

ASPECTS REGARDING THE BEHAVIOR OF FOOTBALL SUPPORTERS

TOMA ANDREI

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, PH.D.

VALAHIA UNIVERSITY, TÂRGOVIȘTE, ROMANIA

e-mail: andreitoma688@gmail.com

Abstract

Football is the most important sport in the world, which would not make sense without supporters. The role of the supporters is very important for the success of football, although essential for the existence of football seem at first sight the sponsors.

The development of football is impressive, worldwide. There are national, continental or world events at club or national teams level.

There are several types of supporters, which can be recognized in any country of the world; Passionate fans are just a type of supporter.

The behavior of football supporters is influenced by a variety of factors, including: family, friends, economic issues, time available, costs. Certainly, football fans are influenced by television and the Internet.

The loyalty of football fans is a proverbial one, compared to many other areas.

There are many reasons to be a football supporter; to have fun, to identify with the winners and other reasons

Many aspects mentioned below are valid for club teams. At national team matches, there are some special details.

There are some relatively recent changes in the behavior of football fans, including the emergence of "supporters without frontiers", who travel to other countries to watch their favorite teams. Another trend is the increase in the proportion of female supporters.

Some interesting aspects also appear regarding the Romanian supporters. Among them: the most popular team in Romania is not a Romanian one!

I tried to draw at least a few valid conclusions for all supporters, regardless of the country.

Keywords: football, supporters, behavior of football supporters

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1.Introduction

Because consumers exist in all areas, one can also speak of the behavior of football fans.

The factors that determine the behavior of the football fans overlap; and the behavior of the football fans is complex and with several dimensions.

The methodology used included analyzing the available statistical data, analyzing the books related to this topic, the written press, the academic articles in the field, analyzing the results of published research (including surveys), as well as the results of my own observations. I think observation can be more useful here, than for many other topics of study.

I tried to highlight some aspects among which: types of supporters; influences on the behavior of the supporters; the evolution of the behavior of the supporters.

The aim was to try to draw some conclusions valid for all supporters, regardless of the country.

It is impressive that there are many publications on football related topics; it is impressive the large number of online studies that I found (although not all equally useful), which may be an indication for the total number of studies devoted to football over time. It is clear that this has been and is an exciting subject not only for researchers, but also for other interested parties of the football phenomenon.

I found mainly national studies related to this topic, but also some on several countries, based on questionnaire or on qualitative methods. Still, few studies are trying to generalize; most of the studies were on national topics.

The sources that I had access to often emphasize the limitations of the studies or the fact that the studies should be continued in more detail.

It is obvious that the subject is a complex one and cannot be easily exhausted.

2.Consumer behaviour in spheres other than economics - the behaviour of the football supporters

For several decades, it has been unanimously accepted to broaden the marketing sphere in other fields, beyond the sphere of the economy.

Although the restricted meaning of the concept of consumer refers only to goods and services in the sphere of the economy (offered by organizations whose main objective is to make a profit), the broad meaning of the concept of consumer includes any fields other than the economy.

Consumers exist in all areas; so, the behavior of the football consumers can be mentioned as well.

A definition of football supporters is: those people who are passionate about football, who constantly watch football matches. Not only the ultra-passionate supporters are included here; there are several categories of supporters.

There are several dimensions of the consumer behaviour, also valid for consumers in spheres other than the economy.

The behavior of the football supporters is complex and with several dimensions: attitudes, motivations, effective behaviors, fidelity, image, satisfaction, loyalty.

3.Football, a phenomenon of global importance

Football is undeniably a phenomenon of global importance. The development of the football phenomenon is an impressive one, worldwide. There are football teams and competitions for seniors, youth, juniors, children, women. There are teams and competitions between the club teams or between the national teams; national, continental or world competitions.

The list of the existing competitions is an impressive one.

Football is the most popular sport in the world, and the interest in it has been growing over the recent decades. The popularity of the football is not a superficial impression, but the result of the comparison with other sports, according to several criteria [19], [13] (including the number of the practitioners, the number of the teams and leagues, the degree of the expansion worldwide, the audience, the salaries of the players, the value of the sponsorship contracts, the coverage in the media, the public interest).

The number of the football practitioners is growing. However, surprisingly, it is not easy to say how many football practitioners or how many professional footballers are in the world (also valid for other sports).The most recent information on this subject, coming from a FIFA report from 2007, on the year 2006, showed that there were 265 million footballers in the world, and their number was increasing from the year 2000 [11], [5].

There were also 5 million referees in the world; in total, 270 million people, i.e. 4% of the world's population were involved in football. These figures show the popularity of football; no other sport reaches these figures.

Some national differences can be observed, among which: although football is the no. 1 sport in most countries, however, in Australia and in the US, football is overtaken in popularity by other sports [9], [2]. The number of supporters is lower or the popularity of football is lower.

In addition to the largest number of practitioners, football also has the largest number of supporters in the world.

It is difficult to say how many supporters there are in the world; it's just estimates. But it is clear that football is the first place in the world between sports, and as a number of supporters.

4.Types of football supporters

Football supporters are those people who are passionate about football, who constantly watch football matches and have a favorite team.

Many studies are dedicated only to the passionate supporters.

I want to emphasise that perhaps the passionate supporters have the most important role for a team, but they represent only one of the types of supporters. Their proportion in the total of the supporters remains to be seen; and it may differ from one country to another.

It is difficult to say on a global level what the proportion of the passionate supporters ("fans") is; the word "fan" seems to come from "fanatic" and means "devoted", a very enthusiastic person about something [4], [20], [21].

There are valid types of supporters anywhere in the world, established on the basis of observation:

By the degree of the involvement:

- active supporters
- passive supporters.

By the match attendance [3]:

- occasionally
- regularly
- "fanatics"

By the advantages sought by the fans:

- those who seek to win
- the ones who aim to have fun

By their physical (or not) presence at the matches:

- supporters who go to the stadium every match, at home and away
- supporters who go to each match, only at home
- supporters who go to matches sporadically (occasionally), especially at home.
- supporters "from a distance", who do not go to the stadium, but watch the matches. And they can be of the occasional, regular, "fanatic" types.

A special type of supporters type are ultra-enthusiasts, who follow all the events related to the team, not only the matches: official matches, friendly matches, training sessions, presentation of the players roster, any other actions related to the team.

The ultra-passionate are those who attend also the away matches. They are the most loyal supporters and their number is influenced by economic conditions and by other factors. In Romania, their number is low.

By participating or not in the gallery:

- organized gallery
- traveling on their own, without being part of the gallery.

For the club teams:

- supporters from the respective country
- supporters from other countries.

The mentioned typologies are not excluded

5.Aspects of the behavior of the football supporters

The behavior of the football supporters is a complex one, with several dimensions: attitudes, motivations, effective behaviors, image, satisfaction, loyalty.

The factors that determine the behavior of the football fans overlap; and the behavior of the football fans is complex and with several dimensions.

5.1.Reasons to be football supporters

There are several reasons for being a football supporter:

- to have fun
- to spend their free time
- the desire to identify themselves with the winners, to be on the side of the winners.
- the desire to experience the pleasant feelings that you have defeated, that you have been better, that you have achieved a performance.
- trying to get rid of daily worries (what other non-football players manage to do in other ways):
- the satisfaction of defeating the rival teams.
- the interaction with other supporters
- if they did not perform as football players, they at least sympathize and encourage players better than themselves.

The successful teams attract supporters. This is evident worldwide; the teams with history and repeated successes have most of the supporters.

Examples of such football teams we have in all the countries that have meant something in football so far: Barcelona, Real Madrid, Bayern Munich, Milan, Juventus, Rome, Porto, Benfica, Manchester United, Manchester City, Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool, Ajax Amsterdam, Boca Juniors, River Plate, Flamengo and many more. I only mentioned a part of the teams; their list is very large.

In Europe, the highest average of home viewers had it in recent years the German team Borussia Dortmund.

By the audience on facebook, Real Madrid and Barcelona were the first in 2018; in the top 10 there were only teams from Western Europe (from Spain, England, Germany, France, Italy) [6].

A relatively recent example for Romania, of the fact that the successes attract supporters, in my opinion is CFR Cluj: in the year 2000 was in the third league, in the year 2004 it promoted in Liga 1, and in 2008 it was champion. The team became known, made an image and its share of sympathy in Romania grew evidently after the championship's leading places and after repeated participations in the European competitions, including in Champions League.

Over time, the supporters are attracted by the successful teams, even if, initially, they are newly established teams.

The team becomes known, creates an image, attracts supporters, gets to have loyal supporters.

In this sense it helps not only the successes of the team, but also the marketing practiced by the football teams.

Why do people like football? There are several reasons [14]. The reasons include:

- because it is the most beautiful sport
- because it can be understood quite easily
- because many played it in childhood, at least in the mini-football version
- because it is quite easy to play
- because it has world-wide scope
- because it arouses passions.

Football is connected with the emotions of man; not only positive emotions, but also negative ones. Football is an emotional compromise; through football, supporters also learn to suffer [8].

Sometimes, the preferences of the fans are surprising. For example, a study from 2018 conducted by the Spanish publication “Marca” showed that, in Romania, the most popular team is Real Madrid; so not a Romanian team, but a foreign one.

The situation was similar in Ukraine, the most popular team being the Dutch team Ajax Amsterdam. In contrast, in countries with developed football, such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, on the first place are autochthonous teams [17].

5.2.The loyalty of the football fans

The loyalty of the football fans is an interesting aspect. Unlike the chocolate or coffee brands, when there can be several favorite brands at once, in the case of the football teams this does not happen; a loyal supporter has only one favorite team.

However, as an exception, a supporter may have several favorite football teams, in different countries. This is a topic that deserves to be studied in more detail, and the source should be the poll among the supporters, the sample including many countries.

The loyalty of the supporters has several nuances:

- one can be a loyal supporter of a team even without being present at the stadium.
- the television and the Internet allow loyalty of a certain type and to teams from other countries.

What does loyalty consist of? What makes a supporter loyal?

- sympathizes a single team (with the exception mentioned above);
- goes to the match, on any kind of weather (rain, snow, cold) in any season;
- sing the hymn of the team at the stadium. Big teams have hymns. The anthem is known and sung in the chorus by all passionate supporters.
- visually and audible encourages your favorite team, aiming to boost the favorite team and discourage the opposing team.
- subscribes to the team's home matches;
- wears the club's logos: scarves, flags, hats, shirts etc.
- buy objects with the club logo or related to the club: scarves, flags, scarves, caps, t-shirts, etc.
- some of the supporters are part of the organized gallery.
- attend the home matches.
- gathers in places where the supporters celebrate the success of the team, when appropriate.
- is devoted to the team.

Example of the devotion of supporters: Poli Timisoara-Steaua 1-8, from April 9th, 2004, when the gallery remained in the stadium, in the rain, to sing after the match, although the supported team had lost at home with a crushing, rarely encountered score [15], [22].

Such examples are not very many in Romania; it is also a problem of education, of mentality.

It is possible that the manifestation of the supporters was influenced by the fact that after her it was a great Christian religious holiday; but it cannot be a 100% influence.

There are European countries where fans can be buried near the favorite club team and close to other fans of the same team; so great is the sympathy for the team.

Indicators regarding the number of loyal supporters of a team can be:

- the number of spectators on the stadium, at home matches
- television audience, radio audience, online audience
- the number of subscriptions sold
- the number of members of the gallery, at home matches
- the number of gallery members at away matches
- the number of members of the supporters associations (at national or international level).
- national surveys (although here the views may change quickly over time).

5.3.Influences on the behavior of the football supporters

5.3.1.The influence of television on the behavior of the football supporters

The development of television meant reducing the cost of watching football matches, saving time for many of those interested in matches, televising matches on a large scale, the appearance of the cable TV, watching matches on the Internet.

Television also has disadvantages for fans, including: it is a different atmosphere than the one in the stadium; there is no interaction between fans in and outside the stadium.

Television offers enough advantages, among which the lower costs for supporters, the time saving, the possibility of seeing replays of goals or scenes, the opportunity to see the match again, the possibility to record the match, the convenience.

The development of the printed media, television and Internet has resulted in the emergence of another kind of supporters compared with the beginning period of the modern football.

5.3.2. The influence of the printed media on the behavior of the football supporters

It is a two-way connection. In the printed media, football represents the majority of the subjects. The supporters read sports newspapers, and the printed media has a certain influence on the supporters, contributes to informing the supporters, creating the image of the teams.

5.3.3. The influence of the Internet on the behavior of the football supporters

The influence of the Internet on the behavior of the football fans it is partially overlapping with the impact of the television and print media.

The influences of the Internet are on several levels:

- football matches can be watched on the Internet;
- communication between supporters from all over the world can be done;
- groups of supporters of a team can be organized;
- ticket reservations can be made.
- the quality of supporter of a team can be manifested, using social networks (Facebook or others; for now, Facebook is the most popular one).

Social networks are increasingly present. It applies not only to trade [6], but also to communication between supporters and football teams; or only between supporters.

5.3.4. The influence of the economic factors on the behavior of the supporters

The behavior of the football supporters is influenced by several factors, including economic conditions, distance and travel time.

The economic factors have influence on the behavior of the consumer in the case of any product or service.

The influence of the economic conditions on the behavior of the supporters is clear; for example, the number of the tourists aiming to watch the national football team playing abroad, in another country, depends on the degree of the economic development of the respective country. By comparing the number of the English or German supporters to that of the Romanians or Slovenes, obviously the English and the Germans will be more, from countries with higher living standards.

5.3.5. Influence of other factors on the behavior of football supporters

Other factors influence too the influx of supporters to the matches abroad of the national teams or of the club teams, such as the distance, the security of the country where the match takes place, the size of the population, the popularity of football in that country, even the political aspects sometimes.

It should not be forgotten the role of family and friends, which can be essential in choosing the favorite team.

5.4. Positive aspects of the behavior of the football supporters

There are undeniable positive aspects of the behavior of the football supporters:

- the positive experience when favorite teams win
- fun
- socialization
- tourism (internal and external); it can mean a city visited by supporters, an area or even a (smaller) country.
- the contacts with other cultures
- the broadening of the group of the supporters with sympathizers from other countries.
- friendships between supporters (domestic and international).

5.5. Negative aspects of the behavior of the football supporters

Unfortunately, there are also negative behaviors of the football fans, and even of several types, among which:

- suicides (for example in Brazil, because the national football team had lost).
- the absence from work, on the match days
- the negative feelings of the supporters after the defeats; frustration, depression, nervousness.
- the alcohol consumption
- the altercations between supporters
- the altercations with the law enforcement
- verbal violence
- racist slogans sometimes.

What happened in the Belgian stadium Heysel (29th May 1985) remains a sad but important moment with dozens of victims and hundreds of wounded (more precisely, 39 dead and 600 injured) as a result of the violent incidents between the supporters, at a final of the European Champions Cup, which at the time was the most important event for the European club competitions.

Interestingly, the "hooligans" that caused the drama at Heysel Stadium are not from a poorly developed country, but from a civilized country. The example above shows that we should not rush into making generalizations; people are never all the same, consumers are never all the same; so neither are the football supporters.

5.6. Changes in the behaviour of the football supporters

The behavior of the supporters has evolved with the society and with football. It is no longer the same, as in 1920 or in 1960, for example, from many points of view.

The new communication technologies have obviously influenced the behaviour of the football supporters. For example, the influence of television on the behaviour of the football supporters is undeniable.

The influence of the internet on the supporters' behavior, as well, is undeniable.

Social phenomena such as the women's emancipation also has had influence. Thus, the proportion of the women football fans/supporters increased, although the men remain the majority of the supporters.

In the United Kingdom, in the Premier League, the average proportion of female supporters was 15% in the period 2003/2004-2007/2008 [1]. A respectable proportion, it can be said.

Another proof of the interest of women as football supporters is the emergence of websites dedicated to this purpose, such as <http://www.thisfangirl.com/> [18].

Football has expanded and has been successful among supporters in countries where it has no tradition: Japan, USA. And it is worth noting here the role of FIFA, for how it knows how to make investments [12] and to develop football worldwide

The meaning of the notion of supporter changes; today's supporter sits on the couch, watching TV [4]; this is the modern meaning of supporter.

On the other hand, “supporters without borders” appeared, who support their favorite teams abroad at the matches they played at home, despite the distance and costs [16].

6. Conclusions

Football is a subject to which many studies have been dedicated; which is not surprising at all, taking into account the popularity of football.

The notion of consumer has a broad meaning, and consumers exist in all areas. Therefore, the behavior of the football supporters can be considered as well.

Football is the no. 1 sport in the world; the figures clearly show this. In the short term, football will remain the most important sport in the world.

Of all sports, football has the most supporters.

The behavior of the football supporters is complex and with several dimensions, and the factors that determine the behavior of football supporters overlap

It is difficult to say on a global level what the proportion of passionate supporters is. It is difficult to find a source for such information. But probably they do not represent the largest proportion of the total supporters.

It is difficult to make national comparisons. However, some conclusions can be drawn, even so.

The motivation of football supporters includes: the desire to identify themselves with the winners, to have successes, to interact with other supporters.

Successful teams attract supporters all over the world.

It can be noted the expansion of football and the relatively recent success among supporters in countries where it had no traditions: Japan, USA. And it is worth noting here the role of FIFA, for how it knows how to make investments and to develop football worldwide.

The development of television and the development of the Internet resulted in the emergence of a different kind of supporters. Each of the two causes meant a lot in influencing the behaviour of football fans.

Many studies are dedicated to “fans”; but there are several types of supporters.

The behaviour of supporters has evolved with the society and with football.

There is a change of mindset, although things continue to be mixed, with enough negative manifestations occurring. The football match should be a spectacle; and the match can also be lost. It should be understood that the rival supporters are not death rivals; they just sympathise with the other team.

There are teams from the same city, with rival supporters; many examples in the world of large cities with several teams and with such rivalries.

Television today allows you to be a supporter of a team from another country; and even of several teams.

There is a real industry around football; with effect on the behavior of the supporters.

Supporters are still mostly men; although in terms of women supporters there is great progress worldwide.

Although there are some changes in the behavior of the supporters, caused mainly by the technology, other aspects of the behavior remain constant. For example, the dose of nationalism observed in the matches of the national teams; or the existence of the negative phenomena related to supporters (they also existed decades ago). Remains to be seen their proportion in the future.

Heysel's "hooligans" are not from Eastern Europe or from a poorly developed country, but from a civilized country. The example above also shows that we should not rush into making generalizations; people are never all the same, consumers are never all the same; so neither football supporters.

The bestial side of people can sometimes be seen, unfortunately, in the negative behaviours of football supporters.

A dose of nationalism can be noted in national team matches. The anthem of the country, flags, national colours, solidarity between supporters, emigrants watching the matches of the team of the country from which they come, national rivalries.

The influence of economic conditions on the behavior of supporters is clearly visible; for example, the number of tourists aiming to watch the national football team depends on the degree of the economic development of the respective country, in the first place. Other factors also influence, such as the distance, the size of the population, the security of the country where the match takes place, even the political aspects sometimes.

For the moment, there are very few studies dedicated to women football fans. And some aspects remain to be studied in the future; for example, supporters who have several favorite football teams in different countries.

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(sequences from the tribune from the Poli Timișoara-Steaua football match 1-8, April 9th, 2004)