

Analysis of the Impact of Fandom Culture and Fandom Economy on the Sports Industry

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Abstract. This study studies the extension of fandom culture in the field of sports and has the significance of studying the integration of sports culture and fandom culture. This paper concludes by studying the essential details of fandom culture and classifying and integrating it with fan culture and economic promotion in sports events. It uses case analysis and comparative analysis to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of fandom differentiation in the sports industry and draws conclusions on how to improve fandom culture in the sports industry. The article uses some football events for case analysis and some football fan organizations to discuss the integration between them in depth. The conclusion is that although fan culture has made indelible success in the sports industry, it still needs to be improved to prevent the expansion of extreme fandom culture. In summary, this study plays a constructive role in the study of sports and fandom culture.

Keywords: Sports events, Fandom culture, Fandom economy.

1. Introduction

This study not only investigates the formation and characteristics of fandom culture within the broader entertainment industry and traces its gradual extension into the sports field at a macro level, but also provides a nuanced analysis at the micro level by examining the specific advantages and disadvantages that fandom culture brings to the sports industry, while further discussing possible strategies and pathways for improvement in order to promote a healthier and more sustainable development of sports culture.

The purpose of this study of sports fandom culture is to analyze the formation mechanism of sports fan culture, reveal the characteristics of sports fan culture, and provide suggestions for its development. The significance of this study is to enrich the connotation of sports culture research, integrate fan culture with sports culture, expand the boundaries of sports culture research, and form a more comprehensive and three-dimensional sports culture research system.

This study uses case studies to examine sports fandom culture in different countries. It also employs comparative analysis to compare the strengths and weaknesses of fandom culture in sports. This study first discusses the current state of fandom culture, through case analysis, we understand the advantages of the current fandom culture, such as its hugeness, and its disadvantages like its blindness. And then this study examines its strengths and weaknesses in the sports industry, this study concluded by integrating fandom culture and sports events. Finally, this study discusses how to mitigate extreme fandom culture in order to better develop sports and fandom culture.

2. The Current State of Sports Fandom Culture

2.1. The Concepts of Fandom Culture and Fandom Economy

Fandom culture is a cultural phenomenon centered around idols, clubs and other organizations, composed of fans with strict organization and unique operating rules. It relies on various Internet social media to promote the organization through support and other means, with the aim of increasing its influence. Take Renjun Fan Club, a fan group supporting Huang Renjun, a member of the NCT Dream, as an example. This organization will regularly hold fund-raising activities for Renjun's commercial promotion, such as contracting large screens in shopping malls and posting support

posters on the road. At the same time, it will organize voting activities for Renjun on social media to gain more popularity.

Fandom economy refers to a cultural-economic operation model that takes sports or entertainment symbols as the core, relies on the emotional identification and collective actions of fan organizations, and transforms emotional value into market value.

2.2. The Scale and Active Level of The Fan Base

According to the research of Dan et al., Each “Fan circle” has a power structure of concentric circle with the core layer consisting of powerful major fans with a voice, functional groups such as the “Anti-black fans” data group, and groups such as the fan club authorized by the agency the next layer comprises fanatical followers, less powerful organizations, and graphic sites that produce resources. The largest group of common fans is in the outer layer [1]. From this, we can conclude that the scale of fandom organizations has organized hierarchy, institutionalization, and strictness. This leads to the fan base distributional scale and organizational scale.

When studying the active level of the fan base, it is essential to focus on multiple variables. Lee et al. assert that recent large-scale studies have found that user comments across various platforms have become linguistically simpler and shorter over time. This shows that active level has variability, and its influence is particularly significant under the influence of time. Meanwhile, when users who are typically comment-heavy begin to post, their Clout and Drives scores rise in comparison with general users. Elevated Clout scores show that these comment-heavy users assert themselves with confidence, drawing on the trust and rapport they have built through frequent informal interactions to shape or prompt community actions [2]. Therefore, group reactions significantly influence active levels. In summary, active level is characterized by variability, social connectedness, and emotional identity.

2.3. The Diversity of Fandom Behaviors

The diversity within fan culture mainly refers to the various manifestations of fandom organizations in terms of composition, behavior patterns, and areas of focus. The diversity of fancom culture emphasizes that fan dom groups are not homogeneous entities, but rather composed of individuals or small groups with different characteristics and demands. They exhibit differentiated attitudes and behaviors in supporting their idols, collectively forming the complex ecosystem of fan culture. This diversity can bring vitality, but it may also lead to conflicts due to differences, which is an important source of the complexity of fandom culture. In general, the diversity of fandom culture reflects the state of fans with different backgrounds, needs and values participating in fandom activities together.

3. The Integration of Fandom Culture and Sports Events

3.1. The Development and Influence of Fan Organizations in Sports

At the end of the 19th century, as modern sports such as football became popular in Europe, fans spontaneously gathered to support their teams. By the 1920s, some clubs began to realize the need to interact with fans (e.g., Argentine football clubs formed their first structured fan groups during this period.). In the 1950s and 1960s, South America (e.g., Torcida, Brazil) and Southern Europe (e.g., Torcida Split, Yugoslavia) pioneered more organized cheering activities, including chants, flag displays, and other forms. In 1969, the fan organization of Sampdoria team called itself "Ultras", which was the first organization to use this name. In 1994, the fireworks display by the fans of Bayer 04 Leverkusen during the European Cup match marked the beginning of the Ultras organization's infiltration into the German football scene. In the mid-to-late 1990s, the Ultras organization spread rapidly in southeastern European countries such as Croatia, Greece and Turkey. From the 1970s to the 1990s, fan organizations began to spread globally. Events like the World Cup fueled the spread of structured fan culture, and related groups began to emerge in Asia, Africa, and North America. In

the 21st century, fan organizations also began to transform, with some establishing partnerships with clubs and even influencing club decisions (e.g., vote rights). Some fan organizations even expanded their activities beyond the sporting realm, embracing social and political roles.

3.2. The Degree of Integration between Fandom Culture and Sports Events

The degree of integration between fandom culture and sports events refers to the depth and breadth of the mutual influence between fandom culture originating from the entertainment industry and the sporting scene. Specifically, this concept encompasses two core aspects: the extent to which fan culture extends into sporting events, and the degree to which sporting events embrace fandom culture. In recent years, this integration has deepened, manifesting in two specific ways. First, online interactions have become more and more fan-centric, with fans forming fan circles around athletes on social media, similar to those in the entertainment industry. Abuse and rumors often occur between different fan groups. Second, commercial capital is driving the integration of fan culture and sporting events. The pursuit of traffic and commercial profit has led to the celebrity-figuration of athletes, furthering this integration.

4. The Influence of Sports Fandom Culture on The Sports Industry

4.1. Positive Effect of Fandom Culture

4.1.1 Promote the Construction of Sports Brands

At the same time, the birth of fan culture has also greatly promoted sports brands, helping them expand their brand influence. For instance, international sports brands like Nike and Adidas are accelerating their collaborations with Korean idols. In 2025, Nike signed aespa member Karina, and the official announcement received widespread attention and likes on Instagram and domestic social media platforms. In 2024, PUMA announced that Rosé, a member of BLACKPINK, would become its global brand ambassador. These idols possess large and stable fan bases and possess strong sales potential. Their active interactions with fans can generate a large amount of organic traffic for brands. For example, G-Dragon's co-branded shoes with Nike sparked a global rush to buy, with the secondary market price increasing tenfold. According to Putri et al.'s study on ambassadors, after considering variables such as attractiveness and influence, their impact on purchasing interest is 0.3364 or 33.64% [3]. This clearly shows that fan culture has a positive effect on purchasing interest.

4.1.2 Enhance the Commercial Value of The Event

Fan culture can bring huge commercial and economic benefits to related events and their clubs. In general, the sales of related products and the revenue of spectators have increased significantly. For example, in 2024, the sales of Shanghai Shenhua Club's peripheral products exceeded 10 million yuan, a five-fold increase over the previous year. In addition, Shenhua events created a huge economic impact. From February 2024 to April 2025, Shenhua events created a direct economic impact of 2.154 billion yuan and an indirect driving effect of 3.71 billion yuan [4]. This shows that the direct economic impact and indirect driving effect created by the fandom industry on the club have a very important impact.

4.1.3 Help Govern Professional Clubs

Since the 20th century, membership clubs have become the first choice for many European clubs, and the first thing that membership clubs bear the brunt of is that members jointly manage the club. In other words, members have decision-making power, voting rights and proposal rights. This shows that fans have begun to intervene in the management field. In recent years, membership-based clubs have begun to spread to East Asia. Shaanxi Union Football Club from Northwest China is a good example. Huang et al. Assert that in order to provide fans with a platform for greater participation in club governance, the "Shaanxi Chang'an Union Football Club Membership Management Measures (Trial)" issued in May 2023 clearly define the rights and obligations of ordinary members, associate

members, and council members. Monthly fan forums and council member meetings are held frequently, emphasizing that certain members have voting rights on some major club decisions [5]. Therefore, the spread of fan culture can even help management manage the entire club.

4.2. Negative Effect of Fandom Culture

4.2.1 Disrupting the Fairness of Sports Events

Excessively extreme fandom culture will seriously disrupt the order of the game and seriously affect the fairness of sports competitions. For example, due to the excessive fan club nature of the Chinese national table tennis team and the excessive commercialization promoted by the Chinese Table Tennis Association, athlete Wang Chuqin has accumulated a lot of popularity. However, during the competition, Wang Chuqin's fans would insult and boo other athletes from the same country, disrupting the normal order of the game.

Not only that, the ultras culture in European football has also contributed to many violent incidents. Max et al. claims that in 2017, close to 2,500 hardcore supporters of SC Dynamo Dresden marched in a tightly packed formation through the streets toward the Wildparkstadion in Karlsruhe for the scheduled match against Karlsruher SC [6]. Despite lacking sufficient tickets for entry, the fans deliberately undertook the journey of more than 500 kilometers as a form of protest against the German Football Association (DFB), which had significantly reduced the ticket allotment as a punitive response to the supporters' prior use of illegal pyrotechnics [6]. In conclusion, Max et al.'s opinion is that although ultras primarily conceive their coordination of crowd action as a way to support the players on the field and to shape the outcome of the match, the stylistic displays and emotional intensity generated in the stands also signal a wider sense of disillusionment with the condition of professional sport [6]. Ultras frequently make the news for their actions inside and outside the stadium, Mark et al. Mentioned, often this is for their disruptive and antisocial activities [7]. In the author's opinion, frequent violent incidents are one of the important factors affecting the fairness of the game. Therefore, it can be concluded that the development of fandom culture has affected competitive sports itself to a certain extent.

4.2.2 Affecting the Sustainable Development of The Sports Industry

The sustainable development of sports relies on core principles such as fair competition, respect for rules, and teamwork. Extreme fan behavior directly impacts these foundations. Furthermore, excessive emotionality and irrational behavior can disrupt event operations, athlete development, and commercial logic, disrupting the balance of the sports industry. According to Varmus et al.'s comparison and systematization of selected examples including fan participation in club events, it is concluded that fans play a very important role in the management of clubs [8]. One example is the Heysel Stadium tragedy on May 29, 1985, when fanatical Liverpool fans broke through the fence and rushed towards Juventus fans, causing a panic stampede that resulted in 39 deaths. The incident was deemed directly related to the rioting of Liverpool fans, and UEFA immediately imposed a ban on English football clubs, prohibiting English teams from participating in European competitions for five years. This incident greatly undermined the sustainability of English football and caused serious damage to the English football industry at the time. In summary, fanatical fan club behavior will greatly undermine the sustainable development of the sports industry.

5. Improvement Methods for Sports Fandom Culture

5.1. Strengthen the construction and Supervision of Laws and Regulations

It is crucial to strengthen the construction of laws and regulations and supervision of sports fan culture. First of all, the legal system should be improved. According to Ferreira et al.'s research on the principle of fandom culture in sports events, it is essential to comprehend and apply the fundamental principles that govern this field of knowledge [9]. Ferreira et al. assert that it is crucial that all sports activities occur within legal, ethical, and public interest boundaries, ensuring

compliance with current legal provisions [9]. In response to prominent issues in sports fandom, special normative documents should be formulated to clearly define illegal behaviors and clearly divide the legal responsibilities of individuals, fan groups, and related platforms for inappropriate behavior to ensure a balance between power and responsibility.

Furthermore, we should strengthen supervision and law enforcement, establish a multi-departmental supervision mechanism involving sports management departments, conduct real-time monitoring and dynamic management of fandom activities, and take measures based on the severity of the circumstances. At the same time, it is necessary to standardize the main responsibilities of the platform, require social media and sports-related platforms to formulate clear fan behavior codes, improve content review mechanisms, and urge platforms to establish fan group management mechanisms to prevent fan organizations from improperly guiding individual fans.

5.2. Promote Cooperation and Communication between The Club and The Fan Organization

Cooperation between fans and clubs plays a vital role in fan governance. According to a study by Borja et al. on the extent to which fans in six European countries (the UK, Spain, Turkey, Poland, France, and Germany) believe they should directly participate in the governance of football clubs, it was concluded that fans are positive about fan participation in governance structures, but pessimistic about the actual effects of fan actions [10]. Therefore, clubs should actively communicate and cooperate with fans to achieve the goal of fan management and avoid the excessive expansion of fandom culture.

5.3. Strengthen Sports Culture Education and Publicity

The core of improving fandom culture by "strengthening sports culture education and publicity" lies in using the positive values contained in sports culture to guide fans to establish rational cognition and standardized behavior patterns. One of the most important factors is to promote correct values through sportsmanship. Andrade et al. analyzed the culture of Argentine football fans and concluded that sports education and publicity can help ease conflicts between extreme fan groups [11]. Furthermore, Wang et al. explored how Chinese professional football clubs can use cultural education and publicity activities to improve the social responsibility awareness of fan groups and reduce extreme fandom behavior [12]. It can be concluded that guiding value orientation is one of the important means. At the same time, we should use the sense of participation in sports to dilute irrational pursuits and guide fandom to establish rational interaction rules. Promote from spectator to participant: Encourage fans to transform their attention to idols into their own sports practice. Kim et al. studied the modern dissemination of Korean traditional sports wrestling and emphasized the importance of improving the loyalty and civilization of fan groups through sports and cultural education in schools and communities [13]. Therefore, it can be concluded that allowing fans to participate in sports events is one of the important means to improve extreme fandom culture.

6. Conclusion

This paper studies the expansion of fandom culture in the sports industry, summarizes the current status, advantages and disadvantages of fandom culture, and also puts forward suggestions for improving extreme fandom culture. In summary, fandom culture has played a very important role in the cultural and economic development of the sports industry, but when facing extreme fandom culture, it still needs to be managed in order to ensure the sustainable development of the sports industry. This paper also has certain limitations in the research object. At present, in the sports industry, only relatively commercial events such as football, basketball and table tennis have their corresponding fandom culture, and there is a lack of fandom culture in other sports, so research cannot be carried out. As for the future prospects of this study, the author hopes to play a certain role in the integration research of the sports industry and fandom culture, and looks forward to further expanding the research on fandom culture in other sports in the future.

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