

COPING WITH PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF LOSING GAMES AMONG
EUROPEAN SOCCER FANS CLUBS IN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

The outcome of every football match is either win, lose or draw. The European Soccer fans in Nigeria are always excited, elated and thrilled when their supporting teams win; while on the other hand, the same fans are psychologically downed as a result of losing in a match. This paper therefore, examined the coping with psychological impacts of losing game among European soccer club fans in Nigeria. The paper explained the concept of fan, Nigerians fans, psychological experience of fans, Relegation—A Factor Affecting Fan Loyalty and coping factors with psychological impacts of losing game among European soccer club fans in Nigeria. The paper recommends that fans should not see winning at all cost as the result of the game in order to promote their psychological wellbeing and also be satisfied with the result of the game and continue to be committed to the team they support

INTRODUCTION

Soccer is the most popular sport in Nigeria and has become part of the young and the adult's life in the country. Soccer loving Nigerians find their ways to every viewing centres whenever their supporting teams are playing because of the passion and the love for their teams. The enthusiasm in soccer among Nigerians is so glaring that images of European clubs such as Arsenal, Manchester United, Chelsea, Liverpool, Real Madrid, Barcelona, Juventus, AC Milan and soccer stars: Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi, Eden Hazard, Neymar Jr, Mezut Ozil, Rooney, among others loom in houses,

cars, and business premises. Although there is no exact statistics of football supporters in Nigeria, it could be said that soccer in Nigeria is making a big impact, socially, economically and physically. Okeke (2009) observes that soccer in Nigeria has captivated the minds of the young and the young in heart. Maintaining that, the support Nigerian fans give to especially their European clubs and footballers come in many brands ranging from mere support, to entertainment, gambling and legal economic gains. The proliferation of commercial football viewing centres in almost all cities, towns and villages attest to the acceptability of soccer in Nigeria.

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The worldwide sport spectator and fan industry has grown rapidly in the last few decades and is still growing. Millions of people regularly view sport events either in person or through the media. For instance, European soccer leagues during the 2009/2010 season exceeded 54 million people. Sport spectators are “those individuals who actively witness a sporting event in person or through some form of media” and sport fans are “individuals with an abiding interest in sport” and/or the teams or players associated with this (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). Sport fans are typically highly enthusiastic about both their fandom and their fanship (Zillman & Paulus, 1993). Being a fan of a sport club is something that can give meaning to a fan’s life and that entails different consumption practices (Holt, 1995 & Tapp 2004). Fans are extremely important for sport clubs, as they generate a large part of the clubs’ income by attending games, buying merchandise, paying to watch games on television or on the Internet, and attracting sponsors. They also contribute to the atmosphere in sport stadia, the identity of the teams, and what makes them attractive to others

Soccer is associated with passion, emotion, excitement and dedication worldwide. References to extreme emotional experiences at football games characterised all aspects of discussions with fans—some referring to this as 'pure joy' and exhilaration of being at football games. Such is the intensity of the experience that two thirds of fans have cried at football matches – mostly through joy, but occasionally because of despair. Football provides for many fans the opportunity to let out pent up emotions resulting from everyday life

A deeply committed fan usually experiences intense emotional events during his/her life time as a fan besides single game wins and losses. In the case of professional European soccer clubs, such events may include championships, promotions and relegations, games against archrivals, participations in international competitions (UEFA Europa League, Champions League, and FIFA Club World Cup), or other highlights and scandals (e.g., election for “team of the year,” financial collapses, bribery of referees, violent fan behavior). Researchers agree that sport fans are typically highly committed to their clubs and this commitment highly correlates with emotional and behavioral outcomes in fans (Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Hirt, Zillmann, Erickson, & Kennedy, 1992; Madrigal, 1995, 2003, 2008; Madrigal & Chen, 2008; Vallerand et al., 2008; Wann & Branscombe, 1990; Wann, Royalty, & Rochelle, 2002)

The Fan

As generally defined by Reysen and Branscombe (2010), a fan is any individual who is an enthusiastic, ardent, and loyal admirer of an interest and the term can be used to describe individuals who are devoted to a myriad of interests, not only sport teams and celebrities. Agas, Georgakarakou, Mylonakis and Panagiotis (2012) explains that ‘fan’, the shortened form of the word ‘fanatic’, expresses enthusiasm, passion and eagerness and even “moving beyond reason”. The incontestable influence a large group of sport fans have directly translates to the electric atmosphere and excitement at most large sporting occasions. In fact, Dobel (2010) mentions that fans matter so much that sports often has a ‘home field

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advantage' largely created by the fans in the stands, because enthusiastic sports fans are able to support and uplift players by transferring their energy and emotional support to them through their cheering and chanting. The opposite is true when sports fans display competitiveness towards their rivals (Dobel, 2010)

Within the sports literature, the fan is separated from the 'sport spectator'. Although, 'sport fan' and 'sport spectator' as the consumer is called by Wann, Dunham, Byrd and Keenan (2004) are sometimes used within the literature in an indifferent way. A sport fan is enthusiastically follows his/her team as indicated by Wann et al., (2004), whereas a sport spectator is interested in a less emotional way. Fans want to see their team winning, they like to be informed about the club's activities and they love to visually identify with their team. Spectators are typically very different. They prioritize good entertainment, enjoy the athletes' skills and want to expand their knowledge. It is hereby certainly worth mentioning that both terms ('fan' and 'spectator') are not mutually exclusive since an individual can be either one or both of them.

Nigerian Fans

Majority of football fans in Nigeria are fans of European football leagues. These major Leagues are mostly, in order of popularity among the Nigerian fans: English Premiership, Spanish La Liga, Italian Series A and German Bundesliga. English Premier Clubs gain the greatest number of fans, Spanish La Liga is in the second place, and the Italian Seria A in the third. The most widely supported clubs are

Manchester United, Chelsea, Arsenal, Barcelona, Real Madrid Bayern Munich and Liverpool (Tade 2014; Ifeduba 2011 & Omobowale, 2009). The popularity of the European football is connected with the introduction of DSTV, Eurosport, and other sports channels on the platform of cable and satellite technology in Nigeria which commenced in the 1990s (Ifeduba 2011; UEFA Guiding Principles 2009) and this marked the beginning of a speedy decline in the fan of local clubs (Omobowale 2009). Before the introduction of DSTV, Eurosport, and other satellite televisions, local football clubs like Stationeries Stores, IICC Shooting Stars, Rangers International and E1 Kanemi Warriors, among others, controlled a huge fan base. Today, the fan base of the local clubs in Nigeria is nearly in extinction, as European clubs have mopped the fan base as affirmed by Tade (2014). He further asserted that;

The European Champions League and Premiership have become infectious to Nigerian Families. As a patriarchal society, husband fanship influences and alters social interactions before, during and after UEFA matches. Husbands' identification with European clubs is redefining social relationships at the family level. Loss of matches may lead to refusal to eat food, aggressive behaviour, conflict, lack of communication, while victory brings joy, gifts and better bonding and communication. Watching matches outside the home increases

Prof. Yao Jiaxin, Oguntuase Solomon B. and Ogunsanya Jephthah O.

www.guildaa.org

the opportunity of husbands to
associate with deviant peers and,
consequently, deviant behaviour

The point above was also supported by Omobowale (2009) when he observed that sport is an aspect of culture where the attached meaning has implications for social relations. As people are exposed to sports as values, they pick behaviours that may be compatible and/or incompatible with local culture to the extent that they affect social structures and social relations both positively and negatively

Psychological Experience of Fans

Fans' emotional states are usually highly affected by the performance of their team. While the outcome of a sporting contest is objectively neutral, it is a fan's psychological attachment to the preferred team that adds meaning to successes or failures of the team and causes affective responses (Madrigal, 2008). Pictures in newspapers or television broadcasts often show how happy and proud fans are when their team wins, fans yell, swing flags, jump, sing chants, and so on. If their team loses, fans show their sadness and disappointment through their silence, or by venting their anger, crying, or even collapse back upon themselves. Hirt et al. (1992), Wann, Dolan, McGeorge, and Allison (1994), Wann (1996), Bizman and Yinon (2002), Kerr, Wilson, Nakamura & Sudo (2005), Madrigal (2008), and Madrigal and Dalakas (2008) found that victories have positive effects on fans' emotional states and defeats have negative effects

Stress

Stress is an essential emotion. Stress is defined as a substantial imbalance between demand and response capability, under conditions where failure to meet that demand has important consequences (McGrath in Weinberg & Gould, 1999). From this definition it can be concluded that stress is a perception of psychological threat. This argument is supported by Anshel, Jamieson and Raviv (2001). Psychological stress is based on perception. The emotional response called 'stress' is likely to occur when an individual views himself as incapable of coping with a high demand situation that has potentially harmful consequences. In response to such appraisals, our body instantaneously mobilizes itself to deal with the emergency, and the body experiences physiological arousal. Fans are worried by poor performance of their teams, hence anger sets in, and being depressed are characteristics of these losing fans. They have loss of appetite, sleep difficulties, and inability to get one's mind off the problem (failure to win). Interview with a Barca fan to say something about his feeling when Barcelona lost to Juventus on 3:0 aggregate in the 2016/2017 UEFA Champions League Quarter final match revealed that, he was not happy and could not eat after the match in the evening.

Disappointment

Disappointment is a very prominent part of human experience. Schimmack and Diener (1997) reported that, in a study of 150 college students, disappointment was rated the most intense and third most frequent of negative emotions, with only

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anxiety and anger occurring more frequently. A disappointment, like an unexpected loss by team, might lead to no reduction, a moderate reduction, or a large reduction in one's tendency to continue to support team.

Disappointment Theory provides another perspective on disappointment. It was developed by economists who studied individuals trying to make rational decisions when faced with uncertain circumstances. A number of investigators have contributed to Disappointment Theory. Loomes and Sugden (1986) stated that the central proposition of disappointment theory is that an individual forms expectations about uncertain prospects, and if the actual consequence turns out to be worse than (or better than) that expectation, the individual experiences a sensation of disappointment (or elation). Bell (1985) postulated that the more valuable or desirable the hope for outcome, and the more unexpected the actual outcome, the greater the disappointment would be. In further describing the nature of disappointment, van Dijk and Zeelenberg (2002) reported that disappointment is most likely to occur when the people are pursuing something pleasurable, when they feel they have a moral right to their goal, when the failure to obtain the goal is unexpected, and when the failure is caused by circumstances beyond their control.

Relegation—A Factor Affecting Fan Loyalty

The system of promotion/relegation in European soccer means that clubs can be promoted to higher divisions or relegated to lower divisions depending on their position in the league table at the

end of the season. Banyard and Shevlin (2001) show that English fans of a Premier League club that was relegated to the second division psychological distress that can be compared with traumatic distress caused by physical threats. Konigstorfer and Uhrich's (2009) study compares two teams' promotions and relegations to the first and second Bundesliga (the professional German soccer league) over different seasons. Their results showed that these events significantly impacted on a number of indicators of relationship strength. However, they appeared to have no effect on the long-term behavioral loyalty of fans of the two teams.

Wann, Melnick, Russell & Pease (2001) considered adjustments in fans' associations with their team as a tactic applied by fans to maintain psychological health. This view stems from research that related wins or losses by teams to fans' self-perception. Such phenomena were described as early as the 1970s (Bizman&Yinon, 2002; Cialdini&DeNicholas, 1989; Snyder, Lassegard, & Ford, 1986). Those researchers identified fans who try to raise their self-esteem by decreasing the psychological distance between themselves and successful teams. Such fans were considered to have high BIRGing (basking in reflected glory) levels. BIRGing refers to people's tendency to share in the glory of a successful other with whom they are in some way associated (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman & Sloan, 1976). It is further assumed that some fans protect their self-image when clubs lose games by increasing the psychological distance between themselves and the unsuccessful teams. Such tendencies are called CORFing (cutting

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off reflected failure). CORFing prevent harm to oneself esteem or public image (Snyder et al., 1986). BIRGing and CORFing tendencies help to explain fluctuating attendances of games depending on the success of the teams as shown in empirical studies carried out by Baade & Tiehen (1990); Whitney (1988) Boen, Vanbeselaere, & Feys (2002)

This stream of research work suggested that fans, in response to a relegation to a lower division, experience decreasing BIRGing and increasing CORFing levels. The opposite tendencies may occur when clubs succeed in staying in the league. The rationale behind the presumed effects of relegation is that this event brings about serious changes for clubs and fans. For example, players may have to be sold because of reduced income from sponsorships, merchandise, selling of television broadcasting rights, and ticket sales. The attractiveness of the opponents will decrease, because there are less star or big city teams (such as Munich, Manchester, or Madrid) to play against in a lower division. Richardson (2004) argued that relegation is a loss of cultural capital for fans as the opponents of the relegated team are less prestigious in the lower division. Also, the stadium atmosphere may be less arousing as the number of spectators decreases (Königstorfer & Uhrich, 2009).

**Coping with Psychological Impacts of Losing
Game among European Soccer Fans Clubs in
Nigeria**

Coping has been identified as a complex, individual, dynamic and multidimensional process by several sport scientists (Anshel, Jamieson & Raviv,

2001; Crocker & Graham, 1995; Crocker & Isaak, 1997; Gould, Finch & Jackson, 1993). In order to understand the coping process, it is important to understand the components that are related to the need to cope. As the definition suggested, coping, is an effort to manage emotions that arises in different situations. Sport psychology scientist Hanin (2000) that emotion is a reaction to a stimulus event either actual or imagined. It involves changes in the viscera and musculature of the person it is experienced subjectively in characteristics ways, it can be expressed through such means as facial changes and action tendencies, and may mediate and energize subsequent behaviours. (Deci, in Hanin, 2000). Furthermore, Hanin identified and described three fundamental elements that coping consists of. First the physiological change such as increased heart rate. Secondly action tendencies in the last element of emotions are the subjective experience. This refers to the individual's conscious experiences during the emotional event. Lazarus (2000) also stated that emotion is a phenomenon that is an organized psychophysiological reaction to ongoing relationships with the environment, most often, but not always, interpersonal or social. This reaction consists of responses from three levels of analysis namely introspective reports of subjective experience, overt actions or impulses to act, and physiological changes that make the emotions organismic. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping is a process of constantly changing cognitive and behavioural effort to manage specific external and/or internal demands or conflicts appraised as taxing or exceeding one's resources. This states that coping is a process that takes place

Prof. Yao Jiaxin, Oguntuase Solomon B. and Ogunsanya Jephthah O.

www.guildaa.org

whenever an individual is in a situation that is perceived as demanding (for example situations of success or failure).

Therefore, people who are unable to cope efficiently with the pressure of competitive sport may experience not only a decrease in their ability to perform, but unmotivated, lack of interest, mental distress, and even experience signs of physical incapacities (Omar-Fauzee, Daud, Abdullah, & Rashid, 2009).

Satisfaction

Satisfaction is defined as a post-consumption evaluation of perceived quality relative to pre-purchase performance expectations about quality (Homburg, Koschate, & Hoyer, 2005). Here, satisfaction is considered not just with respect to a single sport game attended by a fan, but with respect to all the games fans have attended during the season (Johnson, Anderson, & Fornell, 1995). Satisfaction's relationship to loyalty is well documented, where cumulative satisfaction is antecedent to loyalty (Oliver, 1999). For the sports context, research has found cumulative satisfaction to be related to fan loyalty (Biscaia, Correia, Rosado, Maroco, & Ross 2012; Clemes, Brush & Collins, 2011). This implies that European Soccer fans need to be satisfied with the result of the game being negative irrespective of their betting

Self-connection

Self-connection refers to the activation of a person's identity system (Aaron, Norman, Aaron, McKenna, & Heyman, 2000). It reflects the degree to

which a club delivers on important identity concerns, tasks, or themes, expressing a significant aspect of a person's identity (Fournier, 1998). Self-connection is apparent in personal relationships between partners, which have been primarily subject to research in the field of social psychology. However, people can also be fans of sport teams for the purpose of self-concept maintenance as shown by Dimanche & Samdahl (1994); Laverie & Arnett (2000). Wann, Melnick, Russell & Pease (2001) stated that, because of close association to their teams, highly identified fans often view their role as a team follower which is reflection of themselves. Self-connection is seen when fans claim that they are fans of specific clubs or that their club expresses what is important to them

Commitment

Commitment is defined as an enduring desire to continue a deep relationship, combined with a willingness to make efforts toward that end (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). It can be categorized into affective and calculative commitment (Kumar, Hibbard, & Stern, 1994). Intimate commitment is considered here, this mainly involves affective states, but it goes beyond affective commitment. This variable assesses the depth of intimacy between fans and their teams, and fans' tendency to build up reciprocal, close relational ties with their teams.

In the area of social psychology, research into romantic partnerships has shown that relationships can become stronger when persons who are highly committed to their partners have to weather psychological ups and downs (Wieselquist,

Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999). In the same way, highly committed fans may give even greater support to their teams during bad times than under normal conditions. An example of this is offered by the unsuccessful Chicago Cubs baseball team, whose fans had high attitudinal and behavioral loyalty levels despite the club's losses over several seasons (Bristow & Sebastian, 2001). Thus, highly committed fans may have the feeling that their club needs their support more than ever in times of crisis.

Avoidance- Focused Coping.

Avoidance- focused coping strategies involves pushing away, avoiding or sometimes denying happenings and situations to protect one self. Decreased effort, not preparing well and giving poor efforts are ways of avoidance- focused coping strategies as reported by Poczwardowski and Conroy (2002). These results have support in Anshel & Kaissidis (1997) where the authors stated that avoidance- focused coping refers to repression, disengagement, rejection or turning away. Moreover Anshelet & Kaissidis (1997) stated that avoidance- focused coping is to prefer when emotional resources are limited, or the source of stress is not clear, or the situation is not controllable or when the outcome measures are immediate or in short- term. According to Anshel, Kim, Kim, Chang & Eom (2001) and Yoo (2001) avoidance- focused coping strategies is preferred when the athlete wants to replace unpleasant, non-constructive thoughts with more positive ones.

Retroactive Pessimism

Retroactive pessimism occurs when, subsequent to a disappointing outcome, individuals re-evaluate their group's chances for success, concluding that, 'We never really had a chance, anyway.' By adopting such a deterministic belief, persons are better able to cope with threats to their social identity (Aiken & West, 1991). Because such cognitions involve concluding that an outcome was inevitable, retroactive pessimism is an example of the necessity component of hindsight bias and research indicates that strategic perceptions of necessity can be effective as a coping strategy (Blank & Nestler, 2006)

Several studies have documented the existence of retroactive pessimism. For example, Tykocinski, Pick & Kedmi (2002) asked fans of two soccer teams to rate their team's chances of victory in an upcoming match both prior and subsequent to the contest. Results indicated that supporters of the winning team reported little change in their pre- to post-match ratings of the teams' chances. Such a finding was expected as these persons had little reason to exhibit retroactive pessimism. Conversely, fans of the losing team significantly altered their pre- to post-game perceptions of the teams' chances, reporting that the winning team was more likely to win and the losing team more likely to lose after the competition had taken place. Thus, by adopting a retroactively pessimistic belief that a negative outcome was most likely inevitable, individuals may better cope with a threat to their social identity

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Conclusion

Fans are important aspect of soccer as they support the clubs both during season and off season as a result of the love, passion and enthusiasm they have for the club, players and coach. These same fans suffer psychologically when their supporting team losses to the opponent. It is therefore concluded that, there should be thorough orientations that the game football is not a win at all cost for this could jeopardize the psychological wellbeing, of European soccer club fans to a greater percentage of football fans in Nigeria milieu. Also, the coping strategies aforementioned could serve as vital instrument in overhauling any psychological impact of losing game among the European soccer club fans in Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. Adequate orientations for fans majorly through media before the match and during the break of the match and if possible at the end of every match in order to be conversant about the outcome of the game and improve psychological health
2. Satisfaction coping strategy should be used in case of any disappointment from the game. The fans should be satisfied and remember the good days of the team
3. Self-connection should be used by the fans for them to know that they are part of the club

4. Commitment is an inevitable tool that makes a fan to be strong and have passion for their team at all times
5. Retroactive pessimism should also be used by the fans while experiencing failure, disappointment and stress as a result of not winning of a team/club.

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SOCCER FANS CLUBS IN NIGERIA

Prof. Yao Jiaxin, Oguntuase Solomon B. and Ogunsanya Jephthah O.

www.guildaa.org

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www.guildaa.org

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