

# A STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON INCREASING INTERACTIVITY BETWEEN FOOTBALL FANS AND CLUBS

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**Abstract:** Football fan culture has evolved immensely from sitting passively in front of a television screen, to live tweeting, live videos and an active involvement with the football team, players and management. This shows a development in interactivity between football fans and their favourite clubs through the use of social media. This study looks into football fans in Bangalore and their response to how football clubs on social media affects interactivity.

Via social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat and YouTube), professional football clubs provide minute to minute updates, information and details about games, transfers, injuries. This creates a direct link between football fans and clubs and allows two-way communication through comments, replies, tweets. The researcher aims to understand the effect of social media on increasing the interactivity between football fans and clubs.

**Keywords:** Football Fan Culture, Interactivity, Social Media, Football Fans, Football Clubs.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Social media can be referred to as a platform that permits people to communicate with others by sending and receiving information, using the internet (Nations, 2017). With social media influencing the world, it has become the channel of engagement between football fans and clubs. Fans prefer to get on social media for updates and match streams creating a direct connection which hadn't existed before, along with accessibility and speed.

For football fans, social media rewards the participatory culture; through their system of preferences, retweets, shares, personalization and upvotes, social media stages are worked with empowering and advancing a participatory culture and feeling of groupism. Social media helps in reaching that feeling of togetherness, with its ability to provide participation and interaction (Elliott, 2014). There was a lack of interactivity before the internet and social media, either due to expensive tickets, geographical limitations or unavailability to watch the game on television, due to broadcasting issues; these barriers have been overcome ensuring that fans do not miss any sort of communication from football clubs (Cave & Miller, 2015). It is seen that each and every social media page is important in some way or the other, twitter for live rants, Facebook for messages and opinions, Instagram for live footage and players photos and YouTube for post-match videos, bloopers etc (Laird, 2013).

Most football clubs are changing themselves with the advent of social media, understanding and grasping its importance, by equipping stadiums with WIFI, creating specially catered online content, challenges, competitions and enabling fans to have a say in what goes on and around a club. (Cave & Miller, 2015).

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Most of the previous studies looked at specific sports teams, athletes and clubs. Numerous methods were used; however, content analysis and surveys were more common. The most recent is a web-based survey which looked to see what motivates and drives fans to get involved with the Facebook pages of their favourite clubs (Vale & Fernandes, 2017). Mixed methods were also popular, as seen in a paper which used interviews, questionnaires and content analysis of Twitter pages showed how socio-technology increases engagement between fans and clubs (Chung, 2016).

There was a case study done on Liverpool's social media use to examine how relevant content increases engagement with fans for growth of fan bases (Parganas & Anagnostopoulos, 2015). Another survey was done to find a link between how the use of social media can increase the purchase of merchandise and game attendance in collegiate football via Twitter as it is used by fans to identify with a particular team (Johns, 2015).

One research paper analysed every football team under four football leagues and how the team's social media presence on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter to determine whether their social media interaction and marketing help in communicating with fans, improving their fan base and promoting their business (Kuzma, Bell, & Logue, 2014). A comparative content analysis looking at the Twitter strategies between four teams- two basketball clubs and two football teams and how their strategies affect their interactions with fans of the two sports was done by studying the Twitter activity and determining the similarities and differences between the techniques used (Johnston, 2014). Another study used a similar method, where content analysis of the Twitter accounts of 30 NBA teams was done to get a better understanding of how professional, personal and community relationships are built between fans and clubs in the National Basketball Association (NBA), in order to build and promote the clubs (Wang, 2014).

An explorative study was done using semi-structured interviews, content analysis of Twitter feeds and focus groups to understand whether social media and fan interactions help in long term growth of a football clubs in the English Premier League (Allison, 2013). Since survey method was common, a questionnaire, supported by the "Parasocial Interaction Theory" was done to determine whether students follow athletes on social media and whether there have been cases of successful communication, however this study showed that it does not allow fans to directly communicate with athletes (Brown, Rochester).

Some papers conducted interviews with professionals from the sports industry, marketing industry, academic institutions and sports directors to see how social media can be used for marketing, commercializing, public relations, communication etc. It acknowledges the impact of social media when it comes to building a personal bond between fans, players and teams increasing engagement (Malerk, 2012). Content analysis was another extensive method used in most papers. Analysis of Twitter pages was done to deduce how interactivity allows fans to get a direct look into the lives of athletes as they Tweet their views, opinions, interests, likes and dislikes, increasing fan engagement through Twitter (Hambriek, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010).

All the papers studied how social media plays a role in improving and increasing interactivity and engagement between fans and sports organizations and athletes. It is seen that content analysis is the most popular method used over the years along with survey method, which is currently popular.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

The research methods used were a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative research methods- and online questionnaire with 103 respondents, interviews with 5 football fans and content analysis of the Facebook pages of three football clubs- Arsenal F.C., Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester City. The sample population consists of football fans from Bangalore selected via convenience sampling.

The questionnaire would look to explore the fans football team preferences, social media preferences, social media preferences when it comes to football, social media activity and the overall time spent on social media to understand the use and benefits of social media in informing, updating, including and entertaining football fans.

By conducting one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with fans of various clubs, the researcher will understand the differences in fan-interactions with different clubs on social media networks, to know which social media is preferred, the problems faced and what the fans expect. The content analysis of the official Facebook pages of the 3 football clubs on Facebook is done to compare the content put out in terms of interactive posts, sponsorship posts, contests, audience-engaging posts and how the number of followers, position on the table and social media marketing are directed towards the needs and wants of the fans and consumers.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

The research is supported by the ‘Parasocial Interaction Theory’ where media allows normal people to be in contact with inaccessible people like celebrities, sportsmen and women, politicians etc, making the viewer a part of these people’s lives through a one-sided relationship. This can help determine whether fans are more included and taken into consideration when it comes to communication by football clubs. The research can also look what fans expect from the social media pages of clubs and whether this parasocial interaction is what sustains fan loyalty and fan support for a particular football club.

## **IV. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Survey:**

The final survey was completed by 65 males and 35 females took part mainly between the age of 16-25 from the city of Bangalore, India. Majority spend 1-5 hours on social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube. 77.7% of the fans follow their club on social media and a large portion feels that it is sometimes easier to communicate directly because of social media. Only 35.9% of the respondents sometimes post towards the club and player, however a majority of fans partake in quizzes, challenges, giveaways etc.

Through the survey, it was also understood that more than half of the fans have never been included in any activity, nor have they received any sort of response from the club’s social media page. However, around 47% of the fans said they would like to be included in club decisions and most fans follow the pages for entertainment, updates, live videos & streams and player interactions. 67% believe they know more about a particular player and 35.9% support this idea as they feel a more personal connection between the player and themselves, while another 35% do not feel any sort of connection. While 62.1% also feel a better connection and inclusion in the football fan community because of social media.

A large majority of the participants agree that social media is important when it comes to creating awareness, updating and informing fans, moreover, it is also a platform where fans can voice their opinions. 68% of the fans prefer social media livestreams and updates over traditional media when matches are not shown on television and 94.2% prefer social media for updates and news about football clubs. This large majority prefers social media because of its speed and immediacy and around 80% feel that social media is much more efficient than traditional media such as television, newspapers and radio.

In the end, it was seen that over 80% of the participants agree that social media increases interactivity and less than 5% feel the opposite. Another 79.6% also support this by agreeing that football clubs on social media helps in bridging the interactivity gap between fans and clubs and only 6.8% do not feel so.

### **4.2 Interview:**

The researcher conducted interviews with 5 football fans and from these interviews, a total of 13 themes were determined: Interactivity, Inclusion, Information, Fan Loyalty, Acknowledgement, Direct Link, Low Response, Visibility, Promotions, Immediacy, Active Participation, Accessibility and Utilities. Two of the predominant themes are *interactivity* and *inclusion*, where fans prefer interactive posts and activities which make them feel more included in the running of their favourite football club. The interviewees also spoke about how they prefer the social media page for *information* and highlighted how *immediacy* and *accessibility* are what make social media the preferred medium. Moreover, there are several *promotions* and *utilities* (such as live videos, Q&A sessions, comments, tags, challenges, notifications etc) on social media which include fans and help strengthen and build *fan loyalty*. Another theme that builds fan loyalty is *acknowledgement*, as fans prefer clubs that respond and acknowledge them via social media, although some of the interviewees also commented on the difficulty of getting a response. A few interviewees suggested a solution for the *low response* rates, which is through the use of hashtags, tags etc to improve *visibility* on social media. Some interviewees also felt that they become *active participants* while watching livestreams and interactions on social media, as they are given an option to reply, comment and question. Almost all of the interviewees agree that the social media pages of football clubs established a *direct link* between them and their favourite football club.

### 4.3 Content Analysis:

From the 3 clubs' social media pages, it is seen that they do in fact tailor content in such a way that it includes, entertains and informs the fans about what happens during games, post matches and even during training. All three clubs put up creative videos of their players having funs, playing games, dishing out on other players and completely different versions of them off the pitch. The clubs also post videos of goals, match highlights, game promos; however, Arsenal FC is the only club that has dedicated, consistent live match videos on every matchday. Several clubs use social media to promote their merchandise, but from the content analysis of these three pages, it is observed that Manchester City and Tottenham do not market their merchandise to the extent Arsenal does. Manchester City, however, has paid posts promoting almost all their sponsors. Arsenal and Tottenham used the month of December and Christmas effectively to put out very tailored, festive videos, giving fans a look into the celebratory atmosphere at the clubs with their players, while Manchester City only put out generic posts in December. The fame and support the clubs have on the field, doesn't necessarily impact their social media following, as it seen that a big, successful club like Manchester City has less followers and likes on Facebook compared to Arsenal. Therefore, it can be deduced that a club's social media presence definitely impacts fans, more creative interactive content is what makes fans follow and like the pages of clubs.

## V. CONCLUSION

The researcher used three different methods in order to inculcate various different responses and answers to understand whether the social media pages of football clubs have any sort of importance when it comes to increasing interactivity between football fans and the clubs. One method used was the online survey, which yielded calculated, numerical statistics which gave a better understanding of fans' overall feelings towards utilizing social media for football related purposes. The interviews with football fans gave more detailed understanding into the psyche of the fans and it was a much more qualitative set of results which were obtained. The content analysis on three football clubs' Facebook pages showed whether these pages were providing and producing content that the fans require, want and desire which was mentioned by the fans in the survey and interview.

The main aim of this research paper was to determine the effect of social media on increasing interactivity between football fans and football clubs. It looked into how the football club's social media content and posts are interactive in nature, including the fans via contests, games, quizzes, challenges etc. Overall it was understood that fans do prefer social media over television when it comes to getting information, updates and news because of how fast, accessible and immediate social media is compared to traditional medium. It is observed that the social media presence of several football clubs is in fact, for the sole purpose, that is to disseminate anything and

everything about the club to the fans and for the fans. Through this, not only are fans able to feel closer to the clubs, they also develop a more personal relationship with the players of the clubs and their presence in the football fandom also grows. Looking at all the data produced and collected it is seen that due to the advent of social media, there is an increase in interactivity between football fans and football clubs via and hence social media is a powerful tool and medium when it comes to increasing interactivity between football fans and football clubs.

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