

Leveraging in-group identities for the distant fans: A case study of the international official supporting clubs

Haozhou Pu

Abstract: Globalization has fostered a large-scale global market place. With the aid of media technology, fans are able to access sport products regardless of geographic proximity. Professional sport teams and parent leagues aspiring to expand their global market have employed various tactics such as establishing subgroups to attract and maintain the “distant fan” base (Pu & James, 2016). In this study, a cross-national study was conducted to explore the identity and cultural dynamics of members within the supporters clubs. Specifically, the study was informed by immersive ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the international supporters clubs of the English Premier League teams. The study reveals the existence of multilevel group identities (i.e. superordinate, subgroup, relational, and external) among members within the supporters clubs. It also suggests that the supporters club serves as a crucial site where the distant fan’s psychological connection with the team is formed, maintained, and strengthened. The findings further imply that the international supporters club constitutes a “glocalized” brand community where the *transplantation* and *readaption* of foreign soccer culture into a new cultural milieu is evident.