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Football Fan Relationships with Their National Associations: A Trans-European Perspective

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Abstract

Research question

The overall aim of this research project was to identify the types of relationship football fans want to establish with their National Football Associations (NFA) in order to improve them through a marketing management approach. Improved relationships should allow NFA to better achieve their organisational goals and to satisfy and maintain football fans and their members loyal to them. The specific objectives were to define what kind of relationships fans with different levels of commitment and different cultures in Europe expect to have with their NFA and team; to identify for each category of fans the factors that can make a

relationship be perceived as positive and successful; to identify and distinguish the relationship management practices which are desired by fans from those which create points of tension and resistance between different countries; and to identify the most relevant factors and management practices in order to increase fans' loyalty and commitment towards the relationship.

Methodology

Three diverse European countries were selected, Armenia, England and Lithuania, and a qualitative research method was employed to collect the data. Two focus groups were conducted with national teams' die-hard fans on one hand and national teams' regular and casual fans on the other hand for both Armenian and Lithuanian contexts, with respectively 11 fans for each Armenian focus group and 8 fans for each Lithuanian focus group. Individual interviews with 6 casual and regular fans and 4 die-hard fans were adopted for the English context considering the strong rivalry between fans of professional clubs. An interview guide was used and comprised four sections which corresponded to the four research objectives.

Findings

Various interesting findings can be noted. First, not all fans look for personal, regular and long-term relationships with their national team or their NFA, which can be explained by: the existence of strong relationships with professional football clubs, personal characteristics such as time, or little appetite for committed relationships. Information, perceived image of the NFA and team, identification, emotional bonds with the teams and players and trust in the NFA were also found to strongly influence fans' commitment in the relationship. Good governance was also seen as an important factor but this was not shared by all types of fans.

Keywords: fans, relationships, management, national associations, Armenia, England, Lithuania

Theme: supporter action and network