

A Comparative Analysis Of Football Fans' Attitudes And Consumption Behaviors In The Middle East

Theodorakis, Nicholas¹; Wann, Daniel²; Akindes, Gerard³; Chadwick, Simon⁴

¹Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece; ²Murray State University, USA; ³Josoor Institute, Qatar; ⁴University of Salford, United Kingdom

E-mail: ndtheo@phed-sr.auth.gr

This study aimed to extend previous findings on cultural differences in sport fandom by examining attitudes and behaviors of football fans in the Middle East. In addition, comparisons between the different football markets in the region were also made. Given the exploratory nature of this study, the issues were investigated with a series of research questions: 1). What are the most common factors for selecting one's favourite football team for fans from the five Middle Eastern sport industry markets? Further, do reasons for selection differ across industry? 2). What are the levels of team identification for favourite football teams for persons from the five Middle Eastern sport industry markets? Further, do levels of identification differ across industry, and 3). What are the consumption patterns for fans of the five Middle Eastern sport industry markets?

Review of literature

Past work consistently reported the role of the father as the most important socialization agent for influencing one's interest for sports (Parry, Jones & Wann, 2014). However, a recent study among sport fans in Qatar revealed friends to be the most influential agent in one's decision to select a favorite team (Theodorakis, Wann, Lianopoulos, Foudouki, & Al-Emadi, 2017). Interestingly in contrast to other cultures (e.g. Greece, USA, U.K.), the very vast majority of fans in Qatar supported a team outside of the country, while almost one third of them expressed their support to a second and a even a third team. The phenomenon of following multiple teams have started to attract the interest of researchers lately. Grieve et al. (2009) proposed that sport fans today are willing to associate with more than one team in an effort to maintain and maximize the positive psychological and social benefits of identification by switching identification to another sport team.

Methods

Overall, 2,133 football fans from 10 countries in the Middle East participated in an online survey conducted by YouGov. YouGov used an active sampling methodology and that is participants were first identified as football fans and then asked questions prior to being selected to participate. Participants completed a modified version of the Sport Spectator Identification Scale and reported the most influential person/reason in their decision to identify with their favorite sport team. Several forms of sport consumption behaviors were also assessed.

Results and discussion

For selecting local teams Turkish and Egyptian football fans were influenced primarily by their families. In contrast, this reason received low scores among fans from the Gulf States and KSA who reported friends as the main influential agent. In terms of selecting a favorite international team, competitiveness and winning tradition were the main reasons, followed by the existence of their favorite player in the team, and the team's championship record. The fact that the vast majority of participants considered themselves fans of multiple teams (supporting a local and an international, or even multiple international teams) reveals an intriguing contemporary sport consumption pattern. In terms of team identification results showed that fans had a strong psychological connection with their teams. Turkish and Egyptians were found to be more passionate than fans from others part of the Middle East. Fans from those two countries support, in great numbers, local teams. Hence, strong competition and fierce rivalry among local teams might have impacted levels of identification. Interestingly, levels of identification with a favorite team did not differ significantly between males and females. This finding is in contrast with those presented by other researchers who unanimously reported that male fans are identified more with a team than females in several other cultures (Melnick & Wann, 2004; 2011)

Consistent with work conducted in other cultures, the results suggested greater amounts of football-driven consumption via television and sports-related on line platforms, compared to football game attendance. Fans from the Gulf States watch significantly less local football on TV than international football. In contrast, in Turkey, Egypt and KSA, viewing the local league closely matches, or even exceeds, viewing of international leagues. Furthermore, frequency of attendance across the region is low. Fans in Turkey attend more games than any other country. Despite the fact that Egyptians comprise a very passionate group, they attended fewer games than the others probably because of the proximity of the stadiums, and costs of

tickets. Concluding, marketers of international football teams and business companies should not consider the Middle East a homogenous market since, as the research suggested, there are significant variations in attitudes and behaviors among football fans from the five different markets that should be considered before promotional and sponsorship strategies are to be applied.

References

- Grieve, F. G., Zapalac, R. K., Visek, A. J., Wann, D. L., Parker, P. M., Patridge, J. & Lanter, J. R. (2009). Identification with multiple sporting teams: how many teams do sport fans follow? *Journal of Contemporary Athletics*, 3, 283–294.
- Melnick, M. J. & Wann, D. L. (2011). An examination of sport fandom in Australia: Socialization, team identification, and fan behaviour. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 46, 456–470.
- Melnick, M. J. & Wann, D. L. (2004). Sports fandom influences, interests, and behaviours among Norwegian university students. *International Sports Journal*, 8, 1–13.
- Parry, K. D., Jones, I. & Wann, D. L. (2014). An examination of sport fandom in the United Kingdom: A comparative analysis of fan behaviours, socialization processes, and team identification. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 37, 251–267.
- Theodorakis, N. D., Wann, D., Lianopoulos, Y., Foudouki, A. & Al-Emadi, A. (2017). An examination of levels of fandom, team identification, socialization processes, and fan behaviors in Qatar. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 40(1), 1–21.