

## **Gender Perspectives on the Influence of Football Fandom on Academic Life of Undergraduates in the Public Universities in Enugu State Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

The study investigated gender perspective on the influence of football fandom on the academic life of undergraduates in the public universities in Enugu State. Specifically, the study determined ways respondents react to the performance of their favorite football clubs; as well as perceived positive and negative ways football fandom influence academic lives of the respondents. Population comprised of 66,460 students from the two public universities in Enugu state. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 600 undergraduate students as sample for the study. Sports fandom questionnaire and researcher-structured questionnaire were used for data collection. Frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviation, chi-square and Pearson's correlation were used for data analyses. Findings show that 73.5% of the respondents just jubilate in reaction to club victories. In reaction to club losses, 43.7% are just sad while 5.7% fight with fans of other teams. The respondents agreed that football fandom inspires them to work hard at their studies ( $\bar{X}$ =3.51), improves their general knowledge ( $\bar{X}$ =3.46) and keeps them mentally and emotionally fit for their studies ( $\bar{X}$ =3.32). Male respondents agreed that football fandom reduces their time for studies ( $\bar{X}$ =3.10), makes them skip meals ( $\bar{X}$ =3.58) and drives them to gambling ( $\bar{X}$ =3.12). It was recommended that school administration should get involved in the matters relating to football fandom among students in order to curtail its negative impacts on students' academic lives.

**Keywords:** Gender, Football, Fandom, Academic, Undergraduate, University

### **Introduction**

All over the world, love for football has evolved into an obsessive affair in which individuals especially youths, invest time, emotion and money into supporting a favored team or club.

Lovers of football usually demonstrate emotional, passionate and dedicated identification with a particular football team (Rationis, 2020). Oftentimes, this kind of identification brings together people who have similar disposition

towards a team of interest, thus offering them a sense of belonging to a larger social structure known as football fandom (Givi & Turkmani, 2018).

One of the terms used most frequently and interchangeably to describe the follower of a football team is 'fan'. This word has its roots in the noun 'fanatic', meaning a person with an unusually strong commitment to a belief system or way of life - in this instance, to their football club. In most forms of popular culture, the 'fan' is invariably assumed to be female. Yet in football the opposite is true (Dunn, 2012). Football was invented by men, and from the 19th century right up to today, the large majority of players and consumers are boys and men (Pfister, Lenneis & Mintert, 2018). The football ground is assumed to be a male domain, and the football fan is assumed to be male, with team allegiance frequently passed from father to son. However, female football fans do exist. In reality, women have always watched and played sport, and for as long as there has been organized football, there have been female fans (Dunn, 2012).

There is a popular notion that men and women differ in emotional responsiveness to football (Wolensky, 2018). Existing research shows that there is a strong correlation between gender differences and the way an individual identifies with football; males have a stronger bond or identify ability to football team than females do (Melnick&Wann, 2010; Koch &Wann, 2016).Another study showed that men

spent more time watching football on television than women and had greater knowledge of football than women. Currently, the consumption of media has changed tides, as females seem to have higher levels of television exposure compared to males (Besley& Shanahan, 2004); and may be as equally involved in football fandom as their male counterparts.

Football fandom, according to Davis (2014) is a form of leisure whereby individuals follow up on football related activities for the purpose of pleasure and social belonging. It is a platform on which football fans express their support and loyalty to the performance of their favorite team such that the success or loss of their team boosts or bursts their self-esteem (Agbonna, Nnajieta, & Anyakoha, 2016). According to Goodlad (2018), football fandom enables individuals to collectively celebrate or lament the performance of their favourite teams. Rationis (2019) explained that it is similar to apprenticeship, involving the process of training, practice and demonstration of relevant knowledge of the team among other fans. Affordable accessibility to satellite television media has enabled fans to watch live matches of their distant favorite teams. Many Nigerians youths are ardent followers of football clubs of other countries particularly the English premier League, via satellite television media. These Nigerian youths are mainly found in higher institutions as undergraduates.

An undergraduate is a college or university student who has not

graduated and takes part in undergraduate education (Anand, 2014). Undergraduates are expected to engage in activities that will be meaningful to their academic life. The academic life of a student ranges from learning how to deal with lecturers, to being productive and to being a better student. Success or failure of a student's academic life is evident in his/her academic performance (Ballotpedia, 2020). A student's academic performance may be affected by his/her engagement in football fandom which has become relatively easy via the television in viewing centers.

Commercial viewing centers provide the commonest avenue for young people especially undergraduate students, to follow up on the activities of their favorite foreign clubs (Dogari, Apuke, & Idi, 2018; Onyebueke, 2018). The centers provide the fans with opportunities to get away from domestic, academic or personal problems and bond with their peers as they enjoy the game they love (Onyebueke, 2015). Many studies in Europe, Asia and Africa found that football fandom is generally a positive agent of social identity, uniting people irrespective of races and religion (Rationis, 2019). Lippe (2015) reported that football fandom prevents depression, keeps mind active, strengthens relationship, builds self-esteem and prolongs life. According to Rationis (2020), it is an important means for people to form and maintain strong friendships that might otherwise not exist.

On the negative side, Onyebueke (2018), observed that football fandom among youths has been found to lead to unnecessary arguments, fight, gambling/betting, inter-club rivalry and aggression, teasing, nicknaming, distraction in studies and other life activities, eating disorder, alcoholism, transfer of aggression, suicide and rioting. Most of the viewing centers also operate bar services and go as far as making football viewing free on the condition that the customers must purchase drinks while they watch matches. Cummings (2013) opined that fandom affect peoples' personal pride, their happiness, their self-confidence, and often their inhibitions in ways that would be unthinkable in other activities with similar personal involvement. Dogari et al. (2018) reporting various studies, observed that football fandom can have adverse effects on ardent fans; in addition to consumption of much time and money which could have been invested in more productive activities, the rivalry that exist among club members could degenerate into 'cultism' and result in 'tribal' clashes and hooliganism if not controlled. Eribake (2009) cited the incidence in Port Harcourt Nigeria, in which a fan of one football club, rammed his car into a group of jubilating fans of another team, killing four people and injuring many others.

The proliferation of football bars or viewing centers has further increased the risk of fan rivalry as well as alcoholism and unplanned spending among youths (Dogari *et al.*, 2018). Personal observation of the researchers

shows that public viewing centres abound around the university campuses. These centres usually become beehive of drinking and other social activities, during the seasons of football competitions, especially the European league matches. The football match seasons are often characterized by the emanation of very loud spontaneous emotional outbursts from the viewing centres, indicating that football fandom is an intricate part of the undergraduate students' lives. Alaka (2015) estimated a nine-month financial cost of keeping up with football events among Nigerian youths at about ₦143,820 (US\$719) for home viewing and ₦18,800 (US\$94) for viewing centers; which is spent on cable subscription, fuel for generator, paid viewing and consumption of drinks at viewing centers. This is exclusive of other expenses such as purchasing branded jerseys, scarves, flags, hats, and hand bangles.

These observations raise research concern among youths in the universities. Three studies carried out among Nigerian fans of English clubs, as reported by Dogari *et al.* (2018), found out that football fandom could lead to extreme fanaticism which increases the risk of crime, breakdown of law and order as well engagement in some weird rituals aimed at bringing good luck for favorite clubs. The studies were all carried out in viewing centers located in various towns in Nigeria which are patronized by both youths and adults from different walks of life. There is scarcity of research targeted at undergraduates

of Nigerian universities who are being prepared to take over the mantle of leadership of the country in various sectors; and thus, cannot afford to be unduly distracted. Furthermore, there is an abundance of literature on football and fandom; however, gender is mostly not an issue in these publications. The overwhelming majority of studies and publications on football fandom focus on men. Research about female football supporters and fans is very limited (Pfister, Lenneis & Mintert, 2018). This study therefore investigated the gender perspective on the influence of football fandom on the academic life of undergraduates in public universities in Enugu State, Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the study**

The general objective of this study was to investigate the gender perspective on the influence of football fandom on the academic life of undergraduates in public universities in Enugu State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined;

1. ways undergraduates react to the performance of their favourite football clubs by gender; and
2. perceived positive and negative ways football fandom affect the academic lives of the respondents according to gender.

### **Methodology**

*Design of the study:* The study adopted descriptive cross-sectional survey research design. Cross sectional study is a research design whereby data are collected on the whole study

population at a single point in time in order to determine presence or otherwise of variables of interest (Alexander, Lopes, Ricchetti-Masterson, & Yeatts, 2014).

**Area of study:** The study was conducted in Enugu State. Enugu State is a state in southeastern Nigeria, created in 1991 from part of the old Anambra State. Its capital and largest city is Enugu, from which the state derives its name. Enugu State has a good number of public and private primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Enugu State has three main public tertiary institutions: The Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT); The University of Nigeria, Nsukka campus (UNN) and Enugu campus (UNEC); and The Institute of Management and Technology (IMT) (Williams, 2008).

**Population for the study:** The study population comprised of all the students enrolled as at 2018 in the two public universities in Enugu state. This gave a total population of 45,576 (28,257 female and 17,319 male) students from 9 faculties in University of Nigeria and 20,884 (10,896 female and 9,988 male) students from five faculties in Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT). Demographics showed that 51.7% of the students were aged between 19-21 years, 29% of them were males while 71% were females.

**Sample for the study:** Sampling was done in multiple-stages. First, by randomly selecting 30% of the faculties in each University. This gave three out of nine faculties in the University of

Nigeria and two out of five faculties in ESUT. The faculties selected were Agriculture, Arts and Engineering from University of Nigeria; and faculties of Education and Engineering from ESUT. The next stage involved random selection of 10% of students in each faculty. According to Ifidon and Ifidon (2007), for a descriptive survey with a population of up to 10,000, a sample of 10% is minimum. This gave a sample size of 600 undergraduate students comprising 326 (231 female and 95 male) students from the University of Nigeria and 275 (195 female and 79 male) students from ESUT who were randomly selected from the seven faculties.

**Instruments for data collection:** Sports Fandom Questionnaire (SFQ) by Wann (2002) and a structured questionnaire were used for data collection in this study. The SFQ was adapted to assess the level of sports fandom. It has 8-point scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 8 (strongly agree). The structured questionnaire was made up of sections A, B and C. Section A was used to collect information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Section B contained questions on the perceived positive and negative influence of football fandom on students' academic life while section C assessed ways of celebrating victories and losses of favored team. The items of the structured questionnaire were developed based on the findings of a 10 man focus group discussion conducted by the research team. The group participants were asked to

itemize how being a football fan has positively and negatively impacted their academic lives, and how they react when their favorite club wins or loses. Their responses were synthesized and used to develop the questionnaire.

The structured questionnaire was validated by three lecturers in the Department of Home Science and Management, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Their corrections were used to make the final copies of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for SFQ, sections B and C of the structured questionnaire, in this study were 0.926, 0.896 and 0.945 showing high levels of internal consistency.

**Data collection techniques:** Six hundred copies of each of the questionnaires were administered to the respondents. The participants were selected from the students who were available in the faculty buildings and gave their consents on the days of data collection. A hundred percent return was achieved since all the distributed questionnaires were collected.

**Data analysis techniques:** Means was used to categorize the respondents into fans and non-fans. Data were analyzed

using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation. Chi-square was used to determine the relationship between gender and the academic life of the respondents and their reaction to their club performances. Significant level was established at  $p < 0.05$ .

## Results

### Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Data analysis showed that 71% were females while 29% were males. About 51.7% were between ages 19-21 years old while 21% were within 16-18 years old. About 30% of them were in final year; 19% were in first year while half (51.7%) of them were in other years. Majority (91.7%) were single while 8.3% were married. About 67.3% of them lived in school hostel, about 15.2% come from home while 17.5% of them stayed off-campus. Many ( $n = 366$ ; 61%) identified as ardent football fans with a greater proportion (71.6%) of female fans than 28.4% male fans.

### Ways respondents react to the performance of their favorite football clubs by gender

**Table 1: Percentage Responses on Respondents' Reactions to Favorite Clubs' Victories**

	Just jubilate F (%)	Drink F (%)	Party with friends F (%)	Total	$\chi^2$ values
Males	71 (68.3)	5 (4.8)	28 (26.9)	104 (100)	
Females	198 (75.6)	22 (8.4)	42 (16.0)	262 (100)	6.46*
Total	269 (73.5)	27 (7.4)	70 (19.1)	366(100.0)	

$\chi^2 = \text{Chi-square}; *p < 0.05$

Table 1 shows that majority (73.5%) of the respondents just jubilated over their club wins; a few (7.4%) drank/smoked to show their happiness and the rest (19.1%) partied with friends. Chi-square analysis showed that gender was significantly

associated with ways of reacting to club victories. Female fans were more likely than male fans to just jubilate (75.6%) and drink (4.8%) and male fans were more likely to organize party (26.9%) with friends.

**Table 2: Percentage Responses of Respondents' Reaction to Clubs' Losses**

	Just sad	Cry	Lose appetite	Lose sleep	Fight/quarrel with fans of opponents	Total	$\chi^2$ value
Males	39 (37.5)	4 (3.8)	26 (25.0)	25 (24.0)	10 (9.6)	104 (100)	
Females	121 (46.2)	35 (13.4)	58 (22.1)	27 (14.1)	11 (4.2)	262 (100)	16.0*
Total	160 (43.7)	39 (10.7)	84 (23.0)	62 (16.9)	21 (5.7)	366(100.0)	

$\chi^2 =$  Chi-square; \* $p < 0.05$

Table 2 shows that in reaction to club losses, many fans (43.7%) just felt sad; almost a quarter (23%) lost their appetite and a few (5.7%) fought/quarreled with fans of the opponents. Gender was also significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) associated with

reaction to losses. Male fans were more likely than female fans to lose appetite (25%), lose sleep (24%) and fight with opponents (9.6%); while females were more likely than males to feel just sad (46.2%) and cry (13.4%).

**Table 3: Mean Responses on Positive Influence of Football Fandom on Academic Life as Perceived by Male and Female Respondents**

S/N	Positive Influences	$\bar{X}_n$ (SD)	Rmk	$\bar{X}_f$ (SD)	Rmk	t-values	Total $\bar{X}_t$ (SD)	Rmk
1	Inspires me to work hard at my studies	3.81(1.32)	A	3.19(1.52)	A	3.85*	3.51(1.48)	A
2	Motivates me to make a personal time table/to do list and stick to it.	3.70(1.28)	A	2.98(1.54)	D	4.61*	2.73(1.46)	D
3	Improves my knowledge generally	4.00(0.87)	A	3.78(0.90)	A	2.11*	3.46(1.19)	A
4	Keeps me mentally and emotionally fit for my studies	4.23(0.87)	A	4.00 (0.91)	A	2.25*	3.32(1.38)	A

$\bar{X}_n$  = mean by males;  $\bar{X}$  = mean by females;  $\bar{X}$  = grand mean; SD = standard deviation; Rmk = Remarks; A = Agree; D = Disagree; \* = values are significant at  $p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows that the male respondents agreed to all the items as positive influence (mean  $\geq 3.0$ ) of fandom on their lives as undergraduate students. The female respondents agreed to all items with the exception of item 2 - "motivates me to make a personal time table/to do list and stick to it" which had response mean 2.98. Gender significantly accounted for observed variance in the mean scores on positive influences. Total mean showed that the respondents disagreed only on item 2 (mean = 2.73) as a positive way football fandom influence their academic life.

**Table 4: Mean Responses on Negative Influence of Football Fandom on Academic Life as Perceived by the Respondents by Gender**

S/N	Negative Influences	$\bar{X}_n$ (SD)	Rmk	$\bar{X}$ (SD)	Rmk	t-values	Total $\bar{X}_i$ (SD)	Rmk
1	Makes me skips lectures	2.91(1.35)	D	2.25 (1.39)	D	4.17*	2.07 (1.29)	D
2	Reduces my time for studies	3.10 (1.59)	A	2.40 (1.54)	D	3.86*	2.19(1.37)	D
3	Reduces concentration in my academic work	2.93 (1.51)	D	2.30 (1.49)	D	3.64*	2.09 (1.35)	D
4	Makes me lose night sleep	2.98 (1.52)	D	2.27 (1.51)	D	4.03*	2.11 (1.37)	D
5	Makes me skips meals to watch my favorite match	3.58 (1.51)	A	2.75 (1.64)	D	4.43*	2.46 (1.51)	D
6	Makes me spend my pocket money to buy my club items e.g. jersey, headband.	3.17 (1.59)	A	2.30 (1.44)	D	5.07*	2.21 (1.39)	D
7	Drives me into sport betting/gambling	3.12 (1.70)	A	2.25 (1.51)	D	4.78*	2.12 (1.42)	D
8	Makes me miss school test/exams	2.82 (1.59)	D	1.92 (1.33)	D	5.46*	1.93 (1.28)	D

$\bar{X}_n$  = mean by males;  $\bar{X}$  = mean by females;  $\bar{X}$  = grand mean; SD = standard deviation; Rmk = Remarks; A = Agree; D = Disagree; \* = values are significant at  $p < 0.05$

Table 4 shows the negative influences of football fandom on academic lives of the respondents. It shows that the female fans disagreed with all the items as not a significant influence, while the males agreed that they skipped meals to watch matches (mean = 3.58), -spent pocket money buying club items (mean = 3.17), drove them into sport betting/gambling (mean = 3.12) and it reduced time for study (mean = 3.10). Gender differences were also found in all the items at  $p < 0.05$ . The overall mean showed that the respondents disagreed with all the items as negative ways football fandom influenced their academic life.



## Discussion

Findings showed that majority of the respondents reacted to the victories of their favorite clubs simply by jubilating and some organized party with friends. However, a few engaged in drinking to show their happiness. A greater number of males reported partying with friends to celebrate victory. This finding agrees with the finding of Lederman, (2011) among students of Oregon university that male fans were more likely to organize party with friends when their teams won, but unlike the report by Lederman, the females in this study engaged in drinking more than males when their club wins. Iliades (2012) also observed that women are about twice more likely than men to die by suicide and accidents and suffer other health related issues, as a result of drinking problems. On their reaction to club losses, the findings show that many of them just felt sad, some lost sleep and appetite and a few went as far as fighting or quarreling with fans of the opposing clubs. Male fans were more likely than female fans to lose appetite and sleep, and to fight with opponents while females were more likely than males to feel sad and cry. In a similar study carried out by Agbonna et al. (2016) among students of tertiary institutions in Southwestern Nigeria, 5.6% of the respondents reported they were willing to fight the fans of the opposing team should their favored team lose a match. Goodlad (2018) observed that football fandom enables individuals to collectively lament the performance of their

favorite teams. As observed by Cummings (2013), football fans could lose personal happiness, pride, and self-confidence when their team loses a match, and this could make them lose their self-restraint and engage in negative acts that they would not have been involved with given other circumstances. These acts as observed by Onyebueke (2018) include unnecessary arguments, fight, inter-club rivalry and aggression, teasing, nicknaming, alcoholism, transfer of aggression, suicide and rioting all of which could lead to complete breakdown of law and order and disruption of academic activities if not controlled.

The findings further showed that football fandom have positive influence on academic lives of the students; male students reported that participating in football fandom activities inspired them to work hard at studies, motivated them to make and comply with a personal to-do list or time table, improved their knowledge on general life issues and kept them mentally and emotionally fit to go about their studies. Participating in sporting activities especially ones that involve passion and devotion, is established as a means of relaxation and positive way of spending leisure time (Wolensky, 2018). The importance of productive leisure activities in the lives of undergraduate students cannot be over emphasized. It is crucial for developing self-identity, increases the ability to cope with academic and personal life stresses, provides opportunity for increased physical

activity and exercise, increased means of socializing and interacting with peers and ultimately leads to better health and wellbeing (Yarnal, 2010). The female students also reported similar positive influences with the exception of motivating them to make and stick to personal time table. Gender difference was found in the level at which football fandom positively influenced academic life of the participants, with male students experiencing higher level of influence. Although the number of females who identified as football fans is high, studies had shown that males show higher level of commitment to fandom activities than females (Theodorakis, Al-emadi, & Wann, 2017). Wolensky (2018) opined that female fans display lower levels of emotional attachment with fandom activities compared to males who “use fandom as a socially acceptable outlet for a wide array of emotional displays.

On the other hand, while females did not report any form of negative influence, male students agreed that they skipped meals to watch matches, spent pocket money buying club items, engaged in sport betting/gambling and had reduced time for study. Meal skipping could have adverse health effects on individuals especially students, if not controlled. Wilhelm (2017) observed that it could lead to binge eating, lower metabolism levels and consequently weight gain, impairing of mental focus and an increase in the risk of developing diabetes. The students also reported spending their pocket money buying

club items and engaging in sport betting/gambling. Ogula and Munyua (2019) observed that students who engage in sports gambling lose much more often than they win. These practices amount to wastage of scarce resources, adds to the financial pressure faced by parents, and has the potential of introducing the students to serious financial crimes such as stealing and embezzlement of funds. In addition, Palmer (2013) stated that sports gambling was associated with poor mental health, binge drinking, use of marijuana, cigarette and illicit drug as well as unsafe sex due to alcohol intake.

It is noteworthy however, that though football fandom activities reduced time for personal study, it did not interfere with the students' attendance to lectures and examinations, neither did it reduce concentration in their studies. This finding is contrary to the report of Lederman (2011) that male students in Oregon university experienced drop in grades by 27 points, more than females, when their clubs won as a result of partying. Sitkowsk (2008) also reported that among high school students in south eastern Pennsylvania, male students who participated in athletic sports experienced drop in grades at the end of sporting season. The findings of current study suggest that there is no conflict between students' participation in football fandom and their academic activities irrespective of their being football fans or not.

## Conclusion

It is a popular culture among undergraduate students especially females, to identify with a football team and participate in various activities that show solidarity with the favorite football club. This includes celebrating the victories and mourning the losses of the favorite teams. Although, the students generally reacted to their club performances by merely jubilating and feeling sad as the case may be, a few of them showed tendency for risky behaviors such as drinking, smoking, fighting and quarrelling in addition to loss of sleep and appetite. Football fandom was found to have some perceived positive influences on the academic lives of both male and female students. Football fandom could therefore be said to provide an array of suitable leisure activities for the students in the midst of stressful academic pursuit. However, it also had several negative influences on the academic life of the male students which included skipping meals and sports gambling or betting, which could have series of negative consequences. Although gender disparity existed in the students' reaction to their club performances and the way football fandom influenced the lives of students, football fandom was generally perceived to have no negative influence on the academic life of the undergraduate students.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that;

1. School administration should get involved in the matters relating to football fandom among students by offering supervised football viewing services to the students in their hostels so that minor acts of indiscipline and club patronage at viewing centres do not degenerate to full blown hooliganism and cultism.
2. Parents and guardians of undergraduate students especially the male students, should also provide periodic supervision of the children/wards' participation in fandom activities especially digital aspect of fandom, so as to harness the positive aspects of fandom and minimize its negative effects.
3. Undergraduate male students should discover practical ways of organizing their fandom behaviours, so that it does not escalate to harmful dimensions and they are able to achieve adequate balance between their academic life and football fandom.
4. Future researches are recommended to extend the investigation of football fandom among teaching and non-teaching staff of universities and its influence on their job performance and family living.

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