Intrigues of Brand Activism versus Brand Antagonism in Rival Online Football Brand Communities: The Case of the Top Two Premier Football Clubs in Ghana

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Abstract : Purpose: In an increasingly digital world, the realm of sports fandom has extended its borders, creating a vibrant ecosystem of online communities centered around football clubs. This study ventures into the intricate interplay of motivations that drive football fans to respond to brand activism and its profound implications for brand antagonism and engagement among two of Ghana's most revered premier football clubs. Methods: A sample of 459 fervent fans from these two rival clubs were engaged through self-administered questionnaires expertly distributed via social media and online platforms. Data was analysed, using PLS-SEM. Findings: The tapestry of motivations that weave through these online football communities is as diverse as the fans themselves. It becomes apparent that fans are propelled by a spectrum of incentives. They seek education, yearn for information, revel in entertainment, embrace socialization, and fortify their self-esteem through their interactions within these digital spaces. Yet, it is the nuanced distinction in these motivations that shapes the trajectory of brand antagonism and engagement. Surprisingly, the study reveals a remarkable pattern. Football fans, despite their fierce rivalries, do not engage in brand antagonism based on educational pursuits, information-seeking endeavors, or socialization. Instead, it is motivations rooted in entertainment and self-esteem that serve as the fertile grounds for brand antagonism. Paradoxically, it is these very motivations coupled with the desire for socialization that nurture brand engagement, manifesting as active support and advocacy for their chosen club brand. Originality: Our research charters new waters by extending the boundaries of existing theories in the field. The Technology Acceptance Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Social Identity Theory all find new dimensions within the context of online brand community engagement. This not only deepens our understanding of the multifaceted world of online football fandom but also invites us to explore the implications these insights carry within the digital realm. Contribution to Practice: For marketers, our findings offer a treasure trove of actionable insights. They beckon the development of targeted content strategies that resonate with fan motivations. The implementation of brand advocacy programs, fostering opportunities for socialization, and the effective management of brand antagonism emerge as pivotal strategies. Furthermore, the utilization of data-driven insights is poised to refine consumer engagement strategies and strengthen brand affinity. Future Studies: For future studies, we advocate for longitudinal, cross-cultural, and qualitative studies that could shed further light on this topic. Comparative analyses across different types of online brand communities, an exploration of the role of brand community leaders, and inquiries into the factors that contribute to brand community dissolution all beckon the research community. Furthermore, understanding motivation-specific antagonistic behaviors and the intricate relationship between information-seeking and engagement present exciting avenues for further exploration. This study unfurls a vibrant tapestry of fan motivations, brand activism, and rivalry within online football communities. It extends a hand to scholars and marketers alike, inviting them to embark on a journey through this captivating digital realm, where passion, rivalry, and engagement harmonize to shape the world of sports fandom as we know it.

Keywords : online brand engagement, football fans, brand antagonism, motivations