the game (Morris, 1981; Perry, 1999; Cho, 2013) and mostly gendered with little studies done on the female experiences within the game (Pope, 2014). However, with increasing female participation as part of the game's rising popularity, this gender imbalance in terms of research work has been slowly redressed in recent years. Whereas to the business-minded community, football is regarded as a form of 'popular culture' (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2004), a part of the wider entertainment industry which caters for mass marketing and allows consumption by both sexes. The obvious male fans aside, this also reflects the serious commercial possibilities placed upon female football fans which have been growing in numbers (James & Ridinger, 2002; Desbordes, 2007).

Increased female participation is crucial for the game as proclaimed by the ex-FIFA president and other top FIFA officials. In the aforementioned 'Big Count', the most noteworthy statistic came from direct female participation which rose by 19% compared to 8% on the male side from 2000 to 2006. In absolute numbers, though, female participation stood at only 10% of the total direct participation from both genders with much potential for growth. In 2014, further increase in direct female participation was verified by the FIFA Women's Football Survey where total direct female participation stood at 30 million reflecting a 16% increase from the previous 'Big Count' in 2006. There are several studies which confirmed that playing a sport is closely intertwined with supporting this sport as a fan (Pfister, Lenneis & Mintert, 2013). Hence with the upwardly trends in direct female participation, the increasing overall viewership numbers and amount of academic research on the female footballing experience as guidance, there seems to be a pattern of convergence and an affirmation of female fandom growing in both numbers and importance – this despite the relatively higher barriers to entry for female fandom.

In marketing terms, it is understood that the top European football clubs have two broad marketing channels – traditional marketing and the more contemporary social media marketing. Traditional marketing entails merchandising through jerseys, scarfs, caps and other memorabilia, sponsorship arrangements

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