

LOOKING AT SATELLITE FANS' REASONS TO CHOOSE A CLUB TO SUPPORT: A STUDY OF THE ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE IN CHINA

Guillaume Bodet, Hui Geng, Nicolas Chanavat,
Loughborough University
United Kingdom
g.s.p.bodet@lboro.ac.uk

Abstract keywords

Satellite fans, sport clubs, motivations, support, football, global brands

Aim of abstract/paper - research question

The objective of this study was to assess the importance of the factors influencing satellite fans' decision to support a foreign club

Theoretical background or literature review

Geographical and familial bonds have been traditionally found as important factors influencing fans' decision to support a team, particularly in the European context (Jones, 1997). However, without such bonds, we can wonder how satellite fans choose a team to support. The study of Wann, Tucker & Schrader (1996) in the North American context already identified several factors such as players' talent and personalities, peer influence and teams' success which could be relevant in the context of distance fanship. However, they are not sufficient to fully understand satellite fans' decision-making. Chanavat & Bodet (2009) postulated that satellite fans' decision-making process was more rational than local fans and was probably more similar to consumers' choice between brands. Based on this assumption these authors considered that a brand-equity framework would be relevant to analyze satellite fans' perceptions. Chanavat & Bodet (2009) and Bodet & Chanavat (2010) adopted an inductive research approach based on semi-structured interviews and investigated the brand perceptions of French and Chinese fans respectively of Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool and Manchester United. They identified new relevant factors which could possibly influence the decision to support a foreign club such as the presence of players of the fans' nationality, the perceived-fit between satellite fans and local fans, and the club's business and marketing dimension. However, as these authors followed an exploratory inductive approach, they were neither able to generalize their results nor to assess the importance of each factor.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

Consequently, we adopted in this study a deductive research strategy to identify the importance of the factors influencing satellite fans' choice to support a foreign team. A literature review identified 21 factors based on the work of Bodet & Chanavat (2010), Chanavat & Bodet (2009), Jones (1997), Wann et al. (1996), Hognestad (2006) and others. Respondents were asked to rate how important was each factor in their decision to support their chosen foreign club using a Likert scale (1 to 5). Socio-demographic variables were also measured.

The population chosen consisted of Chinese fans of the English Premier League clubs to be consistent with the studies of Chanavat & Bodet (2009) and Bodet & Chanavat (2010) and because EPL clubs increasingly target the Chinese markets by having websites in Chinese, advertising in Chinese within their stadiums and by organizing pre-season tours in China. Moreover, Chinese fans actively follow the EPL and have been also recognized as big consumers of merchandised products. An electronic version of the questionnaire was prepared and a web link was displayed on the EPL channel of Sohu.com, a popular Internet portal in China and the international online rights holder for the EPL. 1160 valid questionnaires compose the study's sample.

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

In terms of clubs supported, 38.3% of the fans support Arsenal, 29.9% Manchester United, 12.8% Liverpool, 9.2% Chelsea, 5.9% Manchester City, 1.6% Tottenham Hotspur, and 2.4% support other clubs in this sample. A large majority of these fans are male (83.3%), young (95.5% are between 19 and 34 years old), educated (73.9% hold a BA), and urban (more than 50% of them come from the cities of Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen). The average level of team identification is 3.95 on a scale ranged from 1 to 7 which can be considered as medium.

Regarding the decision factors, the decreasing descriptive results are as follow: style of play (M: 4.14), club manager (4.12), presence of a specific player (4.12), presence of star players (4.09), perceived fit with fans' social background (4.04), club history (3.98), sporting success (3.73), kit colours (3.69), team's kit (3.69), club identity (3.61), personality (3.37), broadcasting (3.35), China tour (3.16), peer influence (2.95), personal connection (2.44), familial influence (2.37), previous game attendance (2.30), fit with the foreign fan's local club (2.10), Chinese partner (2.00), sponsors (1.93) and Chinese players (1.88). Using ANOVA, significant differences between clubs were found suggesting that fans with different priorities would choose different clubs. It could be hypothesized that these decisions are linked with fans' personality traits. From a managerial perspective, these findings provide a clear hierarchy of managerial actions for clubs targeting foreign satellite fans.

References

- Bodet, G., & Chanavat, N. (2010). Building global football brand equity. lessons from the Chinese market. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 22(1), 55-66.
- Chanavat, N., & Bodet, G. (2009). Internationalisation and sport branding strategy: A French perception of the big four brands. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 12(4), 460-481.
- Hognestad, H. K. (2006). Transnational passions: A statistical study of Norwegian football supporters. *Soccer & Society*, 7(4), 439-462.
- Jones, I. (1997). A further examination of the factors influencing current identification with a sports team, a response to Wann et al. (1996). *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 85, 257-258.
- Wann, D. L., Tucker, K. B., & Schrader, M. P. (1996). An exploratory examination of the factors influencing the origination, continuation, and cessation of identification with sports teams. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 85, 995-1001.