

Australian Football Supporters Engagement Patterns; Manchester United vs a-League

Authors : Trevor R. Higgins, Ben Lopez

Abstract : Australian football fans have a tendency to indulge in foreign football clubs, often assigning a greater value to foreign clubs, in preference to the Australian National football competition; the A-League. There currently exists a gap in the knowledge available in relation to football fans in Australia, their engagement with foreign football teams and the impact that this may have with their engagement with A-League. The purpose of this study was to compare the engagement of the members of the Manchester United Supporters Club - Australia (MUSC-Aus) with Manchester United and the A-League. An online survey was implemented to gather the relevant data from members of the MUSC-Aus. Results from completed surveys were collected, and analyzed in relation to engagement levels with Manchester United and the A-League. Members of MUSC-Aus who responded to the survey were predominantly male (94%) and born in Australia (46%), England (25%), Ireland (7%), were greatly influenced in their choice of Manchester United by family (43%) and team history (16%), whereas location was the overwhelming influence in supporting the A-League (88%). Importantly, there was a reduced level of engagement in the A-League on two accounts. Firstly, only 64% of MUSC-Aus engaged with the A-League, reporting perceptions of low standard as the major reason (50%). Secondly, MUSC-Aus members who engaged in the A-League reported reduced engagement in the A-League, identified through spending patterns. MUSC-Aus members' expenditure on Manchester United engagement was 400% greater than expenditure on A-League engagement. Furthermore, additional survey responses indicated that the level of commitment towards the A-League overall was less than Manchester United. The greatest impact on fan engagement in the A-League by MUSC-Aus can be attributed to several primary factors; family support, team history and perceptions to on-field performance and quality of players. Currently, there is little that can be done in regards to enhancing family and history as the A-League is still in its infancy. Therefore, perceptions of on-field performances and player quality should be addressed. Introducing short-term international marquee contracts to A-League rosters, across the entire competition, may provide the platform to raise the perception of the A-League player quality with minimal impact on local player development. In addition, a national marketing campaign promoting the success of A-League clubs in the ACL, as well as promoting the skill on display in the A-League may address the negative association with the standard of the A-League competition.

Keywords : engagement, football, perceptions of performance, team

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