
HOW DOES SOMEONE BECOME A SUPPORTER OF A FOREIGN SPORTS TEAM? A STUDY ON THE BRAZILIANS FANS

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Abstract

This paper aims to understand how someone becomes a supporter of a foreign sports team (not of an athlete or a league). It must be cleared that the focus of this research is on the perspective of the fan (the management side was not heard, but the implications of the findings should affect the managers' work, as it is widely know from the popular press the actions of the teams to foster supporting overseas). Although the question of this paper seems to be of great interest to the researchers and practitioners, it was not found prior work on the fan motivation literature that deals with the topic of this study – this one might be the “kickoff” to shorten this gap.

Farred (2002) wrote how his long distance love for Liverpool FC started during his childhood in his native South Africa back in the 70's/80's, but he shed little light on the study topic due to his love at first sight relationship. Anthony and James (2008) pointed that the Farred's behaviour have unprecedent opportunities to grow due to the recent development of communication technology. As a result of this possibility, the sports teams are aggressively trying to establish a fan base overseas (Yu, 2010). This management decision lies on the premise that if you have more fans/supporters of your team, the revenues tend to grow (Harris, 2013). One should note that supporting a team because he/she lives/was born in a specific location isn't the only reason that leads a supporter to use this kind of relationship to self-identification – actually, being a fan due to locality is a peripheral means of getting that (Hunt, Bristol, and Bashaw, 1999). So, it can be said that the fact of not living/having been born in London doesn't hinder someone to become a Tottenham Hotspur supporter – the teams/leagues should be aware of this “gold rush”. Three research methods were used: (1)in-depth interviews (seven students – Management undergraduate course), (2)web-based

survey (fifteen respondents), and (3) documentary research from a forum in a website of a long distance course (one case), a forum of an organized Brazilian supporters group of Arsenal FC (forty eight), and a website of a Tottenham Hotspur organized Brazilian supporters group (two). The data gathered is of qualitative nature. The sample of this study consists of seventy three people (presumably Brazilians), mostly Arsenal supporters. Both in the in-depth interviews and the web-based survey, the respondents were asked which foreign sports team they supported and how they became their supporters.

Content analysis was used: thirty three items were identified and grouped in eight dimensions (emerged from the data collected):

(1) sporting elements (n=88) – stuff related to the choices made by the team that impacts on the pitch (lack of sporting dominance, performance, style of play, Brazilian player, favourite player, quality of the players, Brazilian team, type of squad, manager); (2) existential issues (n=27) – people turned out to be supporters of the team due to their posture to life (items: management, philosophy, history, ideology, cultural influence, special moments, tradition of the team); (3) media (n=27) – several ways that a person can be in touch with the team (exposure of the team matches, literature, video-game); (4) geographical (n=10) – items pertinent to the location of the team (ancestry, connection with the locale, residence, trip); (5) identification elements (n=9) – things that present the team to others (colours, shield, name, official merchandise, uniform); (6) peripheral (n=7) – things that have a connection with the core product of the team, but is not the product itself (stadium, supporters idiosyncrasies); (7) clueless (n=6); (8) peers (n=4) – the influence of significant ones made them supporters (father, friends). As an example of application of these results, the identification elements could drive the managers to work alongside the equipment provider to design attractive uniforms, being the colours especially noted, because one may become a supporter due to these things, as it's confirmed in the excerpt "my unconditional love for Arsenal started when I played 2006 Winning Eleven, (...) chose the team with the most beautiful jersey. Garnet and gold looked perfect for me!".

As there is no previous literature on the subject tackled in this paper, it can be said that there is now a starting point for academics/practitioners to lean themselves when it comes to understanding the foreign team supporting behaviour. Further research should verify which of the reasons found are also seen in other countries, as well as the different patterns for supporters of distinct genders, age, sport, league affiliation, and level of involvement/support/attachment to a team (a quantitative approach apply to these suggestions).

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