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### Motivations of Americans to be Fans of Non-U.S. Sports Teams

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## Motivations of Americans to be Fans of Non-U.S. Sports Teams

### Abstract

This research was conducted to gain a better understanding of why American sports fans chose to follow international teams and how they consumed the international sports product. The results provided can assist sports marketers learn about the various ways to expand their business internationally and the key factors that most influence non-domestic fans. By understanding fan motivations in an international context, marketers can more effectively execute their business plans when trying to sell in foreign markets. Previous information was gathered regarding fan motivations and behavior, but little was known about fandom abroad.

The data were measured through a 13 question survey and randomly sent out to a sample of 1500 students at a northeastern college in the United States. The 29 complete responses were statistically analyzed and used to develop results. From the analyses, the top three most influential factors motivating Americans to follow international sports were: influence of a star player or coach, the location of the team and the league in which they play in. These three factors were the primary reasons why individuals chose to become fans of certain teams and should be utilized in international sports sales/marketing strategies.

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Motivations of Americans to be Fans of Non-U.S. Sports Teams

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### **Executive Summary**

This research was conducted to gain a better understanding of why American sports fans chose to follow international teams and how they consumed the international sports product. The results provided can assist sports marketers learn about the various ways to expand their business internationally and the key factors that most influence non-domestic fans. By understanding fan motivations in an international context, marketers can more effectively execute their business plans when trying to sell in foreign markets. Previous information was gathered regarding fan motivations and behavior, but little was known about fandom abroad.

The data were measured through a 13 question survey and randomly sent out to a sample of 1500 students at a northeastern college in the United States. The 29 complete responses were statistically analyzed and used to develop results. From the analyses, the top three most influential factors motivating Americans to follow international sports were: influence of a star player or coach, the location of the team and the league in which they play in. These three factors were the primary reasons why individuals chose to become fans of certain teams and should be utilized in international sports sales/marketing strategies.

### Motivations of Americans to be Fans of Non-U.S. Sports Teams

The power of sports is its ability to breaks barriers and unite people from all over the world to on a common ground. Soccer is soccer, no matter where it's played and because of this, players and fans alike can understand the same game even if they don't speak the same language. Fans of sport are passionate for their favorite team and will cheer for them unconditionally, regardless of wins and losses.

Professional sports leagues offer the highest level of talent in their respective sport, which results in a large number of passionate fans. Although the United States is home to four major professional sports leagues, the highest level of soccer (the world's most popular sport) is played primarily in Europe. Top international sports leagues, such as the English Premier League, have not only grown their business in their own domestic markets, but also across every continent in the world, especially in North America. Manchester United of the English Premier League sold more licensed jerseys in the U.S. than all of the American based Major League Soccer teams (20 total) combined (Kerr & Gladden, 2008). International sports leagues have brought their sports product into the United States which resulted in a large following of their teams. In order for U.S. sports leagues to experience the same financial gains as their international predecessors, U.S. leagues must understand what influences people to outsource their fandom.

## **Literature Review**

### **Fan Identification with Sports Brands**

Much like the sports product itself, leagues and teams are unique in their own way. Each league and team is located in various cities, have their own team name, multiple color schemes, logos, jerseys and stadiums (Kerr & Gladden, 2008). They also have their own unique fan bases, comprised of both males and females varying in age, ethnicity, income level, educational

background, etc. Every team and every individual is different, which makes sports so fascinating to see strangers unite to cheer on their teams.

In order for teams to develop their brand, it's important for them to grow their brand equity. Kerr & Gladden define brand equity as "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtracts from the value provided by a product or service" (2008, p. 60). Strengthening a team's brand equity is a critical aspect of enhancing fan loyalty and improving overall business (Kerr & Gladden). There are many ways for organizations to build their brand equity and thus build a stronger relationship between the fan and brand. Brand equity starts with the financial resources made available for the organization. Having ample financial options allows for organizations to increase their chances of sporting success by being able to sign high caliber talent and upgrading facilities to the highest level (Kerr & Gladden). It's estimated that 30% of non-European soccer fans follow a specific club because they like an individual player (Kerr & Gladden), which allows for teams to capitalize on signing big name players. Brand equity also develops from the conference or league the team is associated with. These leagues have built their own brands through their rich history and strong reputations which results in benefits for the teams playing in them. Teams are much more likely to sign high caliber talent if they are members in a well-known league and build more brand equity because of it. Being a team in a reputable league and with a strong brand image is reflected by the ability of the organization to generate media coverage outside of its home market (Kerr & Gladden). Besides media coverage, other benefits for a team experiencing high brand equity include less drastic revenue when the team loses, the ability to charge price premiums, more sponsorship interest and more licensing and merchandising opportunities arise (Mullin, Hardy & Sutton, 2007). Teams with high brand equity include Manchester United, Real Madrid,

Boca Juniors and Bayern Munich all of which are highly regarded as the poster child of their respective leagues and the soccer community (Kerr & Gladden).

Teams with high brand equity are ideally what fans are interested in and want to affiliate themselves with.

Each fan has their own journey of affiliation towards a particular team. Dwyer, Greenhalgh & LecCrom (2015) found that these relations are unique because of the emotional, familial, regional and educational factors that tie a fan to share a tie to the team. Some grow up fans of a specific team because their parents influenced them, other fans support the local team, while some like a certain player or coach. Hyatt & Foster describe the process for aligning with a team as, “fans first become aware the team exists, then become attracted to it, then find themselves attached, and finally become allegiant” (2015, p. 444). The process evolves the fan’s emotions and over time, the bond will continue to grow. Fans form an emotional attachment to brands when their feelings occur in a way similar to relationships built between people (Fillis & Mackay, 2014).

It is human nature for individuals to want to experience various levels of involvement (Fillis & Mackay, 2014). The more people are involved with an organization, the greater their experiences will be. For example, when fans become more committed to a team, they will increase the frequency of following and watching the team live (Hyatt & Foster, 2015). Once affiliated with a team, “fans exhibit higher-level internal involvement than non-fans and are prepared to alter their lifestyles to accommodate their fanaticism” (Fillis & Mackay, 2014, p. 336). This can be seen by fans purchasing merchandise to show off their fandom, or watching an early morning match due to various time zones that non-fans wouldn’t participate in. Regardless of their purchasing or viewing habits, fans are intense and often very loyal to their teams.

**Fan Behavior**

After associating themselves with a sports brand, fans build on their relationship with the team by actively engaging in various components of the fan experience (Wann, Grieve & Pease, 2008). This can include attending live games, watching the games on television, purchasing merchandise, wearing apparel, tailgating at games, among others. Everyone has different interest and commitment degrees which is why there are different measures of fandom. Kwon & Trail (2001) used a three level system to identify fans. Level 1 starts at "social fans", who have a low level of identification with a specific team/player. They enjoy the entertainment value of sport and the socialization at games, rather than the score and records (Kwon & Trail). Level 2 consists of "focus fans" who have moderate identification and might stray away from the team if they start to lose. Level 3 are "vested fans" who have a strong and lasting relationship with their team, are generally not affected by losing, and will stick with their team (Kwon & Trail). Ideally for teams, they'd like to get all fans at level three and continue to move them up the escalator to increase their attendance. A highly vested fan is 66% more likely to attend a game than a focus fan and will attend almost twice as many games (Kwon & Trail). Furthermore, highly identified fans are also more likely to monitor their team in the media, purchase merchandise and purchase products from team sponsors (Kerr & Emery, 2011).

Fans who have a higher level of fandom share similar opinions and behaviors regarding the supporting team, resulting in the formation of support groups. (Dwyer, Greenhalgh & LecCrom, 2015). Having fans interact with other people who have the same interests as they do is great for the organization. Sports communities consist of people participating in rituals and traditions of the team. Traditions range from New Zealand's most popular rugby team, The All Blacks' Haka dance, which hails from a traditional war dance, to fan created fight songs such as



the Buffalo Bills' shout song which is played after every Bills scoring play. The high level of brand interactions mean that there's more intention to attend games, purchase merchandise and recommend the team's games to others (Dwyer, Greenhalgh & LecCrom, 2015). Reasoning behind the high level of interactions can be related several factors, including team success. People want to associate themselves with a high quality brand, so by affiliating themselves with a successful team, they believe that their own self-image will be enhanced (Kwak, Kim & Hirt, 2011). Resulting in the fulfillment of self-esteem goals that the individual is looking for.

The formation of support groups is due in part to human nature of wanting to socialize with likeminded individuals. Factors that help shape fan attendance can be attributed to socialization and individuals' desires to benefit from group affiliation, camaraderie, entertainment and self-esteem enhancement (Fillis & MacKay, 2014). Forming groups and interacting at sports parties, tailgates and live events help achieve the human desire of socialization. In the study developed by Wann, Grieve & Pease (2008), they discovered the differences in the needs of individuals to experience socialization factors at both nonaggressive and aggressive sporting events. Through their results, they discovered that fans with a preference in aggressive sports reported higher levels of eustress, self-esteem and group affiliation motivations than nonaggressive sports fans. Emotional connections with other sports enthusiast drive fan behaviors and consumption patterns across various sports.

### **Fan Behavior in an International Context**

Outside the United States lies millions of sports fans untapped by American sports franchises and leagues. In Europe, for example, there are millions of fans that support the English Premier League soccer league (Kerr & Emery, 2011). Three of the Big Four American sports leagues (NFL, MLB, NBA and NHL) have done a great amount of promoting their brand

globally and attracting fans for nearly every continent. However, there are still many more countries and areas yet to fully be explored. Of the four major U.S. leagues, the NFL is lagging behind and while they have made a point to host at least one game per season in London since 2007, they have yet to touch the rest of Europe (Gardiner, 2016). The NFL has also restarted their Mexico series as they will host a game in Mexico City in 2016 for the first time since 2005 when the stadium sold over 103,000 tickets (Associated Press, 2009). The NFL saw success with the Mexico series in 2005 as it marked the most attended regular season NFL game in history for four years until the Cowboys reset the record (Associated Press). There is certainly a market abroad for the NFL and although they don't have a team in Europe yet, there is reason to speculate one might be in the next 15 years (Gardiner).

If the NFL were to expand in parts of Europe or Asia, they must first understand what lies ahead for their product as well as how to properly market to their potential fans. The ability for brands to reach international markets became much easier with the growth of technology. Technology advances have led to the ability for sports to globalize and bring their brands worldwide (Kerr & Emery, 2011). Using technology to broadcast live sports across the globe allows leagues to gain interest and awareness from prospective fans. The NBA grew their international brand image was by signing players from overseas and giving fans from the player's homeland someone to root for (Yu, 2010). In taking the next step, the NBA also signed broadcasting rights to show games in China for free (Mullin, Hardy & Sutton, 2007). Back in 2005, 30 million Chinese viewers regularly watched Yao Ming and Houston Rockets' games due to their connection and pride for the great 7'8" center (Kerr & Gladden, 2008). By broadcasting games and expanding to international waters, the NBA grew their business and fan base exponentially.

Even though international fans are far away from the teams, their team is still close to their heart and can be labeled as “satellite supporters” (Kerr & Emery, 2011, p. 880). These satellite supporters shouldn’t be taken lightly. “Real Madrid is valued at over \$3.6 billion and makes 60% of its merchandise revenue from international markets” (Kerr & Emery, 2011, p. 880). That number is up 10% from 2010 and will likely increase with the endless possibilities of global marketing in the world today.

As previously discussed under the “Fan Behavior” section, individuals form groups in order to meet their socialization needs. Satellite supporters are no different and follow the same principles of forming groups, however they must use various online mediums because of their locations abroad. Satellite supports use mediums such as fan forums, websites, fanzines (Fillis & MacKay, 2014) and social media to discuss their teams and interact with other fans. These values are similar to those of Americans and follow the similar principles.

The location of these satellite supports are also important for marketers to focus on when trying to grow their brands. Han, Mahony & Greenwell believe that the flattening of the sports world will force sport marketers to be prepared to “promote their teams to spectators in a wide variety of countries with different cultures” (2016, p. 262). Fans from different cultures will have different motivations and perceptions on marketing techniques when consuming sports, so it would be beneficial to heavily research cultural tendencies before entering a market. By comparing the cultures of Taiwan, Korea and United Kingdom (UK), there is data that supports the benefits for marketers to do their research.

As part of her research, Yu (2010) looked at several different countries to analyze their specific trends. For example, Yu noted that Taiwanese fans have a particular interest in elite

NBA players such as Yao Ming, Michael Jordon, Kobe Bryant and Spencer Haywood because they've visited Taiwan to meet fans. From the Taiwanese perspective, they also follow specific MLB teams because of players such as Hong-Chih Kup and Chin-Hui Tsao playing for American professional baseball clubs. The results from these Taiwanese influences could be seen in increase attendance patterns to the US. Over 55,000 more Taiwanese residents visited the United States in 2007 compared to 2002 (Yu, 2010). The interactions with Taiwanese sports fans have opened up a market for both NBA and MLB teams to expand their business in.

Another country located in Asia, South Korea, has differing values than those of traditional American fans. Han, Mahony & Greenwell (2016) conducted a study of both American and Korean college students to reveal differences of fan motivations across varying cultures. Their findings concluded that Americans valued individualistic motivations (aesthetics, entertainment, escape, self-esteem and eustress) more so than Korean students. Americans also valued the collectivistic motivations (community pride, family bonding, team attachment and group affiliation) more so than Koreans, while Koreans only preferred play attachment (collectivistic motivation) more than Americans.

Finally, there are also differences in the motivations of United Kingdom sports fans versus those of American dissent. Due to their growing sports marketing of English Premier League soccer, the oldest tennis tournament in the world, Wimbledon, and their highly popular British Formula One Grand Prix, sport fandom and spectating are a significant aspect of culture in the UK (Parry, Jones & Wann, 2014). Parry, Jones & Wann (2014) conducted a study of students at a university in the UK to find out gender related consumption patterns and how impactful socialization was to participants. Differences in gender consumption resulted in males watching significantly more sporting events on television than females on a daily basis (51% of

male vs 8% of female), as well as 84% of males reporting that they discussed sports daily, compared to 33% of females. Moreover, their results also concluded that 66% of respondents said they are most influenced by their father as the single greatest socialization factor, followed by 11% said school influences them most and 9% said friend.

When comparing these cultures, each of them has their own unique factors that influence people of that culture more so than another culture. Understanding these motivational differences across various cultures is important when discussing sports fandom.

There's no disputing the large opportunities American sport leagues have overseas. Though there has been an effort to bring leagues like the NFL abroad, they have not fully capitalized on these opportunities. From examples such as Manchester United and Real Madrid, it can be seen that these leagues have made their way into American culture and taken their brands international. Although it's something that takes time and development, NFL executives could follow the same path that the NBA has taken to grow their business. The NFL could include the key learnings from the English Premier League and other successful international leagues who have established themselves as a global brand. The important caution is to understand the cultural values and differences from American fans.

### **Methods**

It's not yet understood why a fan who might not have ever been to a live game (let alone the team's country) be invested in an international team, when there are leagues and teams in the United States that offer the same sport. There is limited research on the motivational reasons why fans would choose to follow a team not located in their country, however it can be inferred that these reasons would be similar to the factors previously discussed. This leads to the purpose of

this study which is to examine the motivational factors that influence Americans to be fans of non-United States based sports teams.

### **Design**

This explanatory research was conducted with the goal of describing why certain fans choose to follow a sports team that is not located in their current country. Research has previously been done regarding fan motivations, however it has yet to be fully developed on an international level, coming from American's perspectives. Furthermore, this research hoped to explain why American sports fans seek fandom from a foreign team/league when there are team's options in their own country. In order to gather this data, a 13 question survey was created.

### **Sample**

The study sample was compiled of individuals in a college community from a small school in the northeast of the United States. A survey was delivered via email to 1500 random students on campus to minimize bias. A college campus provided people from diverse backgrounds and various levels of fandom to participate in the study. The survey contained questions in order to filter out any participants who do not identify with a non-United States sports team. After participants acknowledged they identify with a non-United States sports team, they continued on to the rest of the survey.

### **Data Collection**

The data collected was primary, with a mix of both qualitative and quantitative data. There was a range of different possible answers, with some being open-ended, while the majority

were either measured by a nominal or interval scale.

For this study, an international fan refers to Americans who identified with a non-US sports team (e.g. any team from the English Premier League). Fan motivation variables were broken down into four different categories: team related, organization related, market related (Kerr & Gladden, 2008) and individual related. Team related variables included star players (defined as a small group of popular players or single player influencing fans to follow the team) and star coaches (defined as a highly reputable, well-known coach). Organization related variables included the league (defined as the league that teams participate in) and the colors or logo (defined as the team colors or distinct logo). The market related variables included geographic location (defined as where the team is located) and media coverage (defined as the amount of games that are televised or internationally broadcasted). The individual related variables included visiting the city/country (defined as visiting the city or country that the team plays in), family member influence (defined as the influence from a family member or relative), in order to join a fan group (defined as the desire to join a social fan group) and US tour (defined as seen the team play while they toured the US). Other individual variables (aside from the fan motivational factors) measured throughout the survey were: type of fan (defined as the level of fandom associated with a team), the amount of games watched preseason (as a percentage of one total season), subscription of a TV package (defined as paying a monthly/ yearly fee to watch specifically the international team play) and location of where games are watched (defined as the preferred location to watch their team play on TV). Finally, respondents were asked to provide their age and gender.

For the purpose of this study, a five-level fandom model was created based off of the three-level system that Kwon & Trail used (previously discussed under the “Fan Behavior”

section). Two additional levels allowed for more specific responses and allowed respondents to categorize themselves according to their true fandom level. The five-level model is broken down as: 1) social fan, 2) focus fan, 3) average fan, 4) dedicated fan and 5) die-hard fan.

A social fan defined in this study enjoyed watching games and hanging out with friends. They didn't necessarily care if the team wins or loses but rather just wanted to socialize with others. A focus fan defined in this study hoped their team would win, but might have changed their team if the team didn't win consistently. An average fan defined in this study was a fan of one team. They followed the team on social media and watched a few games but didn't always make them a priority. A dedicated fan defined in this study loved their team and watched close to all of their games. They followed the team on social media, along with players or staff. Lastly, a die-hard fan defined in this study planned their schedule around the team and watched every game. This fan could name nearly everyone on the team and followed them intensely on social media.

## **Analysis**

The survey was open for two weeks and was available to be accessed anytime within the time frame through the survey link. After the data was imported into statistical software (SPSS), the mean and mode were calculated for every variable. Frequency tables were also used in order to breakdown the results further and evaluate responses in percentage form. In addition to those descriptive statistics, several variables were analyzed through inferential statistics. The level of fandom was used in an ANOVA with all nine of the fan motivation factors that were measured on an interval scale. Additionally, cross tabulations were conducted with the demographic variables. Both age and gender were compared to the type of sport followed, as well as the level



of fandom.

## Results

There was a total of 60 respondents to the survey that was sent out via email to a random sample of 1500 students. Of the 60 respondents, only 29 submitted usable data and entered in SPSS for analysis. There were two respondents who did not consent to taking the survey and resulted in the immediate conclusion of their survey. There were 22 respondents who indicated they were not fans of international sports teams (excluding Canadian franchises of U.S. sport leagues) so they, too, were immediately sent to the conclusion of the survey. There were several missing data entries for the remaining 36 respondents, so 7 entries were deleted before analysis.

The survey had 21 (75%) male respondents, while there were 8 (25%) females. 97% (n=26) of respondents were of the typical college age demographic (18-22). The most frequently occurring age was 21 years old (n=8), while there was only one respondent who was 25 or older. The final results found that 86% of respondents were fans of an international soccer team, while the next closest sport followed was hockey, at 7% (n=2). Respondents watched an average of 42.76% of their favorite international teams' games and this sample was most likely to watch a game at their own house, as opposed to their friend's house, a bar or team supporters bar. 69% of the respondents have never seen their favorite international team play a game in person. 14 people said they consider themselves a "dedicated fan" while no respondents said they were a "die-hard" fan.

An ANOVA was used to determine that, on average, there was significant difference in wanting to join a fan group with respect to level of fandom,  $F(2,25) = 6.301$ ,  $p < .05$ . Bonferroni-adjusted alpha of .0125 was used. Additionally, 63% of females responded that they'd consider themselves a "dedicated fan", while only 43% of males selected "dedicated fan".

### Discussion

The study measured several different aspects of fan motivation and why fans chose to follow an international team. There were a total of nine different fan motivational factors that were measured. Of those nine, the factor that respondents most agreed to was that they started to follow their favorite team because of a player or coach that they liked. This shows how important the addition of star players or coaches are to a team's brand. The two most frequently named teams from the study were Real Madrid and FC Barcelona. Both teams play in the Spanish soccer league called La Liga and regularly finish in the top part of their league. Six respondents said that Real Madrid was their favorite team, while three said their favorite team was FC Barcelona. This aligns with the star player or coach factor, because two of the best and well known soccer stars, Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid) and Lionel Messi (FC Barcelona), play for each of those teams.

The second most frequently answered motivational factor was based on the location of where the team plays. There are many aspects of the city or country that the team plays in that would influence someone to become a fan of their team, such as the country's history, family lineage, the geographical location, among others. Rounding out the top three motivational factors is the league in which the teams participate. Respondents were allowed to write out their favorite teams in the survey. There was a total of 27 responses to this question and every single team that was listed, was from the highest level in the country's respective championship. For example, the English Premier League is the highest level of British soccer but there are lower levels that make up the English Football League. All the responses referring English soccer were involving a team that plays in the Premier League. This is the same for La Liga (Spanish soccer), Serie A (Italian soccer) and Bundesliga (German soccer). The means of all three of the top factors were very

close (within a .07 mean of each other) while the fourth highest, team color/ logo, had a mean that was .59 away from the league factor.

There was a high percentage of fans (86%) who responded saying the international sport they most follow is soccer. This isn't very surprising considering soccer's commonly referred to as the "Most Popular Sport in the World" so it would make sense that it was also the most frequently chosen sport in the survey. The second highest followed sport was hockey. Although the NHL is the highest level of hockey in the world, many of the players are not from the United States, and instead were born in countries such as Canada or Russia (both of which frequently place top three in the Olympics). With that being said, it is reasonable to conclude that because a lot of talent comes from other parts of the world, high level hockey fanatics will follow teams and players that don't reside in the U.S. and follow their journey to the NHL. There were also respondents who said they followed more of the non-traditional U.S. sports, such as rugby or sailing that have a larger impact in sports societies outside of the U.S.

Fans reported that they only watch 42.76% of their favorite team's games, which is a lower number than originally expected. There are certainly several factors that could have played a role in this statistic, such as the time of game, ease of access to watch games or simply that they had other things going on during the games. Only 7% (n=2) of fans personally subscribed to an extra television package in order to watch their team play. This means they either watch the games with a friend or relative that does subscribe, they go to a bar or restaurant that shows the games, or they are streaming the games online from an illegal service. This sample also said they are most likely to watch the games at their house, rather than a friend's house, a bar or team supporters bar.

As expected, there was a high percentage of fans who have never seen their team play in person. As a result, the motivational factors even more important for teams. If international fans have never experienced their favorite team's games live, franchises have to make sure they are drawing in international fans with the players/coaches signed or through the league they play in, while also providing a lot of media content for non-domestic fans to connect with.

The majority of respondents labeled themselves as being either average or dedicated fans (83%, n=24), while not one called themselves a die-hard fan. Strange times for games, combined with being thousands of miles away might have resulted in the lack of die-hard fandom. Although there weren't any die-hard fans, average and dedicated fans watch more than half of the games and can name a large amount of the team. They won't necessarily watch every game, but they will certainly keep up with their teams and tune in when given the opportunity.

Many of the results from this study were supported by the background information that was previously studied and known. It's essential for teams to develop their brand equity in order to reach fans in the international markets (Kerr & Gladden, 2008). High brand equity results from having a mix of the following factors, all of which were measured in some way throughout the study: high caliber talent, colors and logos that are recognizable worldwide, competing in the highest level and being located in a popular city. Kerr & Gladden estimated that 30% of non-European soccer fans will follow a specific club because they like an individual player (2008). From this study, 79% (n=23) of respondents at least "somewhat agreed" that star players influenced their motivation to become a fan of their respective teams. This statistic shows the importance of signing big name players and how that will increase the number of international fans that a team receives.

Fandom levels certainly vary depending on the individual, so it's hard to generalize all international fans, but it takes a high level of commitment in order to follow along with a franchise that doesn't play close to home. Having 48% of fans label themselves as a "dedicated fan" illustrates the high level of involvement that international fans have with their favorite team. Even if that means waking up early on Sunday mornings to watch their team, fans will alter their lifestyles in order to integrate their team into their schedules (Fillis & Mackay, 2014). The higher levels of fans will watch their team play more and buy more merchandise than lower levels (Kerr & Emery, 2011). Five of eight (63%) females labeled themselves as dedicated fans, while nine of 21 (43%) males labeled themselves the same. Furthermore, 63% of women have seen their favorite team play 1-2 games, while only 14% of males have seen a game in person. It can be seen that the higher levels of fandom result in a higher percentage of fans attending live games.

Contrary to the background information was the lack of need for fans to be involved with supporter groups. Dwyer, Greenhalgh & LeeCrom found that fans with higher levels of fandom will ultimately result in forming support groups because they want to interact with like-minded individuals (2015). The results from this study found that fans prefer to watch from their house or a regular bar, as opposed to a bar that supports their specific team.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The sample of the study was limited based on the college's size and availability of access to the population. Of the roughly 2,300 undergraduate students, the survey was sent out to 1,500 of them. There was a low response rate of 60 people, but that was because of the specific wording used to eliminate potential respondents who didn't meet the criteria of an international fan.

There were several respondents who said they were not international fans excluding the Canadian franchises of US sport leagues, so they were directed to the conclusion of the survey. It was important to only have respondents who supported a team that didn't affiliate with US sports leagues. Additionally, there were responses that were incomplete, thus resulting in the deletion of their submission.

Social media has been growing rapidly around the world and this provides various ways for fans to consume sports. Marketers should be aware that international fans will follow sports through various media outlets and view more content that teams put out in order to fill their fandom needs. Future research should involve more of the media aspect to international fans and how the use of social media influences how fans consume their sport and how that leads to their fandom.

## **Conclusion**

When trying to grow a team or league internationally, based on the results of this study, it is important to sell the star player and coach to create fan favorites among the international communities. This will help teams build their brand equity while abroad and grow their business within the communities. The other factors for teams to keep in mind is the physical location of their team and if that is relevant abroad. A team from New York City is much more likely to have presence internationally than a team in Ohio. This is due to the millions of tourists visit NYC each year, which creates memories and ties to that city for potential fans. Lastly for motivational factors, it's important that these teams are playing in the highest level, because otherwise people won't be as interested in lower level professional franchises or semi-pro teams.

Sports marketers shouldn't underestimate the power that females can have in the sports world and target them more often. As seen in this study, there was a higher percentage of dedicated female fans than males, which should be used to the marketers advantages.

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