

The Effects Of Football Stars' Transfer On The Consumer Behavior Of The Fans

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Introduction

Football is a widely played and watched game in the world, with over 200 teams and 24 per cent viewership worldwide. This high percentage of viewers, in turn, contributes to high loyalty to football teams, clubs and players. Football fans are known to be one of the most passionate groups in the world, as they have been seen crying, rioting and throwing celebratory parties over the outcome of the matches. It is part of their identity, and Sports Managers are aware of this fact as they use it in branding and merchandising. Sales go through the roof whenever there is a new premier league or World Cup; however, the sales are affected more when a major player transfers from one club to another. Acquisition of a player is extremely expensive as the club giving away their player is losing potential business, and the club gaining will see future profits. This acquisition of players is called "Transfer", and the club that acquires the player pays a transfer fee to the previous club of the player, excluding the signing of the player. For instance, Paris Saint-Germain F.C. paid approximately 489 million euros for signing with Neymar da Silva Santos Junior, including the transfer fee. This transfer broke the world record for Football Transfers (Jones, 2018).

Having a strong roster of professional players under a club's belt not only ensures great performance in the matches but also guarantees high merchandise sales, thanks to the consumer behaviour of the fans. Each player represents a different set of inspirations to the fans, and to feel closer to the players, these fans buy official merchandise and even the products that are endorsed by these players. Brands have reported a rise in the sales of their products since they were endorsed by players like Neymar, Lionel Messi, and Cristiano Ronaldo. This paper will explore the effect a player's transfer has on the consumer behaviour of the fans and the extent of it throughout recent years.

Theoretical Framework

In 2014, the United States of America reported that the sports industry was valued at 213 billion dollars, with 32 billion made through the sales of merchandise to the fans of each sport. This shows that the major revenue is made through the fans, so there is a need for [research on consumer behaviour](#). However, the sports industry is an extremely broad topic and cannot be covered in this paper, so the focus of the study is going to be the consumer behaviour of the fans when a football player transfers from one football club to another. This will considerably narrow down the scope of research and give a more in-depth look into the consumer behaviour of the fans.

As previously stated, the acquisition of a player by a club is called a “Transfer”, and this is done to strengthen the roster of the club in hopes of securing high profits in future matches. These transfers are of great interest to the fans of football, and the Football Clubs are aware of this. Due to this high interest, the transfer is highly commercialized, and each club is looking for new ways to make high profits through the consumers. To understand this behaviour, one must first look at the definition of consumer behaviour; “The process of taking action and decisions while making a purchase of goods and services by the people who make the purchase” (Blackwell et al., 2006). At this point, football has become more of a business than a sport, and every aspect of the sport is commercialized so much that even the fans can detect the disingenuous attempts of “connecting with the fans” as marketing ploys.

Fan loyalty has been affected severely, and their spirits are diminishing, so to rekindle their bond with football, player transfers have become vital. The transfer of the players piques the interest of the fans as they are curious to see the future performance of the league with new player placements. This is also the time when T-shirt sales skyrocket apart from premier leagues and World Cup matches.

In August of 2021, Lionel Messi announced his transfer to Paris Saint-Germain (PSG), and with it, new official merchandise with the player’s ensemble was introduced. Fans waited in lines outside PSG’s official stores to buy the new jerseys. It was estimated that nearly 830,000 T-shirts were sold within 24 hours of the launch, breaking the Christian Ronaldo record of 520,000 T-shirts sold in 24 hours. This record was previously held by Neymar, who sold 10,000 T-shirts in 24 hours when he transferred to PSG from Barcelona (Gorsler, 2021). However, in September of 2021, Ronaldo took back the title of most T-shirts sold from Messi when he announced his transfer back to Manchester United. His “No. 7” jersey was put on pre-order at the price of 31 dollars apiece (Statista, 2021). The jerseys made approximately 45 million dollars within the first 12 hours of the pre-order. This revenue crushed the high revenue record set by Messi’s kits sales (Silbert, 2021).



Figure 1 Revenue Generated by Top 10 Football Teams through T-shirt sales (Statista, 2021)

After the official transfers are made before the new season, replica kits are manufactured for the fans to provide a more inclusive experience. Fans adorn their teams’ colours to show their support during the event, regenerating millions of dollars in revenue for the Football club. The ten leading football teams of Europe have generated 1 billion dollars for the season of 2020-21 from replica kit supplies, with a total of 1.58 billion dollars of revenue generated across the 255 clubs. Sixty-three per cent of this is reeled in by Real Madrid, Barcelona, Manchester United, Liverpool, Paris Saint-Germain, Chelsea, Bayern Munich, Arsenal and Juventus. The report presented by GlobalData confirmed that these ten clubs had seen increased revenue between 71 per cent and 442 per cent in value, which is more than the previously generated revenue. Manchester United generated the highest revenue with its deal with PUMA, which was worth 86 million dollars per season (GD, 2020).



Figure 2 Percentage of Revenue generated by the top 10 Football teams through replica kit deals (GD, 2020).

Over the years, the replica kit supply demand has increased drastically and is still on the rise. This revenue was only 50 per cent in the past six years. However, it increased by 200 per cent when the top 10 football clubs signed new agreements with sports brands. This increased the quality of the replica kits manufactured, and the fans were assured that they would be getting the same product as the team or player they supported. This is where their consumer behaviour comes into play, as the product that is presented to them is manufactured by the same company that supplies the kits to the team. This sense of closeness drives the fans to buy the kits, even if they are expensive. For them, it is like being part of a team, and this feeling makes them buy products that have no practical use in daily life. Their passion drives them to buy official products, and the football clubs provide them with more variety so that they keep coming back for new products. This behaviour of the fans is not a shallow need for attachment; it is the degree of love and emotional attachment that they feel for a particular football team (Marquette et al., 2017).

Analysis

The sports industry is one of the most profitable industries at this time, and this is due to its high marketability. Fans of each sport are vital not only for the boosted morale of the team but also for an added revenue stream that generates the industry billions of dollars every year. Football clubs are no different from the rest of the sports industry, and they use every aspect of this sport to increase profits. In this regard, player transfers are treated as events that hype the fans and make them buy new merchandise to show support for the player. This also ensures future sales when a new season of matches is about to begin, as the fans will be willing to buy more merchandise. Sports consumption has always been focused on fans' behaviour, and it is through studying this behaviour that the Sports industry can monetize many aspects of sports. These not only include jersey sales but also match tickets, souvenirs, replica footballs, etc. However, just studying fan behaviour for future sales is not enough, as their interests are ever-changing, and in the past, this has caused a decrease in sales. That is the reason why player transfers play a vital role in reviving the interest of football fans. Spending on transfers elevates the performance of a team and the purchase behaviour of the fans.

Although an unsuccessful player transfer can negatively impact the team's performance and fans' behaviour, it is a risk that most clubs are willing to take as the annual revenue reports present more profits than losses. Changes in transfer policy have had a great impact on fan behaviour and have helped make it more predictable, considering that a lack of fan interest has caused a deep financial crisis in football previously. Of course, the performance of a team is also responsible for driving sales, but highlighting each player during the transfer allows the clubs to present each player's strength individually. This also gives the players a spotlight and allows the fans to assess the player's capabilities. This is a marketing strategy that makes the consumer feel in control and gains their trust, which in turn ensures increased sales and revenue (Khudiyev, 2020).

Findings

This study shows that the fans of every sport have been a vital part of revenue for decades. However, the behaviour of fans is ever-changing and has resulted in a decrease in revenue many times. For this reason, the Football industry has been changing its transfer policies in a way that would make fan behaviour more predictable so that the revenue stream generated through them is not affected negatively. This has worked as the top 10 football clubs have doubled their revenues over the years, raking in millions of dollars over every season. Fans love to show their support for their favourite players, and the transfers are the right time for them to show their increased support for that player (Ronald & Jean-Pierre, 2019). Although most consumer behaviour is driven by the need for a product or service and its economic value in the market, sports fans' behaviour is purely emotional, as they are ardent devotees and enthusiasts. They are not driven by the reasoning behind their purchase of a product but rather by their emotional fulfilment. It is an unstable market as it depends on the irrational choices of the consumer rather than the rational ones. However, new merchandise also includes products that can be used on a daily basis, but the major revenue comes from football kits (Khudiyev, 2020).

Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the effect players' transfers have on the consumer behaviour of the fans. The data shown represent the way the fans bring high revenue just through the T-shirt sales. This is due to their emotional attachment to the players and the teams, so to show their support, they are willing to buy merchandise even though it is not a rational purchase. Many changes to transfer policies have been made to keep the fans interested in the sports so that profits can be ensured.

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