

Research On The Impact Of “Fan Circle Culture” On The Sports Industry From The Perspective Of Fan Economy

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Abstract:

With the vigorous development of the global sports industry, more and more people are paying attention to the sports industry, but it is inevitable that fandom culture will be brought into the sports industry. The paper is based on the analysis of the current situation of the Chinese table tennis team and the Premier League’s fandom, this article concludes the causes and impact of the fan circle culture. The research has found that fan circle culture has both positive and negative effects on the sports industry. If fandom culture is used rationally, it will promote the development of the sports industry, and relevant measures will also be taken to avoid the adverse consequences of excessive fandom. Otherwise, it will cause some serious consequences like damage to the reputation of athletes and clubs and affect the normal progress of the game. This article also analyzes the causes of rice circle culture, which can be used to reduce adverse effects.

Keywords: Fan circle; Sports industry; Sport event; Club management.

1. Introduction

The sport industry is a rising industry in China, even in the world. An increasing amount of sport events are held around the world. Thus, more people concentrate on sports and treat sport as an essential part of their life. Many people choose to watch some matches on TV and online. According to the data reported by CCTV, as of February 17, the total number of cross-media contacts related to the Beijing Winter Olympics on the platform of CCTV has reached 48.474 billion times, which consists of 31.973 billion times on TV and 16.501 billion times on new media multi-platforms [1]. It is clear that sport events are more fascinating to attract people’s attention and it is also unavoidable that some people bring fan circle culture to sports.

Fan circle culture can cause both positives and negatives in sport industry. So, it’s vital to find out how it affects sport industry and how to utilize fan culture properly to create more benefits and what we should do to reduce the risks brought by fan circle culture. Some current research have recognized the disadvantages of fan circle culture and provide some suggestions about how to governance this phenomenon. For example, On the causes and harms of the “fandomization” of sports in the social media era. However, how can people use the source of fan circle to make some development in sport industry and reach a balance between profits and risks need further research. This

research can help some clubs and sport companies get a correct understanding of the impact of “fan circle culture” in sport and use this culture properly to promote the development of sport industry.

This research is based on the concept of fan culture and fan economy to illustrate the current situation of “fan culture” on sports industry and analyze specific cases to find out the causes and effects. Finally, the essay explores some suggestions about how various events and clubs can correctly utilize the trend of fans in the sports circle to promote event IP, increase the club’s visibility, and attract more viewers and fans. In addition, how to reduce the negative impact of fandom culture on competitions and athletes.

This paper will explain the current situation of fandom in sports circles and conduct case analysis, and analyze the specific causes and effects, as well as how to correctly utilize the trend of fandom in sports circles. This paper is developed with case study and systematic review. At the end of the paper, some suggestions are also provided.

2. The Concept Of Fan Circle Culture And Fan Circle Economy And The Overall Current Situation Of Fandom In The Sports Circle

2.1 Concept Definition

Fan circle is primarily based on interests as standards

of division, especially a fan group chiefly composed of young people, a circle formed by people gathering around a common celebrity. Fan circle culture is a group culture formed by fans based on common hobbies. In this circle, people can communicate without obstacles and find a common spiritual home, which meets the young people who long for recognition and seek spiritual comfort [2]. Fan circle economy is the economic phenomenon and behaviors generated by the organized and large-scale fan circle members. It is a highly modern market economic system and has its own development and growth mechanism [3]. Brand community of fans engagement, social capital platform and business operation behavior is the base of fan economy [4]. Some fans will pay very high prices to buy tickets to watch their idols' performances and will also buy related peripherals and souvenirs. Some fans will even inquire about the idol's formation information, pick them up at the airport, and the most serious ones will inquire about the idol's private information. and do something illegal.

2.2 The Overall Current Situation Of Fandom In The Sports Circle

The situation of fandom in the sports circle is a very common phenomenon, it can be seen easily in daily life. It is similar to entertainment circle, many people, especially youngers are crazy about some athletes or some clubs. However, they do not concentrate on sports itself, they may only focus on the appearance. During the matches, this phenomenon is very severe. Some fans will buy the tickets and watch the match offline. Meanwhile, they may make some flags to support their favorite athletes and clubs. In order to have more common topics with peers, more people may be drawn into fandom by their friends. It is superficially that the fandom can bring many benefits to sport industry, but there are also many impolite behaviors. Many people say nasty things to others in order to defend their favorite athletes on social media. What's more, some people may do something that violate ethics and even laws on the field and in life. It will be discussed in detail later in the research.

3. The Case Study About Situation Of Fan Circle In The Sports Circle

3.1 Chinese Table Tennis Team

The process of fandom in Chinese table tennis team can be divided into 3 stages.

2012-2016: The fandom in Chinese table tennis team originated in 2012, London Olympic. An awesome athlete called Zhang Jike got the qualification to take part in the Olympic Games. Due to his handsome face, many young

girls were attracted to be his fans especially after he won the men's singles champion in London Olympic. From then on, there was a dramatic increase of the fans of Chinese table tennis team. Among these fans, young girls and women accounted for a considerable proportion. Because they were easily fascinated by the appearance of athletes and were willing to spend a plenty of money to meet their idols.

The first phenomenon which reflects the Chinese table tennis team is eroded by fan circle culture is the Microblog. Since 2012, there was an increasing amount of people follow their favorite athletes on Microblog. When athletes post news on Microblog, these fans would leave some comments in the comment area to encourage athletes to perform better in the match. Besides, these fans may go to the competition site to support and cheer for their idol athletes. Until this period, the fandom in Chinese table tennis team was still normal.

2016-2020: However, with the development of Internet and social media, more people can get the information from the internet. Besides, it also provided people more opportunities to communicate with each other. At this time, some fans insult and spread rumors about other athletes to protect their favorite athletes. The phenomenon appeared around 2016, the Rio Olympic. From 2016 to 2020, this phenomenon has become the norm.

2020-2024: The Tokyo Olympic marked the begin of extreme fandom in Chinese table tennis team. Owing to the technology is more advanced than before, most people are accessible to the internet. Thus, the behavior which is expressed before becoming more popular. Furthermore, with the improvement of living standard, some people choose to watch the match live, absolutely including these fans. It seems like a good behavior for audience to cheer for athletes, however, more and more impolite behavior appeared at the competition venue. For example, some people will use flash to disturb athletes when a player serves and using a laser pointer to interfere with the normal progress of the game. Others may make insulting remarks about athletes and abuse them during the match. These bad behaviors will affect the normal conduct of the game and affect the athletes.

What is more serious is that athletes' personal safety and privacy are at risk. For instance, in 2023, a member in Chinese table tennis athlete called Fan Zhendong called the police that someone sneaked into his room while he was training to steal his personal belongings. According to the investigation, the people who entered his room is his fan. She used some illegal method to get the room number and the card. Besides, in 2024, Fan Zhendong's ID card was stolen to buy some items.

As for the broadcasting method, there is still not a chan-

nel or a platform for table tennis. Also, the Chinese table tennis team doesn't have an account on social media, thus, fans could not follow it and they could not have a good communication with fans either. Only by understanding the thoughts of fans can the Chinese table tennis team formulate effective measures to deal with the negative impacts of fan circle culture. Otherwise, these negative impacts will become more severe. So, it is necessary for Chinese table tennis team to have valid communication with fans and spectators instead of only focusing on training and matches.

In conclusion, athletes' safety, reputation, daily life, training plan and match progress are all seriously threatened by these dysfunctional fans at present. The origin of these problems is the fandom and fan culture came into sports circle.

3.2 The Fandom In Premier League

The Premier League is the world's top football league. It was officially established in 1992 and has a total of 20 participating teams. Since it was established, it gradually attracted a range of spectators and fans. Fans will choose a home team and support it, during this period, they finish the changes of their roles, from a spectator to a real fan. The sport fandom in Premier league can be divided into 2 parts: online and offline.

The first aspect is offline. Some fans would affect athletes' not only during the match but also in their personal life. For example, Jacob Harry Maguire, an athlete from Man United had some conflicts with fans of Man City. Man United and Man City are bitter rivals, so their fans have certain conflicts both on and off the court. When Maguire was on holiday in Greece, some Manchester City fans had some conflicts with him. They not only taunted Maguire but also humiliated Manchester United and even harassed the women around them. Maguire was very angry and kicked them to the ground. After this, Maguire was arrested by local police.

In 2022, after Manchester City reversed Aston Villa's game, many Manchester City fans rushed to the field to celebrate and set off fireworks. Some extreme fans even attacked Aston Villa goalkeeper Olsen, which was investigated by the club and the police. These dysfunctional fans disrupt the order of the game and threaten the safety of the players, these are the negative impact caused by fan circle culture.

The next part is online. An England fan was not satisfied with the performance of Rashford, Sancho and Saka. Some offensive pictures and comments against Rashford, Sancho and Saka were posted by him on social media. Some netizens immediately called the police after seeing the relevant content. The fan was sentenced to eight

weeks in prison, suspended for 12 months, plus three fines totaling £1,903.

Especially in the context of technological advances such as the Internet and new forms of digital media. Technological advances facilitate the rapid spread of information, materials and images around the world. Mobile phones and the Internet, and the powerful combination of the two, have given rave fan communities a new way to communicate, gather and express themselves [5].

4. The Analysis Of Why Fan Circle Culture Comes Into Sport And Its Impact

4.1 The Reasons Why Fan Culture Comes Into Sports

4.1.1 From the capital view

In order to get more attention, capital will beautify athletes and push more information about them to people to achieve the purpose of gaining attention. At the same time, it is also to extract the commercial value of athletes and bring more benefits to the company, striving to maximize profits. The capital market will dig deeper into the fan economy brought by athletes [6]. For example, when an athlete endorses a certain product, the higher the exposure of the athlete, the exposure it will bring to the product will be invisible, and sales will increase, thus bringing more profits to the company behind it. The spending power of fan groups is extremely strong. They will do whatever they can to buy items related to their favorite athletes in order to achieve the effect of chasing stars. To sum up, in order to increase profits, some large companies deliberately create images of athletes and expose them heavily on social media to attract fans and encourage fans to consume, which will bring more profits to the company.

4.1.2 From sports industry view

In recent years, many countries realized the importance of sports industry and devoted a range of resource to develop sports industry and promote economy. Currently, an increasing number of people concentrate on sports including sports, stadium, fitness and so on. It can be said that sports have penetrated into every aspect of our lives.

For example, there are more and more sports events, and social media gives these events a broad space to spread, allowing people to see more athletes' wonderful performances. In the Asian Games held in 2023, Chinese table tennis player Wang Chuqin performed well and won four championships. Such deeds spread widely on social platforms, and Wang Chuqin gained a large number of fans. This is thanks to the development of the sports industry. If high-level events such as the Asian Games are not successfully held, there will be relatively fewer people who

know the athletes.

Nowadays, more and more competitions are open to the public, and many people will choose to participate in the competition to experience the sport. After that, if the participants fall in love with the sport, they will do their best to learn as much as possible about the sport, and inevitably they will learn about some of the best athletes and look up to them as idols. For example, some marathon events, amateur basketball games. It depends on the development of sports industry because it provides public a wonderful way to acknowledge sports and athletes.

4.1.3 From technology view

The reason why fandom in sports is such a large scale is that the technology develops rapidly especially internet. The development of social media has provided unique conditions for the formation of fandom in sports. For example, Weibo's super chat allows fans of athletes to gather together and publish entries related to athletes, which makes it easy for people to locate these fan groups and news about athletes. On social media, speech is relatively free. People can speak freely about their opinions, express their love for athletes and communicate with other users [7].

To sum up, the development of internet provides fans a perfect environment to establish their circle in sports.

4.2 The Impacts Of Fandom In Sports

The impacts can be divided into positive and negative impacts. The first part is positive impacts. Fans can bring considerable benefits to companies and clubs, such as game tickets, consumption during the game, souvenirs, jerseys and peripheral purchases. The spending power of fans is much stronger than that of ordinary audiences, which is also a source of profit for clubs and sports companies. In addition, fans can help clubs or sports companies promote club culture and sportsmanship, let more people understand the company culture, and help attract more people to watch the game and become fans, creating greater value. Finally, fans will discuss sports and club-related matters through social media, which will increase the club's exposure in people's eyes, increase social attention, help attract new fans to join, and create profits for the company.

The second part is negative impacts. Excessive fandom may cause damage to the reputation of athletes and clubs, because people often spread rumors on the Internet. In serious cases, it may also affect the mental health of athletes, leading to a sharp decline in competitive status. Some extreme fans attack other athletes in order to protect the image of their favorite athletes. This is illegal behavior, and fandom culture will further promote this behavior.

This will expose athletes to verbal and online violence. In addition, the fandom in sports will also disrupt the normal order of sports. Some fans, under the guise of protecting their idols, inquire about athletes' itineraries and daily arrangements, and highlight their close relationship with their idols by picking them up at the airport and giving them gifts. Doing so not only violates the privacy of athletes, but is also a waste of public resources. It will also affect athletes' daily training or competition status [7]. What's more, dysfunctional fans will do some extreme things during the game, such as hitting athletes in the factory with plastic bottles or rushing down the stands to punch and kick the athletes, seriously threatening the lives of the athletes. This kind of behavior will have a great impact on the progress of the game and greatly reduce the enjoyment of watching the game.

5. How Various Events And Clubs Can Correctly Take Advantage Of The Trend Of Fandom In Sports Circles And How To Reduce The Negative Impact Of Fandom Culture On Competitions And Athletes

The first point is to make good use of fans' enthusiasm. Fans are the foundation of the game and the club. The club can give some discounts to fans who have supported the team for a long time, such as discounts on souvenirs, free visits to the team's locker room, gifts of players' autographs. Such behavior can not only retain the original fans, but also attract new fans to join.

Besides, event organizers and clubs can promote on social media. Clubs and tournament organizers can do some more in-depth analysis of their fans on social media, including demographics, interests and engagement patterns [8]. Adopt different marketing strategies for different age groups. Taking care of audiences of every age group and reduce fan churn rate. According to the survey results, if you post content with a large audience on social media, fans on social media will also repost the content and attract more people to watch it. This is also one of the ways to increase the number of fans.

In the field of purchasing tickets, fans can also do a favor. Event organizers and clubs interact more with fans on social platforms and provide certain discounts when fans purchase tickets. They can also conduct bundle sales or provide small gifts, or give away some coupons, such as parking coupons and meal coupons, so that fans have a better viewing experience.

Next comes to how to reduce negative impacts brought by fan culture in sports. From government view, the government level should strictly supervise phenomena such as

online wars and wars, and promptly stop fans' irrational consumption and reward behaviors. At the same time, increase the supervision of sports star accounts and big-name fan accounts to prevent their accounts from publishing content that provokes controversy. Finally, establish a public opinion handling mechanism, promptly stop the spread of rumors and strengthen daily management [6].

From fans view, first of all, fans must learn to think rationally, not be easily led away from the rhythm, and clarify the boundaries between themselves and their idols. Rational discussions should not be overshadowed by impulsive emotions, and fandom should not be used as a weapon to attack others [7].

From club and event organizer view, clubs and event organizers should strengthen the management of fans before, during and after games. For example, some uncivilized spectator behaviors are expressly prohibited. If a spectator violates the regulations, that person will be deprived of the qualification to watch the match to ensure the normal conduct of the match. This will serve as a warning to the audience and make them consciously abide by the order of the game. In addition, clubs and event organizers can advocate on social media for fans to watch games in a civilized manner, comment online in a civilized manner, and not attack other athletes.

From teenager view, a large part of fans are teenagers who have not yet formed a mature worldview and values. If they are influenced by fandom culture, they are likely to do some extreme behavior in the future. They need to understand what is correct and what is wrong. Therefore, it is necessary to have correct values to guide the rice circle, and the education of young people is particularly important [9].

6. Conclusion

Through research, this article found that rice circle culture has both positive and negative effects on the sports industry. Fan culture will bring a lot of benefits to event organizers and clubs and increase the popularity of events and clubs. On the contrary, excessive fandom culture will damage the reputation of athletes and clubs. In serious cases, it will affect the lives and safety of athletes and affect the progress of the competition. In addition, if the rice circle culture can be used properly, it can bring unexpected benefits. For example, certain discounts and promotions can be given to die-hard fans, and bundled sales can be carried out to increase the attention of the event. In addition, by making good use of fans on social media,

different marketing strategies can be adopted to retain fans and attract new fans to join in.

The conclusion of this article reveals that the correct use of rice circle culture can promote the development of the sports industry. It not only has negative effects, but also fills the gap in current research that does not use fan circle culture to promote the development of the sports industry. This study did not conduct quantitative analysis on specific cases. Future research can conduct data analysis on this phenomenon and compile a data model to facilitate the reference of event organizers and clubs and reveal the specific quantitative relationship between rice circles and the sports industry.

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