Football Fans' Perceptions on Video Assistant Refereeing

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Aim

Introduced in 2016 after a long debate among FIFA bodies about the use of decision-aid technology, Video Assistant Refereeing (VAR) is likely to impact the game of football for years to come and as a consequence its fans. However, no academic study has yet investigated fans' perceptions of VAR as an element contributing or affecting their satisfaction. Only limited research has been conducted on the use of decision-aid technology in football (Surujlal & Jordaan, 2013; Winand & Fergusson, 2016), and debate is growing on the benefits and detriments of VAR for football (Winand, 2016), that include greater fairness and accuracy for referee's decisions but by slowing down the game and risk removing excitement and passion of debating. This paper aims to investigate football fans' perceptions of VAR, and particularly whether and why fans are (dis)satisfied with VAR?

Theoretical Background

According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), individuals relate to groups to which they identify themselves. Football fans identify to a sport team they support and their level of identification and emotional attachment to the team (Haynes, 1995) can explain their action and commitment to ensure their team best interest (Brickson, 2000). Depending on their level of identification, fans may have different expectations for a particular game. The Sport Spectator Identification Scale developed by Wann and Branscombe (1993) is used to identify three groups of fans – low, moderate and highly identified, and has been used to investigate fans' identification as a predictor of their satisfaction (Van Leeuwen, Quick & Daniel, 2002). Fan satisfaction at games is closely linked to winning/losing and the satisfaction with core services, such as the game atmosphere. The introduction of technology in sport may affect such satisfaction and game atmosphere (Collins, 2010). Analysing Goal-Line Technology (GLT), Winand and Fergusson (2016) demonstrated that highly identified fans have lower satisfaction compared to moderate fans with regards to the introduction of future decision-aid technology. The authors identified enjoyment from debating contentious game decisions as a key predictor of dissatisfaction towards GLT. Decision-aid technology may remove fan's excitement from debating controversial decisions. Argumentative theory (Mercier & Sperber, 2011) explains elements of reasoning so that individuals aims to convince others in interactive context, and they produce arguments that support their own beliefs or actions. This could help explain the way football fans interact and reason with regards to game outcomes and contentious decisions, with decision aid-technology in sport potentially impacting their argumentative opportunities. The following assumptions are made that (1) fans with higher identification to their team are significantly more dissatisfied with VAR, (2) fans who enjoy debating contentious decisions are significantly less satisfied with

VAR and (3) fans with positive attitude towards decision-aid technology in sport are more satisfied with VAR.

Research Design
An online questionnaire using Bristol Online Survey Tool was first distributed in February-March 2017 on German and British football fan's forums and a second time in October-November 2017 to eliminate the non-response bias. Background information (e.g. age and gender) was collected and fan identification scale (6 items), enjoyment from debate (6 items), attitude towards decision-aid technology (4 items) and satisfaction towards VAR (6 items) were measured through a 7pt Likert scale from 1=totally disagree to 7=totally agree. Using IBM SPSS 19, factor analyses were used to extract reliable scales for data analysis, validated by Cronbach's alpha (>.7). Correlational analysis, one-way ANOVA, hierarchical regression analysis and mediation model using PROCESS add on for SPSS (Hayes, 2013) where used to analyse relationships between variables. A total of 320 respondents completed the survey.

Results and Discussion
On average, respondents were satisfied with VAR (M=4.36, SD=1.45), they enjoyed debating contentious decisions (M=4.82, SD=1.19) and had a positive attitude towards the use of decision-aid technology in sport (M=5.58, SD=.94). Results showed highly identified fans were significantly less satisfied with VAR compared to moderate fans. Debate seems important to fans and is significantly related to lower satisfaction towards VAR. Mediation analysis also revealed fans with higher identification to their team significantly enjoy debating contentious game events more, which lead them to a less positive attitude towards decision aid-technology ultimately making them more dissatisfied with VAR. Using social identity and argumentative theories, it is suggested that highly identified football fans who argue to convince others based on their emotional attachment to their team perceive to be refrained by VAR to find arguments supporting their views. Decision-aid technology such as VAR may partially remove the possibility for fans to build up strong(er) arguments in favour of their team.

Conclusion
Fan identification to their team is an important predictor of satisfaction towards decision-aid technology such as VAR. The present study contributes to reveal a new important variable for game atmosphere that is enjoyment from debate which is threaten by the growing use of decision-aid technology in sport.

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