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**Attitudinal constructs of football fans and the relation to football market**

Summary

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Statement of the Research Problem

Unlike the conventional business world, the definition of football clubs' success is a relative term and the boundaries between a successful club and an unsuccessful one are unclear in many cases. Most clubs are driven mainly by athletic achievements and not by profit maximization to the shareholder and stakeholder's interests. It is assumed that usually these athletic achievements will drive themselves economic endurance and long term success, which can be further harnessed for the betterment of athletic abilities and future successes (Fløtnes, 2011).

In football, similarly to other markets, one can refer to the fans of the clubs as customers. It is crucial for marketers in football to understand their customers, the fans. Part of that understanding is to know how the fans behave. To achieve that it is essential to study the fans attitude. But, because of the uniqueness of the market, these customers have also special characteristics. However, the constructs of the attitudes are built like in consumer behavior models, divided in behavioral, affective (emotional) and cognitive (knowledge) and under each one of them there are factors that influence the attitude (Znaniecki and Thomas, 1958).

Based on this, three research questions arise:

* What are the factors that have an impact on football fans attitudes?
* How attitudes affect forms and perception of economic dimensions on three levels:
	+ loyalty in the emotional dimension as the lowest level,
	+ time spending as engagement for the intermediate level, and
	+ money spending on the highest level, the financial level?
* Which type of relation exists between the emotional connection to the club, the level of fanhood and the definition of fanhood by the fan to the attitude towards violence?

Significance of the Study

Because of the unique characteristics of the football market and its customers it is necessary to completely understand the construct of the fans attitudes and factors influencing it, to be able to identify the main clubs clients - the fans (Neale, 1964). The customers, the fans, are driven by different motives than the regular customers in other markets as it will be explained later on in this thesis.

To reach this understanding, thesis will focus on Israeli football fans attitudes. Some key factors that affect the clubs economics will be examined through the understanding of the fans attitude construct. The three factors: audience levels, fan money and time spending, and supporters' loyalty, will be a part of the study, together with demographics information. Another factor that influences fans attitude and clubs economics is violence in Israeli football, and as an important factor it will be measured as well. Violence is present in many parts of society, it is present in the life of the fans in some form and level, as with other factors in society like for example ethnic or religious views, violence probably also as an effect on the economic aspect of fans attitude from that stems the importance of studying this factor.

Most studies about attitude focus on cognitive and affective constructs (Gregory R. Maio and Haddock, 2010). Moreover, those two constructs are good predictors of attitudes like showed in some research (e.g. Chowdhury and Salam, 2017; Perugini, 2005; van Giesen *et al.*, 2015; Trendel and Werle, 2016; Breckler 1984; Breckler & Berman 1991; Breckler & Wiggins 1989, 1991). In addition "*there is abundant evidence that evaluative implications of cognitive, affective, and/or behavioral information are positively correlated*" (Maio & Haddock 2014, 37) so we can assume that the influence of behavior on attitudes will be similar to that of cognitive and affective. For the aim of the study more emphasis was put on understanding cognitive and affective constructs (less attention is to be given to behavioral one).

Contribution to Science

The contribution of this thesis will be in the consumer behavior area in the context of marketing. This thesis will focus on the consumer attitudes and the constructs that conform those attitudes.

There are papers claiming that the influence of attitudes on behavior is weak to nonexistent, moreover they state that attitude cannot predict behavior (Bainbridge Frymier and Nadler, 2017). That being said there are researches that prove the existence of such influence such is the case of Weinstein (1972) or Simonson & Maushak (1995). Studies like the one by Glasman & Albarracín (2006) also prove the existence of attitude’s influence on behavior. They conducted a quantitative research that showed that the more direct was the experience with the attitude object, the stronger the prediction of behavior was. But in this research the author studied the intention of behavior as part of one of the three constructs that are part of the attitude, and because of this reason the influence of the attitude on behavior was tested but in the opposite direction, the influence of intention to behave on the attitude of the fan.

In a more specific way the author plans to establish the influence of factors on football fans attitudes and the impact of fans attitudes on economic factors that affect directly the club economy. Special focus will be made on four factors: audience levels, fan money and time spending, supporters' loyalty and violence. Audience levels factor affect the income of the club in every match day in two ways: the revenue from ticket sales and TV rights for the match sell to TV network. For the purposes of this research this will be measured as the self-reported attendance through an online survey. Fan money and time spending factor will help to understand the fans tendencies, priorities and spending habits. Like the measurement of audiences, also the measurement of fans spending's will be based on self-reported data and not on economic data from the clubs. Supporters loyalty is similar to the previous two factors but checks the effects of the attitude over longer period of time, in addition it can check consistency when an attitude changes. And violence factor refers to how different type and level of violence affect fans attitudes. With the help of those factors the author propose to set a three levels hierarchy of the behavior, the first, loyalty in the emotional dimension as the lowest level, the second, time spending habits as engagement for the intermediate level, and third, money spending habits on the highest, financial level. Three hypothesis were formulated that helped to compare the impact of attitudes on every level, H2, H2a and H3.

Understanding the studied connections that conform customers' attitudes is essential for marketers, more in a very complex market like the Israeli football clubs and fans. The results of this research will help to shed some light on a field less covered, and hope to help get a better understanding on the chain of reactions that can create a positive strong fan attitude, and consequently will lead to the desire results by the clubs.

Scope Specification of the Research

The subjective scope of the research is fan attitudes towards their favorite club and team. Two main types of attitudes were addressed; affective (feelings and emotions) and cognitive (belief and knowledge). The third type on behavioral (how a person behaves) was less covered, when examining fans habits and spending's it was approached more as an intention rather than the act itself. This approach taken by the author is based on the idea that attitude in most cases cannot predict behavior, that being said, there are studies showing that a strong and favorable attitude should predict behavior better than a weak or negative attitude (Park, Macinnis and Priester, 2006). The idea of this research was to get a better understanding of Israeli football fan attitude, not necessarily how he behaved. The behavior was approached only as one of the three constructs of the attitude. The sources used for writing this dissertation were literature from the field, including articles, books and researches with relevant data. From these sources the author gathered background about consumer behavior, the studies of attitudes in general and attitude constructs in particular, also previous literature on the other factors used in this research like attendance to sport events, sports fans habits, loyalty of customers and fans and violence in sport. All this in addition to reviewing previous research in the field for the purpose of designing and executing of the study itself.

The objective scope consists of Israeli football fans of one of the top five Israeli teams that participate in the top league (Ligat Ha-Al), Maccabi Tel-Aviv FC, Maccabi Haifa FC, Beitar Jerusalem FC, Hapoel Tel-Aviv FC and Ironi Kiryat Shmona FC. These 5 teams were chosen as they are the winners of at least one league championship on the last ten years. 1264 participants filled questionnaires and their answers were the base for the research that conform this dissertation. The time frame in which the research was conducted was season 2015-2016. The data was collected using questionnaires that were filled by fans via the internet.

The research was conducted in Israel. One of the most important reasons for conducting the research in Israel was that little research on the subject was done in the country. Because of the expansion of the globalization and the transition of football club ownership to be owned by rich businessmen and entities, lots of teams have changed from representation of the communities to global economic forces (Coakley 1998; Giulianotti & Robertson 2004). This transition makes it more interesting to perform the research in Israel, where all clubs in their origin were one of the ways to unite and represent the different communities in the country and now the majority of clubs are privately owned.

Limitations of the research

The survey was conducted during the last part of the 2015/16 season of the Israeli football league. For that reason developments occurred on the end of the season and the next season (2016/17) could not be included in this thesis.

The research and its conclusions are relevant to the country of Israel due to the fact that it was limited to the researcher home country. For that reason and the specific characteristics of the country and population, it is problematic to reach conclusions for other countries based on the results obtained. So, the ideas, results and conclusions are limited to Israel’s territory.

The selection of the five teams that were part of the research was done with two criteria, the first that the team is an Israeli team, the second is that the team won at least one domestic league championship in the last ten years. This limits the conclusions to the fans of more successful teams and ignores the less successful and those from lower leagues.

The sample was a non-random quota sample. In this type of sampling the population was first segmented into mutually exclusive subgroups, for this research fans of a specific team. Then judgment was used to select the subjects or units from each segment based on a specified proportion, in this case the number of fans by team. The technique used was to spread the questionnaires as wide as possible, via internet, and then choosing the acceptable questionnaires until the quota for each team was met. For that reason not all fan were reached in the same way or time.

Fans’ behavior area is complicated to examine as the best way to research behavior is with observations of the behavior itself. But due to the type of research conducted and other data needed for the study this was not possible and the behavior was researched by self-report answers by the fans.

Presentation of the Research Hypotheses

The first hypothesis tested the origins of the fanhood of a person or the attachment process as described by Funk & James (2006), in their article they research the connection of this process to the emotional reaction of the fan. This new research expand this idea and test the attachment process to not just the affective construct. In other words the emotional factor forming the attitude, but to the attitude of the fan as a whole, including not just the affective construct but also the cognitive and behavioral constructs. In addition, the author's aim was to understand what has more influence on the fan attitude, the origin of the fanhood or the demographic and socioeconomic factors. The hypothesis formulated for this purpose was:

H1 – The triggers to become a football fan affects more the attitude of the fan than demographic and socioeconomic factors.

From the results of the first hypothesis (H1) analyzing the three variables measured (age, ways of becoming a fan, and socioeconomic status) against the three construct, it is clear that the variable of ways of becoming a fan has the strongest influence on the three constructs, more than age or socioeconomic status. According to the results this variable has the strongest influence on attitude more than the other two. Based on those conclusions the hypothesis "The way a fan becomes a fan affects more the attitude of the fan than demographic and socioeconomic factors" has been proven correct.

 The analysis and understanding of the habits of spending’s probably is one of the most interesting issues for the marketing departments of a football club. For this reason researchers study the difference in the terms of consumers and fans like in Dixon (2013) book. With the modernization of the markets in general and the football market in particular, social media became an important tool for marketers. This new communication channel permits not only to advertise and increase sales, but also to improve and strengthen the fan connection to the club. There are research like the one of Weaver (2011) or Hird (2010) that study the influence of social media on the fan time spending. Another study researched a more specific aspect of time spending and deal with the increase in time spent by the fan on online gaming (Kelly, Lewis and Mortimer, 2012). This research aim to study the time and money spending habits from a different perspective, it test the connection of that time and money spending factors to the attitude of the fan. For this purpose the following hypothesis was designed:

H2 –There is a connection between the attitude of the fan and his habits of spending time and money on team related things.

The second hypothesis (H2) checked the influence of the different attitude constructs have on money and time spending habits. When comparing money spending habits to time spending habits, one can see that the connection between time spending habits and the attitude of the fan is stronger than the connection between money spending habits and the attitude of the fans. More than that, the results also show that the stronger attitude is, more money and time the fan will spend on team related things. In addition, the research reflects that the behavioral construct has more influence than the cognitive and affective constructs. Yet another conclusion that the research shows is that violence and a low level of the football match will not cause the fans with a strong attitude to stop going to matches.

When looking at the existing researches concerning the attendance factor, or audience as referred in many articles, one can mainly find that the main issues addressed are types of involvement by the audience (Morley, 1980), levels of demand and how it connects to customer satisfaction and profitability (Borland & MacDonald 2003; Dietschy 2013a; Greenwell 2001), and the effect of globalization of football from the attendance point of view (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2004). In this research the author tested the attendance from a different aspect, the research test the connection of such attendance to the attitude factor. This is due to the purposes of this research that has in the center the attitude of the fans, and the idea that attendance can have an influence or connection to the attitude. This connection was tested with the following hypothesis:

H2a – More positive attitude towards the team leads to bigger match attendance.

Three variables (cognitive, affective and behavior) were used in a hypothesis (H2a) that compared them to attendance. The author reached the conclusion that the behavior construct had a stronger influence on attendance than the cognitive and affective constructs. The fans with a stronger attitude will continue to buy tickets and attending matches even if there is presence of violence. Summarizing, stronger attitude toward the team will lead to bigger attendance, fans will buy more individual tickets during a season if they have a stronger attitude, and what a fan consider as violence will not stop him to continue attending matches even if there is such violence. That is why this hypothesis has been proven true.

 In the previous hypothesis the connection of spending habits and attitude was tested. After that more specific connection is researched. In this case the spending habit factor is tested against the loyalty factor. Loyalty, was approached by researchers from different aspects in the past. Forms of loyalty were researched as a base for understanding the term like the articles by Neal (2000) or Biscaia et al. (2013). Some articles researched the connection between fan loyalty and attitudes (Funk & James 2001; Richardson & Dwyer 2003), and some articles had an approach more connected to marketing, like the article by Brandes et al. (2013) that dealt with market potential using loyalty as one of the factors. Another example is an article that tested the connection of loyalty and satisfaction from a product (Tapp, 2004). It is clear that there is an important place for the loyalty factor in marketing oriented research, for that reason in this thesis the connection of the fan loyalty to the spending habits was tested with the next hypothesis:

H3 – The higher the level of fan loyalty to the club, more he will spend on team related things.

This hypothesis (H3) dealt with the loyalty of the fan. Based on the results and conclusions presented, the hypothesis 'The higher the level of fan loyalty to the club, more he will spend on team related things' was verified. The three variables years of fanhood, level of fanhood and change on fanhood that represent the level of loyalty of the fan, show that for example a fan that defines the team as his life, spends more money than other fans, and also that fanhood meaning affects the money spending of a fan. Another example is that the higher the level of fanhood is, the fan will buy more tickets for individual matches. Yet another example is that the lower level of loyalty of the fan is, less he buys tickets for matches. Based on these conclusions a more loyal fan will spend more on team related things. Beside the conclusion that directly steams from the hypothesis, some other insights were reached. As in the previous hypothesis, also in this one is clear that the behavior construct influences more on the attitude than the affective and cognitive constructs. Another interesting result for the author is that a more veteran fan is, he is less affected by lack of public transport and more by lack of parking places at the stadium and violence. Surprisingly the results support the claim that violence affects less on fans with a lower level of fanhood.

 When talking about Israeli football and Israeli football fans, one of the issues that rise is the existence of violence. That is why the author decided to include the violence as a factor in this research. In literature there are article that study the basis for the violence in sports, if it is the origins of the violence (Sorek, 2007) or the history of violence in sports (Elias 1971; 1976). Other articles took one step forward and their authors studied the forms of violence in sports (Bourdieu, 1980) or Fields et al. 2007). In another paper (Guilbert, 2004) tests not only forms of violence but also levels of violence in different sports. As can be seen this factor has been researched from different angles and more than that, like showed by (Spaaij, 2014) there is not a single factor that influence violence. In fact, many factors were used and tested. In this research the author choose to study the influence on violence using three factors that are present in all this thesis and can share a different and additional point of view on the subject. For this purpose the hypothesis used was:

H4 – Violence experienced or witnessed is influenced by the emotional connection to the club, the level of fanhood and the definition of fanhood by the fan.

The last hypothesis (H4) was verified given the results from this research, the three factors used, level of fanhood, definition of fanhood and the affective connection of the fan to the club show that they are connected to the violence experienced or witnessed by the club. Moreover, the results prove an influence of some level of each of the three factors on the violence factor. More specifically, as the level of fanhood is weaker, the exposure to violence is higher. The definition of fanhood also presents an influence on the violence factor, and last the affective connection shows influence on violence factor. From all the types of violence tested, only three were significant in the connection to the factors - "Participation in a fight between fan groups inside the stadium", "Participation in a fight between fan groups outside the stadium" and "Lighting flares in the stands". This can bring to the conclusion that for the fans this three types of violence are considered as more severe than other.

Chosen Conclusions

Several notable conclusions were made. Consistently in the results, regardless the compared factor or variable the behavioral construct had more influence than the cognitive and affective constructs, for example one result shows that the behavior construct has a stronger influence on attendance than the cognitive and affective constructs. Comparing factors that influence attitude of the fans shows that the way of becoming a fan had a stronger influence than age or socioeconomic status. A quite expected result shows that stronger attitude lead to more money and time the fan will spend on team related thing. Two related conclusions were achieved from that part of the research revealing first, that the connection between time spending habits and the attitude of the fan is stronger than the connection between money spending habits and the attitude of the fans. Second, that a more loyal fan will spend more on team related things. A more surprising result was that violence affects less on fans with a lower level of fanhood; the author would expect that a fan with high attitude would be less affected by violence because he is more used to it. Another result proved that violence and a low level of the football match would not cause the fans with a strong attitude to stop going to matches. It was expected that these two different factors would not affect strong attitude fans, but this maybe shows the uniqueness of this market where the product, football match, is not good and the customer, the fan, continues to consume. Finally, it is worth mentioning that from the last part of the research, meaning the analysis of different regression models, the behavior factor is a strong predictor for fans’ time and money spending.

From all the results and conclusions obtained from this research, some ideas for marketers in the football market can be drawn. The marketers in the football market should emphasize their efforts in maintaining the level of fanhood of older fans by increasing their attitude constructs. More important should be to create the attitude at young age, more specific to create that connection to the club through the fathers and brothers. Another way should be by generating opportunities for young people to be a part of the club by playing in it, this will create a connection to the team and club later on in life. In addition it will be recommended for the clubs to focus their marketing efforts on the behavioral construct, this way they target the fan in a more efficient way. So they should rather approach the fan from a cognitive or affective way, for example in advertisement, they should try to influence him through the behavioral construct, to cause the fan to take actions, for example in club activities. Moreover, to overcome the violence factor the club should raise the fans attitude so they continue to attend despite the presence of violence.

The author dealt in this thesis with a part of the football market, and in a specific country. This research can be continued and developed in different directions. From the author’s point of view some directions should be combining the marketing discipline to the sociological one and investigate the attitude of the fan in a combination of both areas. A different direction of future research is to try to reach a formula to get a number for each construct and for the attitude, this formula will include the different factors influencing the attitude. Another idea is to study ways for eradicate or minimize violence in football by using the fan attitude as an element for achieving this goal.

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