

# Module 2. Understanding Fan Behaviour

## Unit 2.1

### 2.1.1. The value of having fans defines loyalty

As we have seen throughout these studies, one of the great opportunities that fan engagement represents is to focus on the 'non-transactional' elements of the fan's relationship with the club or national team, just as much as we focus on the 'transactional' ones.

The danger of an imbalanced approach –which is what we believe often characterises the football industry's approaches to engaging fans– is that if clubs only see loyalty as 'purchasing tickets and merchandise', for example, then the habits that define the emotional connection (travelling to away games, talking up the club on social media, advocating the club and turning up the games at lower categories in appalling weather, etc.) are not valued and the relationship becomes less strong as a result.

This can be seen by comparing the way clubs define loyalty and the way fans see it. While we have already explored some of this in other modules (remember the example from Philadelphia Union and their season ticket reward scheme), this **theme gives us an insight into how we could do something that is hardly ever practised in global football: give fans the opportunity to define loyalty.**

So, what is loyalty? We undertook an informal survey with practitioners that follow the Fan Experience Company on Twitter and those who are connected to your professor on LinkedIn. We wondered if the responses would help us understand whether it is a state of mind, a set of behaviours and habits or a combination of both.

Here is a selection of the comments received:

"The interesting question which this raises, and loyalty programmes in general raise, is distinguishing what actions are given what reward. While we want to encourage many more activities, digitally and offline, we should never lose sight of the core action: paying through the turnstile, win-lose-draw, home-away, for years on end." (Practitioner, Bundesliga).



“Very important question and one of the biggest myths in the football marketing domain. Loyalty is a very hard-to-measure concept because every fan group gives its own interpretation. For one, maximum loyalty means visiting all home-and-away games; for others, it might be visiting max. 5 games a year; and another might say it's reading everything about their favourite club without ever making a transaction. Therefore, there is no 'maximum/minimum', and it's almost impossible to create a scale for loyalty. Nor that it is infinite; loyalty to me is a construct that can disappear when not being compensated properly. According to me, finding a definition for fan loyalty might be something like 'maximum emotional connection a fan (group) can create with its club.’” (Data expert & former club practitioner, Eredivisie, The Netherlands).

“Football, and indeed much of sport is such a multi-faceted, product with personal and diverse behaviours, which makes measurement and judging/evaluating loyalty that can be used in some way for value added promotions or enhancement activity somewhat problematic. Tracking visible consumption doesn't necessarily correlate in a tidy way to loyalty, as might be the case in other categories where traditional ‘loyalty’ programmes exist. Clubs can create more meaning and loyalty through finding and acting from their purpose, undertaking research to understand the culture, and to engage and listen to fans, deep dialogue, knowing who the fans are, how they see the club, and developing a shared articulation and sense of what the club holds dear and what it seeks to achieve. From there, it becomes easier to be distinctive and authentic: to do the simple things well, to innovate, to know the right ideas, to stand for something, to provide more unique moments of magic, to offer more opportunities for fans to experience and get closer to their heroes and the club they love, to surprise and delight, beyond the performances on the pitch. Loyalty in sport is emotional. Fans want to be proud of how their club shows up. It's not transactional.” (Sports Academic, Northumberland, UK).

“Loyalty wears various hats. Some fans are satisfied with basic stadium amenities, minimal online/offline communication, a lack of personal contact with their club and obscure messaging in relation to season ticket/ticket availability and prices; these fans are often directly connected to the performance and results regardless of the ‘add-ons’. They are traditionally ‘loyal’ and will turn up regardless. It feels to me that that’s where much of non-elite football’s focus has been for a long time. To compete with other leisure experiences, to offer wrap-around family match-day entertainment, and therefore attract and retain a ‘different’ kind of loyal fan, many clubs need to improve the fan experience from entrance to exit. This includes an improved focus on parking, catering, toilets, ticket and security staff interaction



(smile and chat please), the quality of match-day entertainment, and the provision of engaging music and announcements. Away from match days, websites need to be easy to navigate and interesting, and fan communication, via email and other social media, personally targeted. Performance and results aren't as important for some people, and, for them, 'loyalty' can be developed in a different way." (Owner, Sports Leadership Development Company).

"I always have been a huge FC Nantes fan and I could feel my deep link to the club when I cried when we moved to second division, when I suffered from moving away from my hometown and not being able to go the matches. And the hardest experience was when Emiliano Sala died. I couldn't be at the stadium for the next home game, couldn't share my sadness with my fellow fans and spent the whole match crying in front of my TV. But to move on more positively, I am now experiencing loyalty to a third division club as me and my kids have become US Orleans fans. I would say that loyalty at this level is more about keep on going to the matches, keep cheering up your players even when it's hard. I would say that the fan that keeps attending matches, follows your social networks, buys merchandise when the results get bad, etc., deserves to be called a loyal fan. Even if it's just about buying a scarf or going to 2 or 3 games in a season. These fans deserve special treatment when the team improves performances and the crowd comes back to the stadium." (Customer Experience/Transformation Consultant, France).

We then spoke to several fans about the same issue. It is interesting to see the common and divergent themes in both sections. So, how do fans define loyalty? These are comments taken from informal discussions in the last few months.

"I think there are layers of loyalty. My weekend is ruined if we lose, but because of distance, I can't be at every game. I guess I am psychologically bound to my club, so while I think those who attend matches should be recognised and acknowledged by the club, I think football needs to work harder to understand the more intangible forms of loyalty."

"It's about turning up to games early, supporting the youth teams, turning up in all types of weather, showing utter determination to be there. Sometimes I feel I have no option. It's part of what I do."

"I haven't really thought about whether or not I should be rewarded by the club for what I do, but I do think they need to account better for the challenges fans have when the TV companies change the dates of games at the last minute."



“I think it’s a mixture of the way you think and the way you behave. It’s impossible to accurately measure that across a diverse fanbase, but you can at least ask fans what they think about loyalty programmes.”

And this last comment carries with it perhaps the most important learning point of this theme. **Concepts of fan loyalty differ in ways that are natural in a sport that be consumed in many different ways. However, an absence of focus on the fan may lead clubs, leagues and federations to make errors that end up damaging the emotional and intangible nature of fandom.**

### Exercise:

*The CEO of a 2<sup>nd</sup> tier club has asked you to research and write a description of fan loyalty for internal club purposes.*

- *List the considerations you will consider when drawing up the definition.*
- *Write the definition (in no more than 250 words).*

## **2.1.2 ‘Remote’ support (including clubs with global fanbases)**

In this theme we will explore the concept of **‘remote’ fans. By this, we mean those fans who do not attend matches, but who self-describe as fans of that club.**

It is important to recognise the dynamics of this term, especially in its geographical sense. Some remote fans live in the same town as their club, but cannot attend because of meaningful barriers, such as work and family commitments, while some fans live many hundreds of kilometres away –many thousands in the case of the world’s biggest clubs– and cannot attend regularly, even if they have the resources to do so.

Remote fans are one of the subject matters of the new European Club Association (ECA) report ‘Fan of the Future: Defining Modern Football Fandom’, in which it is acknowledged that the nature of fandom has changed fundamentally in recent years (ECA, 2020).

**It cites six factors as being decisive in these changes:**

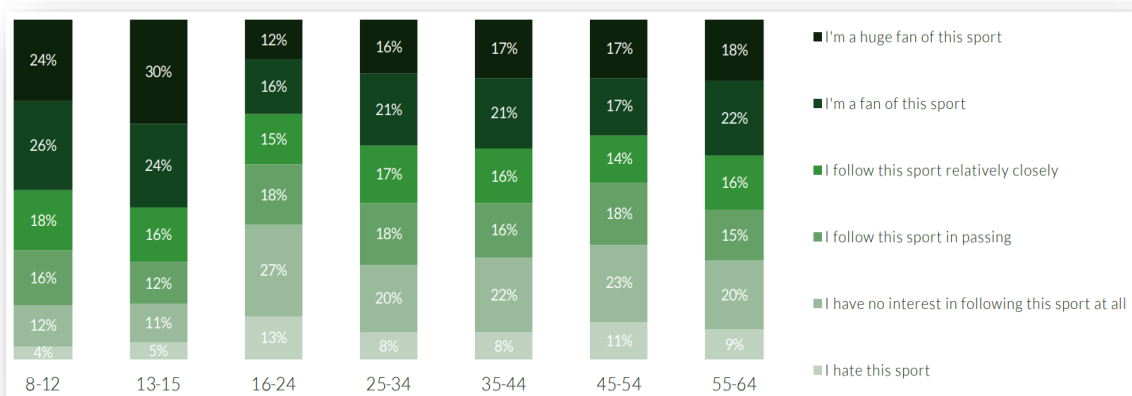
1. Mobile connectivity has improved, making it easy for fans to stay ‘connected’ with their clubs.



2. Social media has proliferated, which enables clubs' direct access to fans and the relationship potential that this represents.
3. Content personalisation has increased by new OTT (over-the-top) service providers and related advanced technologies.
4. The consumption habits of 16- to 24-year olds have led to the decline of linear TV viewing.
5. There has been a diversification of communication channels with podcasts, blogs, articles and videos, etc., all making it easier to connect with fans online.
6. Social responsibility and community awareness must be demonstrated by clubs to meet fans' needs for them to operate beyond their core offering of football matches.

As the following graph (figure 1) shows, it is those at the key ages of 16-24 who feel most disconnected to the sport and, conversely, these are the people who are at the age when football needs to engage them.

**Figure 1:** Levels of interest in football



Source: ECA. (2020). Fan of the Future: Defining Modern Football Fandom, p. 9. Retrieved September 2020 from <https://www.ecaeurope.com/media/4802/eca-fan-of-the-future-defining-modern-football-fandom.pdf>. Screenshot by author.

The report segments the respondents to the survey it has undertaken (which is representative of the wider population and not just football fans) and includes one entitled 'Football Fanatics'. It describes the latter using the following characteristics:

- They follow football in its entirety, with strong emotional engagement.
- Football provides a sense of community which is key to their enjoyment.

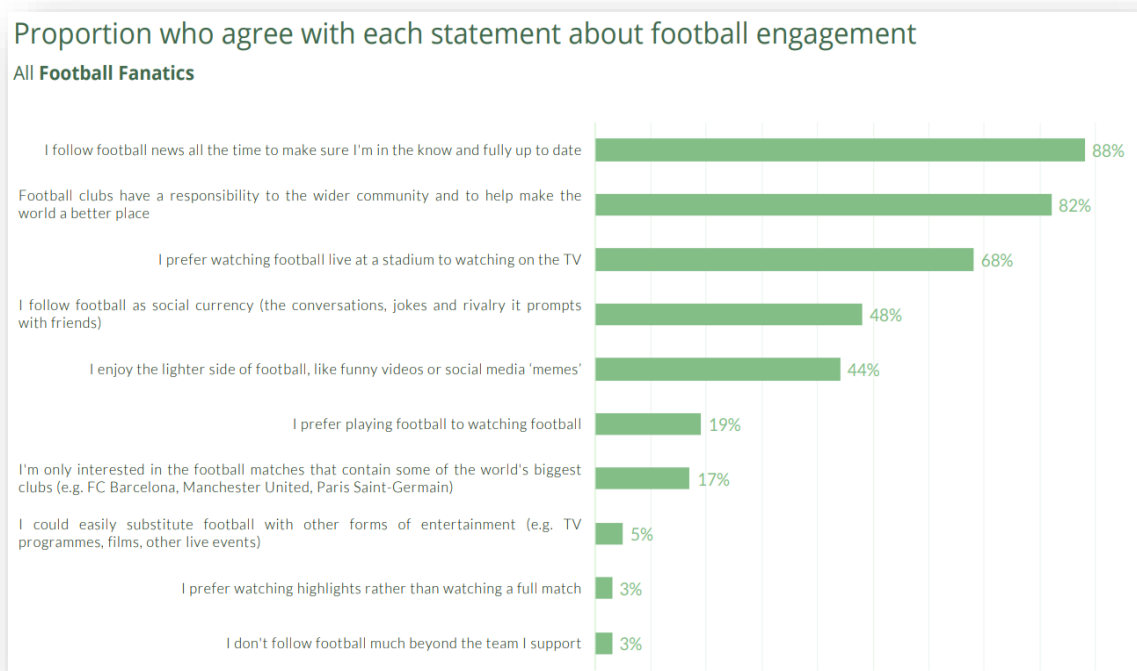


- They are slightly younger than average (37% are under 35), and most of them are male group (69%).
- They follow a range of sports and are highly engaged with football.
- They prefer to go to the stadium to really experience this feeling of togetherness.
- They are attached to their club but engage widely beyond this, including lower league football.

As students of fan engagement, this is our key constituent, and their views are important in understand how to engage with those who are 'remote' (i.e., non-match attending fans).

Their responses to a range of statements highlight how important fan engagement is to them.

**Figure 2:** Proportion who agree with each statement about football engagement



Source: ECA. (2020). Fan of the Future: Defining Modern Football Fandom, p. 19 Retrieved September 2020 from <https://www.ecaeurope.com/media/4802/eca-fan-of-the-future-defining-modern-football-fandom.pdf>. Screenshot by author.

As can be seen from the previous graph (figure 2), **the most passionate fans believe clubs have a responsibility to the wider community and to help make the world a better place.** So, for example, as this is also one of the key factors determining modern fandom,



it follows that remote fans want to see examples of the club's social responsibility and conscience.

A club supporting food poverty in their own city may find this action positively influencing remote fans, who will then use this to engage others, potentially leading to the creation of more fans for the club.

As the following graph (figure 3) shows, **the rationale behind fans' choices of club vary significantly and clearly disprove the notion that all fans want to have is a winning team.**

**Figure 3:** Reasons fans have for supporting their clubs



Source: ECA. (2020). Fan of the Future: Defining Modern Football Fandom, p. 26 Retrieved September 2020 from <https://www.ecaeurope.com/media/4802/eca-fan-of-the-future-defining-modern-football-fandom.pdf>. Screenshot by author.

One can clearly see a diversity of motivations for following clubs, so, again, this suggests that even if a club is not 'winning' or 'successful', there are other factors which made lead 'remote' fans to remain engaged.

A good example can be seen in the run of recent football club docuseries, where Barcelona, Manchester City and Tottenham Hotspur have given 'access all areas' to the production team. These three are connected by success. Barcelona's period of supremacy from 2008 to 2012 was characterised by the 'tiki taka' approach, conceived by Pep Guardiola, and in homage to the playing philosophy of his mentor Johan Cruyff.



Manchester City, where Guardiola has been manager since 2016, won the Premier League championship twice in the process.

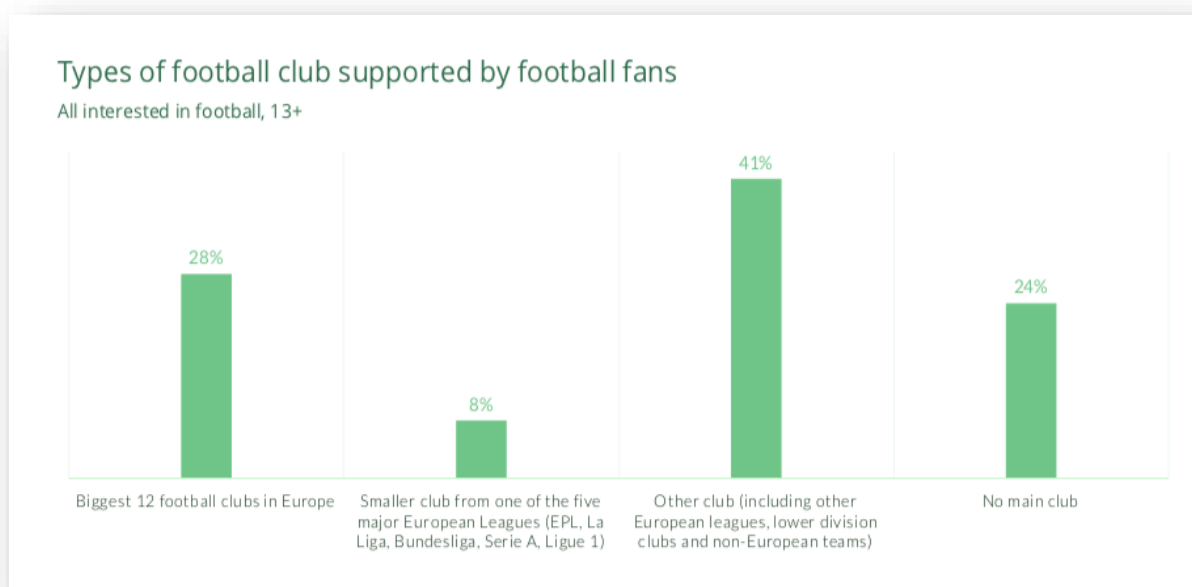
Although Tottenham Hotspur does not have the same trophy cabinet as the previous two, it has reached the Champions League cup and currently has Jose Mourinho (Guardiola's nemesis) as coach. These films are all about success, glory and achievement, and yet, the docuseries that appears to have generated an equal amount of emotional response are the two *Sunderland Til I Die* series that were televised in 2018 and 2019.

This was far from a story of glory, but one of two successive relegations, last minute play-off final pain and penalties heartbreak, with boardroom strife, player discontent and a suffering supporter community. However, this has tapped into a need for fans, geographically remote, to be able to choose a team that has suffered.

Fans of Sunderland are renowned for their loyalty in desperate times on the pitch. A record 46,000 fans watched a 3<sup>rd</sup> tier game in December 2018, and, when remote fans compare affiliations with fans of more high-achieving clubs, they can claim that they are true supporters –as true supporters have experienced the pain of defeat and faced existential questions of club survival.

The final graph (figure 4) we reproduce from the ECA report highlights the fact that, while it may appear that Europe's biggest clubs have dominated remote and international support, the truth is not as stark as this.

**Figure 4:** Types of football club supported by football fans



Source: ECA. (2020). Fan of the Future: Defining Modern Football Fandom, p. 28. Retrieved September 2020 from <https://www.ecaeurope.com/media/4802/eca-fan-of-the-future-defining-modern-football-fandom.pdf>. Screenshot by author.

Only a quarter of respondents followed one of the biggest 12 football clubs in Europe while closer to half of all respondents followed a club outside of this group.

What this tells us is that **all** clubs are capable of using the fan engagement techniques. So, on the basis that all clubs will have significant numbers of remote fans, it is important to be able to understand and relate to that global community.

**Having ruled out ‘winning’ as the main driver of remote fandom, we can now apply the engagement techniques we have studied in this course, namely the following:**

- Ensuring our club has a strong, clear, authentic identity and voice, backed up by a transparent social commitment
- Creating a structured, transparent and effective consultation and dialogue programme capable of capturing key insights on fans and helping them to shape the values and decision-making of the club
- Ensuring that, even if remote, the experience of the fan when interacting with the club is distinct and engaging, so that the emotional connection strengthens
- Always seeking to create a fan-focused culture where interactions with employees or representatives of the club reflect its values and its interest in fans

Exercise:

*Juan Luis is a fan of Everton, based on Córdoba, Argentina. His grandfather on his mothers’ side was Irish and had moved to Liverpool as a child. He follows the club on social media, follows every piece of news he can find, streams games and, once a season at Christmas, buys a shirt from the club shop.*

*What else could the club do to strengthen the relationship and create a ‘magic moment’ for Juan Luis?*

### **2.1.3 New fan groups**

When we explore fandom, we must acknowledge that the evolution of football has created many different types of fans. The idea of the match-attending father and son or

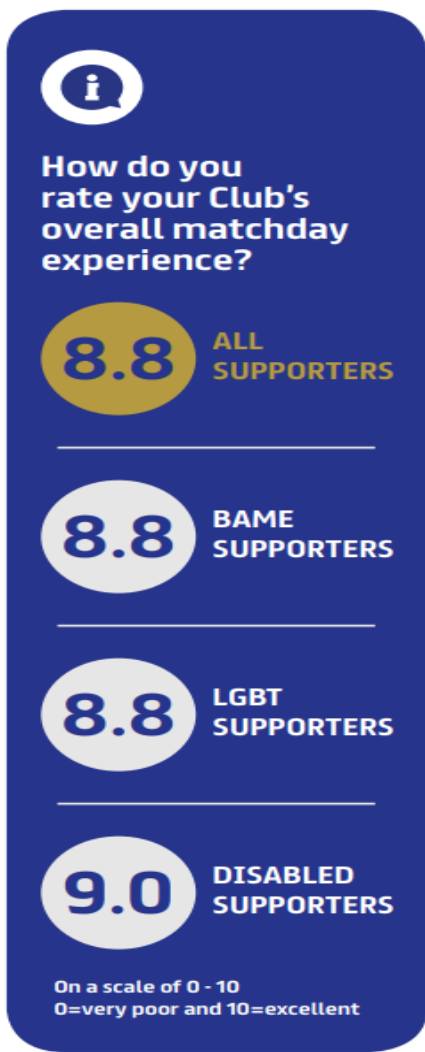


groups of male friends being the norm has been eclipsed by the opening up of the game, the advances of technology, progress with equality, inclusion and the globalisation of sport.

So, this theme looks at the emergence of new groups of fans which, it is certain, will only grow as the sport undergoes some of the changes described in the ECA report in the previous study section. Many of these groups exhibit very different needs, behaviours and beliefs which may challenge the sport's ability to engage them. **But they need to be embraced: not just because it is the right thing to do to grow the football family, but because these groups are growing representation in the game very quickly and, anecdotally, more quickly than more traditional fan groups.**

**Figure 5:** Rate of the matchday experience by different groups of supporters

First of all, let's look at diversity and inclusion and how BAME<sup>1</sup>, LGBT<sup>2</sup> & disabled supporters experience the English game and, more specifically, the English Football League (English Football League, 2019). In England, as the following table shows, while some progress has been made, more needs to be done.



'Over recent years, the EFL and individual Clubs have worked hard to promote inclusivity and accessibility within the game, welcoming supporters from all communities.

As already established, going to watch football is a social activity enjoyed with friends and family. It is therefore important to understand the matchday experience of all supporters, including those from minority communities.

When looking closely at the experiences and priorities of fans from BAME, disabled and LGBT communities, the data would suggest that their overall perceptions, particularly on matchdays are fairly consistent with all supporters.

There are several areas where the results of BAME, disabled and LGBT supporters compare favourably with the total fanbase, including feeling valued by their club, the importance of their club as a focal point for its local community, belonging to their town or city and atmosphere in the ground.

While data shows consistent results throughout all groups, there is always to more work be done. This is seen in the results related to whether or not supporters believed their club provides an inclusive and enjoyable matchday experience for all supporters, regardless of their background, religion, sexual orientation or ethnicity.' (English Football League, 2019, p. 56)

Source: Adapted from English Football League (2019)

<sup>1</sup> Black, Asian & minority ethnics  
<sup>2</sup> Lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender



The EFL has made great progress in understanding the needs of these three different groups and has used this information to aid clubs both in their understanding of their needs and the need to embrace these by adapting the experience, positively educating their communities and pro-actively embracing groups representing LGBT, BAME and disabled fans.

Groups like Kick It Out work closely with the EFL (and the Premier League) to eradicate racism in football. They do this through education, campaigning and also through innovation, such as the Report It application and reporting form, which allows fans to notify clubs or the authorities of incidences of racism in an easy, convenient and safe way.

*Hake a look at the Kick It Out website at <https://www.kickitout.org/forms/online-reporting-form>*

Kick It Out also collates and reports data to inform Government strategies. For example, it reported the following summary in 2018/19:

Discrimination in both professional and grassroots football rose significantly in the 2018/19 season with reports up by 32 per cent, new figures show.

Statistics from Kick It Out, football's equality and inclusion organisation, show reports rose to 422 in 2018/19, up from 319 in the previous year.

Alarminglly, incidents of racism continue to rise. It remains the most common form of discrimination in both professional and grassroots football, constituting 65 per cent of reports – a 43 per cent rise from 2017/18.

Although an increase in reports could highlight a more confident approach to reporting incidents, the leap in reports could also identify that discrimination across the game is still an issue which needs ongoing and constant education and the application of appropriate sanctions.

Faith-based discrimination, which includes Islamophobia and antisemitism, rose higher than any other across this period, with reports increasing by 75 per cent from 36 to 63.

Discrimination related to sexual orientation increased by 12 per cent from 61 to 68. Reports related to gender remained at the same level (eight), while disability discrimination reports dropped from 15 to nine.

In the overall figures, which include social media incidents, discrimination reports increased to 581, a 12 per cent rise from the season before (520). (Discrimination reports in football rise by a third, 2019, para. 1-7

Naturally, this data informs work to address an issue which is also societal in nature, but football is a microcosm of society. However, inside football stadia, as the EFL report shows (2019), there is evidence of measurable improvement.

For disabled fans, many of the older stadia in the UK were built in inaccessible ways. The EFL works on several fronts to ensure that everyone gets the same high-quality experience. Just as Kick it Out leads the fight against racism, so does Level Playing Field<sup>3</sup> campaign and educate on behalf of fans with disabilities.

Just as the League achieves change through recognition through its Family Excellence Awards, Level Playing Field used reward to enable change for disabled fans with their LPF Centre of Excellence Awards, given to acknowledge the developments stadia have made to embrace disabled supporters.

Level Playing Field also provides campaign packs to help supporters celebrate positive initiatives. By providing supporters with the following assets, they can ensure that others are motivated to make changes:

- Hashtags for social media campaigns
- Branded tee shirts for 'weeks of action'
- Opportunities to connect with local disability charities
- Promotion and introduction of innovative new facilities, such as accessible toilets, changing places, audio descriptive commentaries, etc.
- Guidance of publishing news stories and gaining good public relations
- Including of relevant content in the club's official matchday programme or regular magazine
- Creation of a short film/video about the activities of disabled fans
- Encouragement to give disabled fans work experience

---

<sup>3</sup> Official website: [www.levelplayingfield.org](http://www.levelplayingfield.org)



**Figure 6:** Emerald Headingley Stadium toilette sign



Source: Crohn's & Colitis UK official website. (n. d.). Retrieved August 2020 from <https://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/news/your-views-on-not-every-disability-is-visible>. Screenshot by author.

The above image (you could find it in the Emerald Headingley Stadium) shows how factors such as signage can make a huge difference to the experience of disabled fans.

In the UK, there are also fan organisations protecting the interests of LGBT supporters, campaigning for them and educating the wider football industry on ways to more fully engage the industry in embracing them, recognising their needs and supporting them.

Football v Homophobia<sup>4</sup> (an international campaign) and Pride in Football<sup>5</sup> (an organisation representing UK club fans) are the two main groups active in this area. They unite and represent different club fan group, provide assets and information to help them achieve local change, and campaign internationally and nationally on key issues.

The advances in equality for LGBT people are well-documented, but the barriers are still in evidence, perhaps less so in legal terms (especially in the UK, but maybe less so in other countries, including some where homosexual people are still persecuted) but plainly in psychological terms, so it is important that they are represented.

<sup>4</sup> Official Website: <https://www.footballvhomophobia.com/lgbt-supporter-groups/>

<sup>5</sup> Official Website: <https://prideinfootball.co.uk/>



There are also significant numbers of LGBT supporters. In Pride in Football official website, the following is explained:

'It's estimated that around 6% of the population are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans; in football terms that's more than 2000 LGBT fans at an average Premier League game or 5000 at Wembley.' (Pride in Football, 2020, para. 1)

So, there is also a financial business case for engaging this growing group of fans.

Finally, the growth of the women's game has highlighted just how important female fans are in football. As we have studied elsewhere in this certificate, their progress has been met with many barriers over the decades. Women have played football for just as long as men have, but because of age-old prejudice, they have not had the equality of opportunity in terms of playing and receiving incomes.

Women watch the men's game in large numbers too –and this number is growing. This growth has momentum too, and it means that the resistance to change exhibited by the football industry in some countries, including the UK, has to change where washroom facilities may be poor or insufficient in numbers for women, where refreshments choices are obsolete and where there is little beyond the football to engage the female viewer.

**The organisation Women in Football<sup>6</sup> is a network of professionals working in and around the football industry who support and champion their peers. They do this in several ways:**

- Celebrating women's achievement
- Challenging discrimination
- Sharing professional expertise

Football is changing. It is more reflective of the society it serves, it is more conscious of its need to demonstrate its value to society and it is learning from other more progressive industries just how to innovate and improve to embrace the diversity of our countries' football fans.

**Engagement begins with understanding that everyone is different. By continuing to embrace diversity and to meet the needs of the different groups of society, football will flourish.**

---

<sup>6</sup> Official Website: <https://www.womeninfootball.co.uk/about-us/>



### Exercise:

*Can you identify any groups in your country who are campaigning for, defending the interests of or educating on behalf of groups previously under-represented in football?*

*Outline what they are doing and how they are effecting change.*

#### **2.1.4 The life journey of the fan**

What is the lifetime value of a fan to a club?

We will explore the answer to this question further into this theme, but it is considerable. A fan who attends throughout his or her life or another who consumes differently or remotely will, over the seasons that pass, support his or her club in significant financial terms.

**Consistent deployment of fan engagement strategies within a culture of fan-focus can ensure that the levels of emotional loyalty created will not only lead to the retention of this fan, but will also exponentially increase in numbers,** as children, other family members and friends begin to enjoy attending or following too.

Let's examine the case of a match attending fan. A child attends with his parents from the age of 7. For the first few seasons, the cost of membership or a season ticket may be small, perhaps €50 a season (59 dollars approximately), but this ignores the money spent on refreshments, merchandise, programmes and collectibles. So, let's assume at each match the child (from the age of 7 to 12) spends (or the parents spend for them) the following:

- €2.5 (portion of season card cost, based on 20 home games)
- €5 (refreshments during the match)
- €3 (official match day magazine)
- €2.5 (purchase of player cards from club shop to use to collect player autographs)
- €2.5 (portion of cost of €50 for junior sized club shirt at start of season)
- €1 (portion of junior membership, based on €20 per season, to attend social events, to meet the players once a season and to enjoy a Christmas party)

Multiply all of this by 20 and this one child is generating €330 for the club each season (389 dollars, approximately). If the child continues to support the club until he or she is 12,



then we now have €1650 (1,949 dollars). If there are 200 children at your club like this child, then that is €330,000 over a 5-year period (389,748 dollars) –all from one of the groups you are less likely to focus on at a typical club.

So, how do we ensure that these kids keep coming? This is the key question. By simply assuming that once they start coming, they will keep coming, we ignore the other distractions and activities that these age groups are fast consuming. Digital consumption may offer, in part, other club revenue opportunities through the parents opting for streaming services, but unless these are achieved through club's OTT broadcast services, the majority of this income is likely to leave the club.

**It is therefore essential to acknowledge the changing needs of the young fan, the competing distractions, the need to engage the parents in attending until the child is old enough to make his or her own decisions and, most importantly, to deliver an experience that continues to excite and engage them. This then has implications of many dimensions, which includes the following:**

- Fan engagement levels (including the levels of engagement and friendliness of key club match day staff)
- Fan experience levels (including the activities, entertainment and related services to ensure the kids of all ages feel compelled to attend. This might include the mascot, 'magic moments', gaming, arts and craft, and, for older kids, live music and the opportunity to meet players for selfies and autographs)
- Stadium segmentation (including the creation of a family stand or, in the case of Swedish club Djurgårdens, a kids' stand –see other modules in this certificate for more information)
- Safeguarding and support services (including individuals tasked with ensuring the safety of the experience for children)

If you then address these opportunities, what can you expect to achieve? Is it possible to do this even when the team is not winning trophies or playing exciting football?

Back in 2009, with the club in the 2<sup>nd</sup> tier, Cardiff City, from the Welsh capital, began to address the needs of their youngest supporters. In response to research from the then Football League (now EFL) that suggested that family engagement represented a good opportunity for club growth and yet that feedback on family experiences at football was poor, they began to build an experience based on the above factors and on a paper survey undertaken with fans in the then 'family stand' at the recently opened new Cardiff City Stadium.



The families' feedback informed the creation of an improved Family Stand, which it would not just be about cheaper seats, but about a level of experience that would create a positive emotional response from those residents in that part of the stadium.

The experience acknowledged the key factors above. Safeguarding, of course, was a priority, but the club also looked at the 'journey' of the family, from finding information on the website and booking. To ensure that only families would be seated in that part of the ground, the club made sure that you could only book tickets by telephone. By protecting the integrity of this tribune, more and more families would feel at home there, there would be no incidents of anti-social behaviour and parents would feel it was safe to let children go to buy their own refreshments, among other results.

Looking closely at the 'journey', the club focused on levels of staff engagement, leading to stewards who did not just ensure safety and guidance but who also looked to 'go the extra mile' for anyone in need.

The club showed examples of innovation that had not been matched by other clubs in the decade, by rigging their automated entry system to recognise those entering the stadium whose birthday it was. Each season card application requested the date of birth of the purchaser, so when it was your child's birthday and you entered the stadium, three red lights would flash to alert the stewards inside the stadium to this news.

What followed was magical. The family would get to meet a player, the manager or sit in the dugout during the pre-match warmup. They would receive a memento of their visit and return to their seats for the match invigorated in their love for the club.

Everything was tuned to the needs of the family and of young children, and this was illustrated by the increase in the numbers of those buying 'family season tickets' over the next four seasons.

After speaking to Julian Jenkins, the Commercial Manager at the club at the time, it was confirmed that the numbers had increased from 459 in 2009 to over 7,000 in 2012 –all of this, without the club winning a trophy or being promoted to the Premier League (which would eventually happen in 2012).

When one revisits the calculations shown at the start of this theme, it is easy to understand the business case for embarking on these improvements.

But it did not stop there. Cardiff City used the experience to review how the stadium met the life stages of the football fan. They may begin the Family Stand, but where do they go next? The answer would be the Kids Stand in Djurgårdens in Stockholm, perhaps; and

there is also the Canton Stand, where, after several months of consultation and dialogue, the club's Ultra fan groups came together to support the club with noise and colour.

Perhaps, our life stage planning needs to acknowledge what happens as the fan becomes a parent (we circle back to the Family Stand) or if the fan is able to purchase hospitality or to buy a box.

*All of this is predicated on the lifetime value of the fan and on the fact that football appeals to people of all ages. By examining your club's own fanbase and looking into ways of segmenting your stadium to meet their differing needs, not only can you retain and grow your fan base but also exponentially drive much-needed revenue at your club.*

As a footnote to the Cardiff City story, other clubs quickly began to implement similar strategies with Middlesbrough, Doncaster Rovers, Reading, etc., within them. The cumulative effect of this was an overall rise in junior attendance across the EFL of 37% in the first ten years of the scheme designed to foster and inform these approaches: the Family Excellence programme (2007 to date), some 6million new young supports, feeding the life system of our beautiful game (EFL, 2020) and still vibrant and meaningful today.

#### Exercise:

*Research your own club's stadium. To what extent is it segmented to acknowledge the different life stages of the fan?*

*Please write a short assessment of the strengths and opportunities evident in the current stadium plan/layout and make suggestions as to how this could be re-segmented to maximise lifetime attendance.*



## Unit 2.2

### 2.2.1 Characteristics of fan/club relationships

We will re-visit the subject of fan/club relationships frequently in this study, as one of the most obvious manifestations of the emotional value of being a fan is the fact that, **from the 70s onwards, supporters have, in many countries, continued to organise to protest, campaign, achieve change and simply gain a voice within clubs.**



Source: LINDSEY PARNABY/AFP/Getty Images

In the UK, for example, as fan engagement expert Kevin Rye<sup>7</sup> told in a recent interview (Ray, 2020), the **official supporters clubs began to appear in the 50s/60s as a natural evolution of the growing connection between fans and clubs, and in areas such as away travel, they needed to have a formal relationship.**

From the 80s, when football in many parts of Europe was seen as a hotbed of anti-social behaviour and when, in the UK, the then Prime Minister wanted to force fans to carry ID cards, onwards, the official supporters club movement grew to embrace more independent sources of fan representation, including creative and engaging fanzines –

---

<sup>7</sup>Kevin Rye is owner of the fan engagement consultancy Fan Insights: [www.faninsights.co.uk](http://www.faninsights.co.uk)

originally physical, but now in even greater numbers online. One of the most important publications to appear was the monthly magazine *When Saturday Comes*<sup>8</sup>.

The first edition appeared in 1986 and the magazine, with contributors from every corner of the football world, rapidly gained popularity. Today it still exists as an outlet for serious (and less serious) writing on the beautiful game. It refers to itself as 'the half decent football magazine' to situate itself within the circles of ordinary fans, and its content, ranging from serious analysis of local, national and international football at every level to more self-deprecating articles, continues to engage wide numbers of fans, even if there is a proliferation of club-specific titles (both online and physical).

*Independent Supporters Associations evolved naturally in response to intransigence from clubs and the football authorities, and, especially, where it become clear that having an official supporters club did not necessarily mean that fans had a voice or could contribute to decision-making.*

As we have already learned, Brian Lomax created the first Supporters Trust (at Northampton Town, currently in the 4<sup>th</sup> tier of English football), and this movement is described by Kevin Rye (2020) as a form of 'alternative/shadow' government to keep watch on club and football authority activities to protect the interests of fans.

There are, of course, clubs owned partly or entirely by fans too. These include the small, like Wimbledon, whose owner signalled that he wanted to relocate the club to Dublin and then actually did move it to Milton Keynes, some 200 kilometres away from the club's spiritual home in the London Borough of Merton.

In a protest, one of the founding activists said: 'because I want to watch football'. AFC Wimbledon were formed in 2002 by Wimbledon FC supporters angry at the English Football Association's decision to allow their club to move. The old Wimbledon FC, nicknamed the Dons, relocated to Milton Keynes in September 2003 and subsequently changed their name to MK Dons in the summer of 2004.

AFC Wimbledon began at the lowest level of English football: the 8<sup>th</sup> tier. They played their first game (in a league with maybe 50-60 supporters usually present at other clubs' games) in front of nearly 5,000 fans. The strength of this movement and the wider support from other fans disenchanted with the football authorities' failure to address owners who clearly did not have the interests of fans at heart led to AFC Wimbledon rapidly rise

---

<sup>8</sup> Official website: <https://www.wsc.co.uk/>



through the leagues, culminating in their victory in the Conference Play Off Final (the 5<sup>th</sup> tier) in 2011, when they returned to the 4 leagues of the EFL (English Football League).

They now play in the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier –EFL League One– one level above MK Dons. **This story is important because it helps us to complete our tracing of the evolution of fan/club relationships in England from passive bystanders to activists and owners, all propelled and motivated by their strong emotional connection to their clubs: family memories, a sense of place and other deeply felt sensations.**

The fan movement in the UK has been reflected by similar evolutions in other countries. In Spain, Unionistas de Salamanca Club de Fútbol is a football club from Salamanca, in the autonomous community of Castile and León. Founded in 2013, the club plays in Segunda División B – Group 2, holding home games at Estadio Pistas del Helmántico with a 3,000-seat capacity.

After UD Salamanca folded (a club with a storied history, including seasons in the top tier of Spanish football in the early 1980s), a group of supporters founded the club created mainly to preserve the memory of the ‘mother club’.

Several famous people, including Vicente del Bosque, and ordinary fans from around Europe (including your professor) paid for membership of the club to help to support its growth.

On 2 September 2014, Unionistas joined the Primera Provincial de Salamanca, the sixth level of Spanish football. The very next day it played its first official match, losing 0-1 against UD Santa Marta.

The team won promotion to the Primera Regional in April 2015, after beating Real Salamanca Monterrey. Five seasons later and, when football was curtailed in Spain due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the club has played against Real Madrid in the Copa del Rey and remains in the Segunda División B (Group 2).

An article from the *I Paper* newspaper article reads as follows:

It would be remiss and reductionist to label fans as mere customers. There is a much greater connection. Yet for such an important group within a multi-billion-pound industry, they can be marginalised and maligned; herded and corralled; treated with suspicion and contempt. A necessary evil. (Sked, 2017, para. 4-5)

In many of the modules of this course, we have seen how fan engagement in both formal and informal ways can help to narrow the gap between disenfranchised supporters and



clubs apparently more focused on commercial matters. **By giving fans a true voice in the development of the club, by consulting them on key matters and recognising their psychological stake, clubs can maintain the purity of this relationship, while structured dialogue and official supporter representation in football governance can ensure that wider developments, such as new TV deals and their impact on match kick-off time, can be implemented with the fan's voice considered.**

Ultimately, however, as the period of football without fans during the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, football loses its magic. Clubs at every level –even among Europe's most elite leagues, where matchday revenue is but a tiny element of overall income– recognise that, as the banner at the beginning of this unit proclaimed, 'football is nothing without fans'.

### Exercise:

*Are there any 'phoenix' clubs in your national league (i.e., new fan-owned versions of clubs who have formerly 'died')?*

*What makes these clubs different? How do their unique origins manifest themselves (identity, governance, membership, fan engagement, fan experience, etc.)?*

## **2.2.2. Why fans lapse?**

One of the biggest drivers of fans wishing to 'abandon' their club is the gradual loss of the emotional connection. This can manifest itself in many ways, from attending fewer games to feeling the emotional pull fading. This unit explores the reasons for this event: growing more common over the years.

When we studied the evolution of the ultra group in football, we found some common themes, ranging from the importance of the sense of place (stadium and town) **to other factors that, for those fans, diminished their love. These included the increased commercialisation of football and the higher levels of security employed by the authorities.** Ultras, however, are still present at games, with their form of protest continuing to occupy security forces and club ownership.

**For the regular fan, it can often be a club owner whose behaviour, whether risking the club's demise or simply abandoning key beliefs and principles, is the key factor in diminishing this connection.** This is the case at Premier League Newcastle United Club.

'The Toon' as they are known, represent the city of Newcastle, the most northern in England. Its famous black and white stripes have been worn by many of football's most



well-known players over the decades, including Jackie Milburn, Kevin Keegan, David Ginola and Alan Shearer.

It is important in this story to acknowledge that, while the club has experienced two relegations and immediate promotions back to the Premier League, the football performance has become secondary to another story: Newcastle United fans' distrust and dislike of their owner, Mike Ashley.

In an article by the magazine *FourFourTwo* (White, 2020), ten 'moments' are offered to explain this situation, which reached its nadir this same year, as the owner's latest attempt to sell the club foundered on a series of, as yet unclear, reasons.

The reasons given include the re-naming of the famous St James Park as the 'Sports Direct Arena' to promote one of his businesses and the perceived undermining of Newcastle legend, Kevin Keegan, when he returned to manage the club (legally proven, so it would seem, as the club had to pay £2 million in damages).

The author refers to former Newcastle goalkeeper Shay Given's autobiography when detailing the era when Joe Kinnear was manager:

According to Shay Given's autobiography, the appointment of Joe Kinnear as Newcastle manager in 2008 was met with overwhelming disappointment from the players. Kinnear had been out of work for five years and arguably last successful at Wimbledon in the late '90s – sure enough, success didn't follow at Tyneside.

After verbally abusing the media, calling Charles N'Zogbia "Charles Insomnia" in a post-match interview – the Frenchman demanded to leave the club due to this particular incident – and guiding the club to just above the relegation zone, Kinnear was relieved of duties, only to return again later in 2013 as Director of Football. This time he labelled Yohan Cabaye "Yohan Kebab" but didn't make a permanent signing for the Magpies. (White, 2020, para. 16)

When Rafael Benitez came to manage Newcastle, he immediately engaged the fans and became a much-loved figure on Tyneside. However, in spite of receiving the greatest support of any manager in recent times, Benitez's contract was not extended, and he left, among the usual acrimony.

Perhaps the saddest and most damning indictment of the leadership of the club, in Newcastle fans' eyes, was the situation surrounding club legend Jonas Gutierrez. In the article, it says the following:

On the final day of the 2014-15 season, Jonas Gutierrez scored the second goal to ensure Newcastle stayed in the Premier League in a 2–0 win at home to West Ham United. It was an emotional moment, as Gutierrez had fought cancer and undergone chemotherapy.

Gutierrez found out that he was being released by the club, however, from a phone call he overheard (manager) John Carver having. The Argentinian won a disability discrimination lawsuit against Newcastle in 2016, as by not being selected for the team due to his diagnosis meant that he couldn't qualify for an appearances-related bonus. Other charges of unfavourable treatment and harassment were dropped.

Gutierrez's mother spoke at the tribunal to say that Newcastle's role in the episode had made her consider suicide. The case remains one of the saddest and most unfair in recent English football memory, but Gutierrez remains loved by the Toon faithful. (White, 2020, para. 26-28)

Newcastle fans have expressed anger, distrust and dissatisfaction with the owner since 2007. Initially, fans continued to renew season tickets and use other outlets and methods of protest to share their anger. However, at the start of the 2019/20 season, the club was seen to issue 10,000 free season tickets, in response to a boycott by fans in order to give a 'hammer blow' to the image the owner was hoping to create for his businesses by showing a (traditionally) full stadium.

*The Mag*, the Independent Newcastle United fan website, reported at the time what follows:

'Mike Ashley has made the most desperate of moves as the boycott by Newcastle United fans has really hit home' (Robertson, 2019, para. 1).

Nevertheless, while some of the situations described above may make it difficult for the club, owner and fans to reconcile, there are often many 'actionable' reasons for lapsing, which clubs should not ignore.

Season card/ticket/membership renewal is an important part of the season for every club, especially those whose viability depends on match day/ticket revenue. So, identifying and



addressing any specific barriers may lead to the club retrieving income that would otherwise have been lost.

This is where fan engagement approaches can bear fruit. How do many clubs actually contact non-renewing fans to understand the reasons for not doing so? At one club, they decided to telephone each of the 200+ fans who had not renewed, listen to their reasons and, where possible, act either to make it possible for the fan to attend (in a situation, for example, where the fan does not like the people next to him or her) or to influence the range of available season ticket packages (for fans who, because of travel or work arrangements, cannot attend midweek games).

It is possible to survey non-renewing fans or to add a 'tick box' to online renewals so that the fan can give his or her reasons for non-renewal; however, actually calling the fan and talking to them can often, if planned and enacted well, reignite the passion for the club.

In some cases across Europe, there are some examples of players actually making some of the calls. This might mean they cannot make all of the calls, and not every non-renewing fan is going to speak to a player, but the content this produces and the positive communication possibilities that emerge will help the club to show that it wants to keep fans engaged and that it is prepared to do whatever it takes to meet those individual fans' needs.

Exercise:

*You are the Ticketing Manager at a 3<sup>rd</sup> tier club where average season ticket renewals are in the range of 1200-1500, depending on various factors. On this particular season, you learn that 50 –among the club's most long-standing season ticket holders– have not renewed.*

*Please, set out how you would approach this situation and include in your assessment the research you would undertake, the questions you would ask and the potential solutions you would apply to the various emerging scenarios.*

*Please note that you have switched from personal collection of season tickets to online renewal to save the club money, and this may be a factor in non-renewal.*



## 2.2.3 The fan as a critical partner & stakeholder

In other parts of this course, we study the idea of the fan as a 'partner' and the way that relationship could be used to the benefit of both parties and the wider community.

However, football is evolving in some new and interesting directions, including the emerging concept of the fan of the player rather than the club. This means that the fan follows a player's career and that while he or she favours the clubs the player happens to represent, their focus on them is transient.

We have explored in this certificate the importance of creating strong relationships with fans, as this allows them to inform the development of the club and the development of improved experiences, among other matters. However, when the fan follows the player, can we still do this? And, if so, how do we do this?

We also need to acknowledge that, at this point, we are usually talking about global superstars, such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Neymar or Leo Messi, but with the women's game growing at a rapid rate and the concept of fans following players very much as part of the dynamics, we must regard this as an important development and must understand how best to capture that fan's perspective.

To illustrate this and to provide a new perspective on this area of fan engagement, we are going to review two recent reports on the modern football fan and future trends.

One of the issues mentioned in both the Copa90's 'Modern Football Fan 2.0' and ECA's 'Future of the Football Fan' reports is the evolution of a new and challenging **concept in football fandom: the fan of the player, not the club**. This concept, familiar in sports like Formula One, is clearly well known. Fans build an attachment to a driver and, when the driver signs for another construction team, they take their support to that team.

Women's football, especially since its re-emergence in the past decade, has also experienced this concept. **There are various reasons for it, including the fact that the accessibility of the game means that you can get to meet and get to know players personally so it is natural that these stronger bonds may lead fans to follow the players throughout their career, changing allegiance with every new club.**

It is also possible that the number of failing clubs (caused in part by the rapid professionalization of the game) may lead players, who may feel an emotional attachment to a club, but who may have to play elsewhere because it has folded. It is natural that fans may follow or take an interest in the player's subsequent destination clubs.



With the emergence of ‘Galácticos’<sup>9</sup> in the last decade, the sport and its commercial partners **have seen these players as vital to the globalisation of the game.** One by-product of this is **the emergence of ‘player fans’ –people who follow players through their career, in preference to following the clubs they play for.**

FC Barcelona and Juventus have a combined number of 132 million Instagram followers while Leo Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo alone have 405 million<sup>10</sup>. **Of course, this could be mostly or partly explained by the fact that fans of clubs will naturally follow their own players, but with the increasing power of the player in terms of individual rights, the concept of the ‘entre-player’ (entrepreneur) and the proliferation of player-branded products, it would appear that the direction of travel is in favour of the ‘player fan’.**

How this affects the club/fan dynamic has yet to be significantly studied, but it does beg several questions.

The ECA Report (‘Fan of the Future: Defining Modern Football Fandom’) that we have referred to in other modules **of this course identifies a segment among football fans which it calls ‘Icon Imitator’ and defines it as follows:**

- They represent the youngest segment of fans: age 13-34 and 57% male.
- They have an increasing and moderate interest in football.
- They generally prefer to play rather than to watch.
- They find and follow specific players, who they see as relatable (common appreciation and use of social media, etc.)
- They are less focused on competitions but on the biggest football games (UEFA Champions League final, FIFA World Cup Finals, etc.)

The ECA report explores the motivations for being fans of clubs in 2020 when the research was carried out. It continues as follows:

Reasons for supporting a club can vary –playing style, values, and success of the club all appear to be important drivers for many fans. Whilst club success is an important factor for over a quarter (28%), football fans are often looking for a connection with their club, including their playing style (33%), values (30%), location (25%), or because people close to them also support the team (parents 26%, friends 20%). Individual players are least likely to be driving club choice

---

<sup>9</sup> Global superstars. First used in reference to Real Madrid’s team (David Beckham, for example)

<sup>10</sup> Instagram data checked on 11/9/20



among fans generally, though prove more important for the Icon Imitator group. (ECA, 2020, p. 25)

*So, we have a picture where present statistics reflect our current knowledge, in that there are multiple reasons for following a club, including perceived or past success, family, sense of place or other connections, but where one other new concept is likely to grow further.*

We also know that this is presently a factor of geography and culture, with only 6% of fans in England likely to regard favourite players as the basis for club support while nearly one third of respondents in India giving this reason for choosing their club.

*When regarding fans as critical partners of clubs and the systems clubs should put in place to support this, the idea of 'player' supporting clubs gives credence to the idea that clubs should also allow fans to influence an individual player: perhaps, in areas like social responsibility, sponsors and interests.*

We can summarise this as follows:

- At present, the concept of the 'fan of the player' relates to the super-elite clubs and players such as Ronaldo, Neymar and Messi.
- In the women's game, this concept is more established and, as a result, not just present among the elite. Fans follow a player from their emergence as a young prospect and through their career.
- Most of these fans are young, play rather than watch football and are big users of digital technology.

So, building relationships with these fans with the objective of improving their experience must, by definition, follow different approaches from those already described in these studies.

Exercise:

*How seriously do you regard 'fans supporting players' as a significant evolution in the future?*

*Write a short assessment of its impact (1) among elite clubs and (2) among women's clubs.*



## 2.2.4 Fan engagement as a tool to address security and safety challenges

As anyone who loves football knows, it is a game that is characterised by passion. The strong psychological connections that bind fans to clubs manifest themselves in lots of ways, from celebrating victories against our rivals to *schadenfreude*, where we actually celebrate when our rivals lose (even when we are not playing against them).

We know that this passion can often spill over at games and cause anti-social behaviour, which, in turn, leads to stronger and stronger security force presence.

We also know that many ultra groups have grown as a result of their impatience with the growing intrusion that security forces have on their experiences. This may range from being *kettled* –a security procedure where groups of fans have their freedom to move around restricted so that they do not come into direct contact with opposing fans– to simply having more and more intrusive regulations and laws, such as not being able to drink alcohol within view of the pitch (professional leagues in England), to not being able to have a drink at all in the stadium (elite level in Scotland).

When you factor in the negative attitudes to football fans that abound (albeit often predicated on incorrect perceptions) and the long-standing tendency to keep fans ‘at arm’s length’ and not engage with them (as we have studied here), relationships between fans and clubs, leagues, federations and security authorities can deteriorate, being some ultra groups a good example of this.

Football has a tendency, in many countries, to address fans as ‘second class citizens’, often using pejorative tones or overly direct language. Stadium signage is not welcoming, but carries a threat with sanctions often advertised, and stewards can, in all parts of the stadium (even in family areas), appear passive or passive-aggressive. Police presence can be significant, and, with the police dressed in riot gear and carrying weapons, this does not create a positive atmosphere but quite the opposite.

All of this combines to make fan engagement difficult, to reduce the opportunities for fans and clubs to work together positively and, most importantly, to make it difficult for the game to grow in some parts of the world.

Yes, of course, some fan groups are troublesome. There is occasionally violence and law-breaking, and, because the game is a microcosm of society, there will always be a percentage of fans who will behave badly. **However, ‘to tar everyone with the same brush’ –to assume all fans have criminal intent– is far more damaging in the long term for the game than the occasional example of anti-social behaviour or lawlessness.**



One of the challenges in the UK is for the security forces to recognise the advancements made in fan engagement from the late 80s. The Hillsborough Stadium disaster, with the loss of 96 innocent fans, led to a sea change in stadium safety, but the progress in terms of the attitude of local regulators and security forces has been much slower.

One of the people who has done the most to acknowledge this and to address it is former senior policeman Owen West. West, from Bradford in the north of England, has gone on to study the security approaches to fans and identified their weaknesses, specifically their tendency to be based on coercive approaches rather than on communication and engagement.

*In a recent paper, he and a colleague trace the evolution of reforms in policing with regard to football and the idea that there needed to be a 'paradigm shift' in attitudes and approaches where stronger dialogue and engagement replace coercion and force and where respecting the human rights of fans can, as a result, support public order strategy more effectively (Hoggett & West, 2018).*

So, in effect, we are seeing how fan engagement strategies can help make the resolution of safety and security challenges a collaborative effort, based on dialogue and communication, rather than something achieved through force.

The emergence of pyrotechnical devices at football matches, once just the preserve of one part of football, is now seen in leagues everywhere as a fandom expression of the strongest level of support. Images of pyrotechnics are also commonly seen in the promotional videos which are created by broadcasters and yet, they are, in the most part, dangerous and capable of causing serious injury or death.

Football security management has been limited to coercive approaches, but this excludes relationship-building and the opportunities this brings to more closely and effectively engage supporters.

Because of the passions associated with football (the rivalries and the cultures), it is not possible to completely remove all elements of anti-social and illegal behaviour –but, as this is a microcosm of society, nor would one expect this to be achievable. But what we can do is to greatly improve approaches by moving from a force and coercion-based approach to one of engagement.

### **More specifically, what do we mean by fan engagement in this context?**

We have, in other parts of this certificate, studied the concept of 'social identity' and provided links to research in this area. Inter-group dynamics is one key area of this research, and, according to the work by Hoggett and West, **the theory suggests the**



**traditional means used by the police to characterise 'risk' as related merely to the presence or absence of individuals or groups that can be categorised as such ... are too rigid'** (Hoggett & West, 2018)

The dynamics of crowd behaviour at football are, to some extent, influenced by interactions between people in the crowd and the security forces police (Reicher, 1996).

The researchers assert that where fans perceive police actions to be unnecessary, heavy handed or indiscriminate, this increases the likelihood that those in these crowds will understand that conflict with the police is, in these circumstances, permissible or appropriate.

*So, to summarise, heavy handed policing can actually make things worse while the opposite approach, where the police engage in what may be termed 'legitimate' inter-group activities, 'the potential for conflict is underlined' and 'greater opportunities are recognised for avoiding confrontation' (Hoggett & West, 2018).*

One of the ways in which this move from deterrence to a more consent-based approach is to implement the idea of **Police Liaison Teams (PLTs)**. The elaborated social identity model (Reicher, 1996) sets out **four strategic dimensions**:

- **Education:** where the police gather information to inform their approaches and better understand the intentions and motivations of those within the crowds who may pose a disorder risk.
- **Facilitation:** where, with better knowledge of individual's motivations, the police can work to make it easier for those people to manifest their activities in a legal way.
- **Communication:** where levels of dialogue, interaction and engagement between the Police and members of the crowds improve.
- **Differentiation:** where, instead of enforcing control over the entire group, the Police seek to identify the individuals and make appropriate interventions to solve issues.

At a tactical level, the PLTs engage with the 'organisers' within the crowds both before and during the event with the relationship characterised by open dialogue so that, just in the way we have described fan engagement in this certificate, relationships can be strengthened by mutual understanding and growing trust. Ultimately, this approach allows the Police to better assess each individual situation and address using the above four strategic dimensions, rather than taking a 'blanket approach' which risks inflaming the situation and leading to more public disorder.



The paper by Hoggett and West referred to is provided in the references at the end of this module, and, in it, students will find lots of feedback from fans and Police on their experiences. The positive impact of the above PLT approach is clear and neatly summarised in this comment from one of the participating Police officers:

At West Bromwich Albion v Tottenham Hotspur, we were allowed to go up to (a) pub and engaged well with some definite prominent figures from Tottenham Hotspur, and the feedback was good with them comparing us positively against the policing styles that they were used to in London. (Hoggett & West, 2018,)

*What this final theme of this unit has shown is that the concept of 'fan engagement' lends itself not only to activities involved in attracting, engaging, retaining and creating 'high quality fans' (Lambert, 2020) but also in ensuring that the conditions feeding many of the security problems in football are addressed with the result that fewer security resources are required and external perceptions of the game grow more positive.*

Exercise:

- *How are football fans perceived in your country (positively or negatively)?*
- *Why do you think this is the case?*
- *How would you characterise the security forces/Police approach to crowd disorder in your country?*
- *Would the approaches described in this theme improve public order at football matches?*



## References

**Discrimination reports in football rise by a third.** (2019). *Kick It Out*.  
<https://www.kickitout.org/news/discrimination-reports-in-football-rise-by-a-third>

**ECA.** (2020). *Fan of the Future: Defining Modern Football Fandom*.  
<https://www.ecaeurope.com/media/4802/eca-fan-of-the-future-defining-modern-football-fandom.pdf>

**EFL Clubs highlight importance of Family.** (2020, 10 September) English Football League  
<https://www.efl.com/news/2020/september/efl-clubs-highlight-importance-of-family/>

**English Football League.** (2019). *2019 Supporters Survey*.  
<https://www.efl.com/contentassets/5fd7b93168134ee0b9da11fa8e30abd0/efl-supporters-survey-2019-report.pdf>

**Hoggett, J. & West, O.** (2018). Police Liaison Officers at Football: Challenging Orthodoxy through Communication and Engagement. *Oxford University Press*, pay032  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/police/pay032>

**Lambert, D.** (The Fan Experience Experience Podcast). (2020, 14 July). [audio podcast] The Fan Experience Company. Episode 11.  
<https://fanexperienceco.com/podcast/special-dan-lambert-bohemians-fc/>

**Not every disability is visible.** (n. d.). [Online image]. *Crohns & Colitis UK*.  
<https://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/news/your-views-on-not-every-disability-is-visible>.

**Pride in football.** (2020). *Pride in football*.  
<https://prideinfootball.co.uk/#:~:text=Welcome%20to%20Pride%20in%20Football,gam,e%20or%205000%20at%20Wembley>.

**Robertson, J.** (2019, December). Boycott forces Mike Ashley to give away 10,000 FREE NUFC season tickets to protect Sports Direct advertising. *The Mag*.  
<https://www.themag.co.uk/2019/12/boycott-forces-mike-ashley-to-give-away-10000-free-nufc-season-tickets-to-protect-sports-direct-advertising-newcastle-united/>

**Reicher, S. D.** (1996) 'The Battle of Westminster': Developing the Social Identity Model of Crowd Behaviour in Order to Explain the Initiation and Development of Crowd Conflict. *The European Journal of Social Psychology*, 26(1), pp. 115-134.  
[https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1099-0992\(199601\)26:1%3C115::AID-EJSP740%3E3.0.CO;2-Z](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-0992(199601)26:1%3C115::AID-EJSP740%3E3.0.CO;2-Z)



**Rye, K.** (2020) Unpublished interview conducted by Mark Bradley

**Sked, J.** (2017, 5 September). The Evolution of the Football Fan and what it says about the game. *The I Paper*.

<https://inews.co.uk/sport/football/evolution-football-fan-paul-brown-87981>

**White, M.** (2020, 17 April). Why do Newcastle fans hate Mike Ashley? 10 of his worst moments as owner. *FourFourTwo Magazine*.

<https://www.fourfourtwo.com/features/newcastle-united-mike-ashley-worst-moments-owner-fan-supporter-relationship-joe-kinnear-alen-pardew-alan-shearer>

