

When social norms get the boot: A study of crowd behaviour among League of Ireland football supporters.

Mark Leahy (1604438), Supervisor Name: Siobain O'Donnell)

Abstract

The aim of this research project is to investigate how the experience of being part of a football crowd can influence the behaviour and identity of League of Ireland football supporters. The research was carried out using qualitative research methods and thematic analysis. Data was gathered for this study through the semi-structured interviews of four participants and also through ethnographic field research. Data was collected on a voice recorder and analysed through Nvivo software. The results of the research found that while in attendance of live matches, the identity and behaviour of League of Ireland supporters can be impacted by the occasion of match-day, fan rivalry and the influence of the crowd.



Introduction

Football is arguably the most popular spectator sport in the world. As the game has developed over the years, there has been one consistent factor that has been ever present which has been vital for the sport's survival and that is the presence of those supporters who passionately follow the game, the football fan.

Football fanatics possess a passion for the game which is of such extreme intrinsic value to them that it plays a significant role in their lives. Supporting a football club can help break down barriers, improve an individual's confidence and provides an arena for social interaction where people with different backgrounds, experiences and allegiances may come together. The overall objective of this research is gain an understanding of the dynamics of crowd behaviour and to discover the impact that crowd participation can have on a football fan's behavioural patterns. To achieve these objectives, the key focal points of this literature review will be concerned with fan identity, social norms, crowd behaviour, the rivalry that exists among fans and finally, fan rituals.

Method

A qualitative method of research was chosen for this study. For the purpose of this study, research was conducted using semi-structured qualitative interviewing procedures. A fieldwork strategy was also under-taken whereby Qualitative data was collected by means of observation at two League of Ireland football matches attended by the researcher. For this research a handheld Olympus VN-2100PC Digital Voice Recorder was used to record each interview session. To assist in analysing the collected data that was transcribed verbatim from these interviews, NVIVO software was used.

A purposive method of sample of four participants were selected. Participants were selected on the basis that that they currently supported a League of Ireland team, attended their team's matches on a regular basis and that they considered themselves to be loyal, passionate supporters. Once the participants had been selected the research was conducted using in-depth, semi-structured interviewing procedures. Ethnographic field research was also undertaken, whereby the researcher attended two League of Ireland football matches

Results

The researcher was interested in hearing the opinions and attitudes that the participants had towards the crowd behavior that they either participated in themselves or that they witnessed while supporting their team. The researcher also sought to discover the views that the participants held in relation to their own behavior and to determine if they considered that the behavior of others in the crowd had an influence on their own demeanor.

From the results of the interviews, the researcher was satisfied that the objectives of the research project had been achieved and sufficiently answered. The main themes to emerge from the interviews were that of shifting identities, behaviour change, the influence of the crowd, the occasion of match-day and football fan rivalry. All of these themes worked to explain how a football crowd can influence the behaviour and identity of those within the crowd.

Discussion

This research project uncovered a number of areas that should be considered for future research. Firstly, the researcher was unable to uncover any previous research that related to the comments of one of the participants who likened how the influence of the crowd can trigger behavioural change to the way that drink acts to trigger alcoholism. For this reason, the researcher feels that this is an area that requires future research. Secondly, further research is necessary to determine if fans are aware of the identity change. Lastly, it is recommended that future study be conducted on intra-fan relationships.

References

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