
#GoSocceroos: AUSTRALIAN FAN EXPERIENCES AT THE 2014 FIFA WORLD CUP IN BRAZIL: IN REAL LIFE AND ONLINE

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Synopsis:

Abstract:
AIM OF PAPER

Association football or soccer as it has traditionally been called in Australia has up until recently occupied a marginal place within the Australian sporting landscape. The sport has been regarded as a lesser option, especially from a commercial perspective, when compared to the three other football codes; Australian Rules, rugby league and rugby union. Prior to its 2006 qualification, the Australian men's national football team, known as the Socceroos, had only played at one previous FIFA World Cup (FWC) in 1974. Since 2006, where it lost in controversial circumstances to eventual champions Italy in the Round of 16, the Socceroos have also qualified for the 2010 and 2014 events albeit exiting at the group stage. Despite Australia's precarious geographical location in regards to long-haul international travel, regular qualification has been met with extensive fan interest in attending the FWC. Out of the 32 nations which qualified for Brazil 2014, people from Australia had been allocated 52,509 tickets – the sixth most subscribed in terms of sales (FIFA, n.d.).

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the experiences of Australian fans at the 2014 FWC held in Brazil. It examines not only their lived experience within the host country but also the digital experience of fans through related social media. Considering social media, in particular Twitter, has become powerful communication phenomenon, negligible comparative research has been undertaken examining the lived experience with projection of digital social identities online. This ongoing work aims to provide new insights to the sport management literature through the combined analysis of digital and qualitative data.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The FWC is one of the biggest global sport mega-events which attracts billions of dollars of sponsorship and broadcast contracts, millions of spectators from every corner of the planet, and sees nations and cities bid ferociously in the face of ever increasing costs for the prestige and honour of hosting the event every four year cycle (Frawley & Adair, 2014). For the fans, the tournament unleashes intense passion unlike any other event. Those fortunate enough to gain tickets can expect to spend considerable amounts of money with further outlay made for travel arrangements to the host nation (Street, Frawley & Cobourn, 2014).

Looking at Australian soccer literature, much has been written about fans and fan groups of both the former National Soccer League and the current national competition called the A-League. However, when it comes to the Socceroos, the FWC and its fans, it is not surprising to see minimal scholarship considering tournament qualification has only yielded four appearances. Germany 2006 elicited an extraordinary response of popular support with fans travelling to Europe in what was considered to be the largest outward movement of Australian people since World War II (Hay & Joel, 2007). In Australia, FWC live sites in capital cities became large-scale gatherings of patriotic support in spite of the games being shown in the early morning hours of winter (Hay & Joel, 2007).

METHODOLOGY

This involves splitting the subjects into two main groups: independent fans that made all their own travel arrangements and package tour fans that paid a premium for the service of having everything arranged on their behalf. Under the independent grouping, those with Australia team specific tickets would be categorised against independents with venue packs for a particular city or individual tickets for a spread of games across a range of cities. Package tour fans would be split into groups representing the three main Australian package companies known as: the Fanatics, Green & Gold Army and Premier Sports Tours.

The aim is to scrutinise one person per category who fulfils the criteria of attending Brazil 2014 plus being active on Twitter. Conventional ethnographic techniques would be used for data gathering in addition to the use of emergent digital research methods which are seen of being of critical importance considering respondents spend a considerable portion of their professional and social lives online (Murthy, 2013). The hypothesised results would not only see if the lived experience in Brazil mimics the online experience but also to compare and contrast the experience of being an Australian fan in Brazil via their mode of travel experience i.e. independent or package. Another potential research category could also investigate those from Australia who followed another country at the tournament and see if their experience correlates with others under investigation.

RESULTS

Data collection and analysis is currently underway with the results of the study to be available at the time of the conference.

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