Predictors of team identification in Belgian and Portuguese soccer fans

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Aim of abstract

The aim of this study is to compare Belgian and Portuguese soccer fans with respect to the determinants of identification with a soccer team, in particular their underlying motives for team identification. As far as we know, this is the first time that these motives will be scrutinized in a cross-cultural European context. Therefore, the research question focuses on similarities and differences in motives (as team's success, residence to the club, socialization) related to fans' identification levels between abovementioned countries.

Theoretical background

Team identification is defined as the psychological connection a fan feels to a team (Wann & Branscombe, 1993), and has its foundations in the Social Identity Theory (Haslam, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Being a sport fan is considered to be a part of an individual's identity and being a fan of a particular team is an extension of his own identity. SIT states that people identify themselves with a successful group to increase their self-esteem. They need a way of positive distinctiveness in their life (Haslam, 2004). On the basis of this identification concept, sport marketers and social scientists are able to predict whether or not individuals attend games. Although the major part of the investigations treated team identification as a predictor of sport consumption behavior, some researchers recently became interested in which motives determine the identification level of sport fans (Wann, Tucker, & Schrader, 1996). This field still remains quite limited, but we build on existing work by giving a succinct overview of what is known so far about which factors have an influence on team identification. Wann et al. (1996) reported over 40 different reasons to identify with a team. Three of them, namely the team's success, geographical concerns and group affiliation (i.e. attending games to spend time with friends) were designated the most. Besides, socialization agents like parents, peers and friends seems to have a strong influence

on the individual's team identification level (Melnick & Wann, 2011).

Methodology

We created a validated online questionnaire in Dutch and in Portuguese. Items emerge to draft a profile of the person as a soccer fan. Loyalty related questions, as well as a version of the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (Wann & Branscombe, 1993) were incorporated, mostly using a Likert scale or an open-ended question. Socio-demographical information (sex, age, residence, education, sports participation, and others) was also collected. The target population consisted of pupils attending the last two years of high school at public and private schools in and around the cities of Leuven (Belgium) and Aveiro (Portugal). We selected these two cities, because they have a lot in common. More specifically, Leuven and Aveiro share approximately the same amount of inhabitants (97.000 and 78.000 respectively), and their main soccer clubs (i.e. OHL in Leuven and SC Beira-Mar in Aveiro) usually end on an average position of the first league ranking in their respective countries. Sixteen- to eighteen-year-olds were addressed, because they are approaching an independent living in this stage of their life. In that respect, this study is able to compare and provide insights in the psychology of the main future soccer fan.

The following hypotheses are being investigated:

➢ H1: The longer someone is a fan of a particular team, the higher his/her team identification level will be;
➢ H2: The team's success, in order to increase someone's self-esteem, will be the strongest predictor for team identification both in Belgium and Portugal;
➢ H3: The father will be designated more than any other socialization agent to become a fan of a particular soccer team; moreover, the individual's team identification level will be higher in this case;

Descriptive and inductive statistics (regression analyses, separately for Belgium and Portugal) will be applied using SPSS19.

Results

Results are not yet available at this moment. Around 450 respondents have filled out the questionnaire so far. At least 300 respondents are being expected for each city. Further analyses and conclusions will be elaborated.

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