

Does Ethnocentrism Matter to English Premier Fans' Resistance to the 39th Game Concept

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Aim

With the stream of globalisation and commercialisation, English Premier League (EPL) had announced the 39thgame plan, having another round in five global cities outside the UK. This plan suggests that every club play one further match on random assignment, reforming the traditional format where each team play the others once at home and away for a total of 38 matches. This new proposal was planned to initiate in 2011 but finally suspended in 2017 due to the strong aversion from the fans. Interestingly, these resistances of the local fans are contradictory to warm and enthusiastic hospitality of British to foreign sports which are imported recently to the UK, such as NFL UK and NBA London. Therefore, this research aims to explore the possible determinants of local fans' attitude towards the 39th game while examining the moderating effects of the fans' ethnocentrism in the proposed relationships.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Grounded on cultural protectionism in which people perceive national culture, and group identity are threatened by globalisation, thus eventually show stronger defence of the national culture (Bekhuis, Meuleman, & Lubbers, 2012), the current research postulates that EPL fans dissent over the proposal because they think EPL might be in danger and damaged by globalisation of and foreign investment in EPL. Considering the 39th game is not just globalisation and foreign investment but also a pursuit of more money, commercialisation may also trigger resistance. Hence, the current research conjectures three determinants of why fans were almost unanimously negative to the 39thgame proposal: (a) attitude towards commercialisation of EPL, (b) attitude towards foreign investment in EPL, and (c) attitude towards globalisation of EPL. Besides these determinants, this research also posits that ethnocentrism plays a moderating role in the relationship between determinants and attitude towards the 39th game.

First, based on the concept of attitude towards commercialisation defined by Zhang et al. (2005), which refers to one's cognitive and affective reaction to the excessive commercial utilisation, this research tests how attitude towards commercialisation influences attitude towards the 39th game. This is a similar approach to Zhang et al.'s (2005) research which revealed that negative attitude towards commercialisation had an unfavourable influence on consumer behaviour intention in intercollegiate sport context. Second, as Nauright and Ramfjord (2010) argued, negative attitudes towards foreign investment are prevalent more than ever among football fans in England, and it implies the possibility that attitude towards foreign investment positively influences attitude towards the 39th game. Third, the globalisation of EPL triggered fans' discomfort such as change of fixture time, and globalisation attempts in EPL already has been met by strong resistance from the local fans. Likewise, attitude towards globalisation of EPL may significantly influence attitude towards the 39th game. Ethnocentrism, the moderator in this research, represents the universal proclivity of people, considering their own group as the centre of the universe while rejecting outgroups who are culturally dissimilar. According Pyun et al. (2011), ethnocentrism showed a moderation role in the relationship between perceived globalness and consumer behavioural intention in EPL. Thus, in the case when fans respond high on determinants, the attitude

towards the 39th game would steeply increase if a level of ethnocentrism is low while the attitude would increase gently if ethnocentrism level is high.

Methodology

Using a convenience sampling technique, 300 EPL young fans will be recruited from a university in the East Midlands in the UK in June/July 2018. Items in an initial version of questionnaire will be adapted and modified from various literature: attitude towards commercialisation (Zhang et al., 2005); attitude towards foreign investment (Javalgi et al., 1993); attitude towards globalisation of EPL (Suh & Smith, 2008); attitude towards the 39th concept (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980); and ethnocentrism (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). A confirmatory factor analysis using LISREL 8.80 will be conducted to assess the internal structures (overall model fit, reliability and validity) of the measurement model. For the hypothesis testing, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis will be conducted to test the moderation effects of ethnocentrism in the relationships between the three determinants and attitude. A moderation effect is supported if a change in R^2 in the effect of interaction between ethnocentrism and each determinant is significant. An adjusted alpha value of .017 (.05/3) will be applied to ensure that the overall risk or familywise error rate for all tests remains .05.

Contribution and Implications

By providing empirical evidence on attitude towards 39th game, commercialisation, foreign investment and globalisation of EPL in the relationship with ethnocentrism, the current research would enable administrators to better understand the fans' cognitive and affective outcomes surrounding the initiation of the 39th game. In addition, the result would also provide a better insight into any future managerial decisions related to commercialisation, foreign investment and globalisation of EPL, which eventually help narrowing the gap between fans and stakeholders.

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