

# Football Club Brand Image and Fan Loyalty among University Students

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## Abstract

This study examined football club brand image and fan loyalty among university students. Specifically, the research ascertained the level of football club loyalty, assesses the effect of coach factor, trophies won, brand logo and brand image on football club loyalty among University of Benin students and investigated the extent to which University of Benin Students fans demographics affect their loyalty to football clubs. The study adopted the survey research design. The multistage sampling technique was employed to select a sample of 334 students of the University of Benin. Nine (9) foreign clubs and six (6) local clubs were used in evaluating the constructs of fan loyalty. Data were mostly derived from primary sources. Data were analyzed using simple percentages, means, inferential statistics of multiple regression, T-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for the purpose of testing hypotheses formulated. The findings from the study indicated that the University of Benin student fans have a high level of loyalty to their football clubs. This is as a result of the club history, club performance and the student's likelihood to watch their football clubs play against other opponents. The study also revealed that University of Benin student fans have positive image of the football clubs they support, with many citing the clubs' success and style of play as reasons for their loyalty. There is a statically significant relationship between coach factor, trophies won, brand logo/image and football club loyalty among University of Benin students. Demographics of gender, age and educational level have no significant effect on their loyalty to football clubs.

**Key words:** Brand image, Club, Fans loyalty, Football, Sport

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## INTRODUCTION

Football clubs is a major international brand commodity that is consumed by many fans around the globe. This has resulted in the growth of numerous fan club bases and club followership outside the country where the team originated (Maderer, Holtbruegge & Woodland, 2016). With reports showing that 70% of fans in Nigeria consume football match services through satellite pay TV in viewing centers, sport restaurants and households, as most Nigerian football

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fans consume more of English Premier League and UEFA Champions league than local leagues (Omobowale, 2009).

The oldest football clubs date back to the early 19th century. While records exist for most incorporated clubs, they do not exist for all football clubs. Standalone clubs are usually ran like businesses and appear on official registers (Daniels, 2022). However, many football clubs were formed as part of larger organizations (schools, athletic clubs, and societies) and therefore public records of their formation and operations may not be kept unless they compete with other teams. Football clubs may also be dormant for periods and be re-formed (going into recess for reasons such as war or lack of a league or competition to participate in) and even switch between football codes. Likewise, a football club may fold if it becomes insolvent or is incapable of fielding a team to play matches (Daniels, 2022). There are several varieties of football leagues in the world, they include: Spanish league, premier league, Bundesliga, Italia, Chinese league, Scottish league, Nigerian Premier league, Swedish league and so on (Daniels, 2022). It is pertinent to note that each country and continent have their own football league and clubs and each league has several football clubs under it and they compete for cups by paying to win almost all matches set by the league they are to adhere to.

The level of fan involvement with foreign clubs has expanded the commercialization of football (Theysohn, 2009). Thus, these mostly foreign teams (from the English premier league, Spanish Laliga, Italian Serie A, German Bundesliga) can be classified as individual brands (Gladden & Funk, 2001), which means that the branding concepts of marketing can be applied to football teams.

Given the globalizing effect of club followership, within the context of a global and competitive football environment, sport management is increasingly confronted with the critical challenge of retaining fan loyalty (Desai, 2017). When the core product's performance falters (the team has a losing season) and the club does all it can to ensure that they keep their fan base stable and loyal to the club (Gladden & Funk, 2001). Brand loyalty has for long been an important concept within marketing; research has shown that loyalty within sport is very complex, that it is not guaranteed that fans will 'forever support' the club (Tapp, 2004). Brand loyalty can be seen as one of the most important concepts as it concerns repeat purchases and preferences for a certain brand on a consistent basis (Shank & Lyberger, 2014). Essentially, the importance of brand image and fan loyalty to marketing of football club teams cannot be overstated. However, what remains to be established is the relationship between brand image and fan loyalty in regional markets such as a third world country as Nigeria.

There seem to be deficiency of literature on the effect of brand image on fan loyalty (Cho, Lee & Pyun, 2018). Numerous studies have scrutinized fan loyalty in different sport contexts (Martin, 2013). Studies have mostly centered on evaluating the determinants of fan loyalty spectators' attachment, player involvement, and fans' emotions (Foroughi, Nikbin, Hyun & Iranmanesh, 2016; Yoshida, Heere & Gordon, 2015). This study therefore, examines football club brand image and fan loyalty among university students. It specifically aimed at ascertaining the level of football club loyalty and assess the effect of coach factor, trophies won, brand logo and brand image on football club loyalty among University of Benin students;

investigated the extent to which University of Benin Students fans demographics affect their loyalty to football clubs.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Conceptual Review**

#### **The Concept of Brand and Branding**

The word brand comes from the Old Norse brand, meaning to burn, and from these origins made its way into Anglo-Saxon (Buhler, 2021). It was of course by burning that early man stamped ownership on his livestock, and with the development of trade buyers would use brands as a means of distinguishing between the cattle of one farmer and another. Defining a brand is not something that is generally left to chance. A brand is not a name. A brand is not a positioning statement. It is not a marketing message (Agbonifoh, Ogwo, Nnolim & Nkamnebe, 2010). It is a promise made by a company to its customers and supported by that company. Brand names help the buyer by conveying a bundle of attributes about the product (McCarthy, Rowley & Keegan, 2022).

A brand is a distinguishing name or symbol (such as logo, trademark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors (Owusu-Ansah, 2023). A brand, thus signals to the customer the source of the product, and protects both the customer and the producer from competitors who would attempt to provide products that appear to be identical (Aaker & Moorman, 2023). Also it can be defined as a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or combination of these which is used to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors (Mereu, 2020). Alternatively, brand can be defined as an identifiable product augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant unique added values which match their needs most closely. Furthermore, its success results from being able to sustain these added values in the face of competition (Charumbira, 2016).

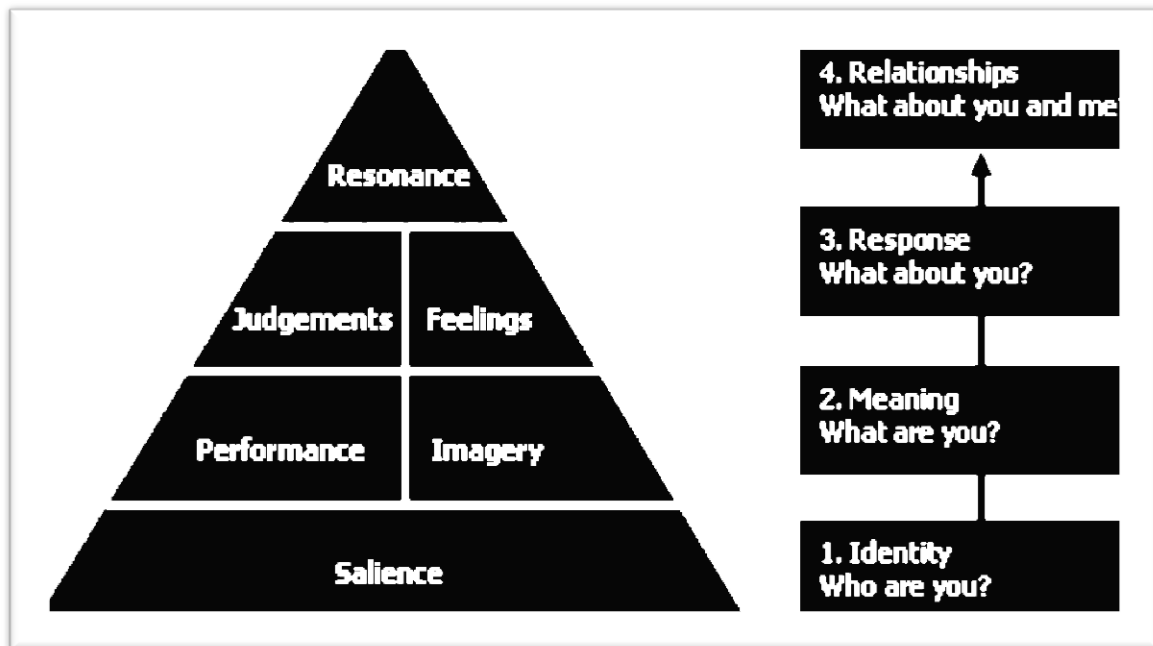
The concept of branding started with its early purpose of signifying or identifying livestock ownership, military insignia, national identification, and religious affiliation (Drabjerdi, Arabi & Haghikhah). The development of branding in the latter part of the twentieth century was quite profound and in keeping with the rapid application of the concept, there has come to be a variety of perspectives and definitions of brands and branding (Drabjerdi, Arabi & Haghikhah).. Knapp (2014), sees branding as the internalized amount of all impressions received by consumers resulting in a differentiated position in their 'mind's eye' based on perceived emotional and functional benefits. Knapp (2014) explained that in addition to basic identity creation, branding also focus on developing brand personality along with systems for brand management in the context of organizational associations.

Buck and Ifland (2023) emphasized the emotional aspect of branding saying that; branding is not only about ubiquity, visibility and functions; but also about 'bonding emotionally' with people in their daily lives. Buck and Ifland (2023) argues that it is only when a product kindles an emotional dialogue which resonates with consumers, that such product can be said to be a

brand in the true sense of it. Zwerenz (2019), approached the concept of branding from a holistic perspective, and integrated the dimensions of culture and organizational behaviour as brand performance indicators and as components of a brand management system. This view implies a stronger sense of the “people” element of a brand; which includes typical aspects of human resource, while holding business performance at the core of the integration model.

**Theoretical Review**

The theory underpinning this research is the Customer-Based Brand Equity, CBBE developed by Keller in 2008. Keller (2008) presents a CBBE- model, a four step program to build brands. He uses a CBBE pyramid to demonstrate the four steps and in order to gain significant brand equity the top of the pyramid must be reached. The pyramid contains six “brand building blocks”. The ones on left represent more realistic brand building where as the ones on right represent emotional brand building. According to Keller (2008), most strong brands were built by going up on both sides of the pyramid.



**Figure 1:** Customer-based brand equity pyramid,  
**Source:** Sulkunen (2012). A study of brand image

Brand salience measures awareness of the brand, how well is the brand recalled and recognized, what things remind of the brand, can consumers link the brand with the right name, logo and symbol? Brand awareness helps consumers to understand which of their needs the particular brand is designed to satisfy. It also helps consumers to understand what is the

category where the brand's products or services are competing in and what are the products and services that the brand offers? (Keller 2008).

Brand performance describes how well the product or service meets customers' more functional needs (Keller 2008). Brand performance is an important tool in differentiating its' products. Keller (2008) has listed five attributes and benefits that support differentiation and thus can create advantage to a brand. Primary ingredients and supplementary features, product reliability, durability, and serviceability, service effectiveness, efficiency, and empathy, style and design and Price (Keller, 2008).

### **Empirical Review**

This section presents a review of previous empirical studies in the area of brand image and fan loyalty to football clubs.

Owusu-Ansah (2023) assessed drivers of football fan-club loyalty: evidence from an Emergent Economy. The purpose of the study was to investigate brand dimensions most relevant in driving loyalty in potential market (Subsaharan, Africa). The study employs structural equation modeling to analyze survey data from 379 respondents. Respondents were self-professed fans of mainly European football clubs from the largest university in Ghana. The study found that product delivery and organizational attributes had positive effects on brand loyalty, while current team success had negative effects on fans loyalty to their clubs among satellite fans in the Ghanaian context. The study also found that identification and level of fan involvement are important moderators of the antecedent-club loyalty relationship while gender was not a significant moderator. In conclusion, the study contributes to extant literature by attempting to answer the call to examine possible moderators of antecedent-club loyalty relationships within the sports context and extending the literature on satellite fans' loyalty into the sub-Saharan African context.

Also, Buhler (2021) investigated the determinants of brand loyalty of football supporters in Bundesliga. The objective of the research was to assess the factors which influence loyalty for football supporters with regards to the Bundesliga. Success seemed to be important for football clubs and logically to be important for having a large group of supporters. In terms of membership numbers, the Bundesliga shows a different result. There are several clubs which are not that successful in terms of performance but have a big amount of members. The research gives a deeper insight on this problem and this can be seen in the main research question that is the determinants influence on loyalty of football supporters, especially for the Bundesliga. The results of online survey of 167 respondents suggest that group affiliation, emotional stimulation, economic motives and self-identity correlate positively with loyalty. Interestingly, the factor of success does not appear to be of an influence on loyalty of supporters. Additionally, four in-depth interviews with football supporters were conducted to gain a deeper insight. The results of the in-depth interviews have strengthened the results of the questionnaire and gave a further insight that values of the club, local proximity, being with friends and sharing memories are the main drivers for loyalty. The research serves as a contribution to the scientific process as preliminary work for Meta regression.

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Wikström (2021) studied the effect of brand image on football fan loyalty in the Swedish football context. The aim of the study was to explain how brand image affects fan loyalty in a Swedish football context. The study used a quantitative approach where data was collected through a questionnaire distributed online, and then tested in a confirmatory factor analysis. The findings of the study revealed that brand image affects fan loyalty through the facets of brand image, non-product related attributes and brand benefits. Where non-product related attributes and brand benefits were shown to have the stronger perceived effect on fan loyalty.

Dwi and Dwi (2020) studied fan loyalty toward international football team: the role of brand image. The study aims to examine the influence of two brand image dimensions (attributes and benefits) in creating fan loyalty toward the international football team. The study applied the covariance-based structural equation model for analyzing the data. The sample consisted of 335 Indonesian fans of the international football team. The study's results reveal that both attributes and benefits are pivotal factors in influencing fans attitudinal as well as behavioral loyalties. Furthermore, the study also shows that the effect of attributes on attitudinal loyalty is higher compared to those on the behavioral one. These findings extend the existing knowledge on the relationship between brand image and customer loyalty in a sports context and provide useful implications for practitioners to retain their fan loyalty.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted the cross-sectional survey research design. The rationalization for using this research design is adjudged based on the fact that it involves studying the current state of a unit or group at a particular point in time. The population of the study includes the total number of undergraduate and postgraduate students of the University of Benin which is 47,335 (University of Benin Students Affairs, 2022). The Yamane (1964) formula was used in obtaining the sample size from an empirical perspective. Therefore, the sample size of this study is 399.

A stratified random sample was obtained by dividing the population elements into mutually exclusive, non-overlapping groups of sample units called strata, which in this case was all the Faculties in the University of Benin. The nature of the study necessitated the use of primary data generation. The instrument that was used for data collection in this study is a structured questionnaire. A likert-Scale type questionnaire was developed for the respondents sampled for this study. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, percentages and means. The relationship between the dependent and independent variables were measured using multiple regression and Analysis of Variance. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 20.0) was used for all the analyses. All test were carried out at the 5% level of statistical significance.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Three hundred and ninety nine copies of the questionnaire were distributed. Of this number, 334 completed copies of the questionnaire were retrieved. The balance could not be recovered from the respondents. All the 334 copies of the questionnaire returned were found usable. This represents a response rate of 83 per cent. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of

the respondents. The table shows that 294 (88 %) of the respondents were males, 40 (12 %) were females. The preponderance of the respondents was in the age group of 20-25 years (57.5%); this was closely followed by the group, 26-30 years (21.9%). A total of 266 respondents were undergraduate students (79.6%) while 60 respondents (18.0 %) were M.Sc. students, Only 8 (2.4%) respondents were PhD. students of the University of Benin. The most preferred foreign club is Chelsea (18.0), followed by Barcelona (15.9%), and next is Arsenal (12.2%). The least preferred foreign club is Juventus (2.4%). With respect to local clubs, Enyimba F. C. was the most preferred local club by respondents (65.6%). This was closely followed by Bendel Insurance (25.4%). The least preferred local club by respondents is Lobi Stars (1.5%).

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

| <b>Demographic Characteristics</b> | <b>Categories</b>      | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                      | Male                   | 294              | 88                |
|                                    | Female                 | 40               | 12                |
|                                    | <b>Total</b>           | <b>334</b>       | <b>100</b>        |
| <b>Age</b>                         | Less than 20           | 44               | 13.2              |
|                                    | 20-25                  | 192              | 57.5              |
|                                    | 26-30                  | 73               | 21.9              |
|                                    | 31 years Above         | 25               | 7.5               |
|                                    | <b>Total</b>           | <b>334</b>       | <b>100</b>        |
| <b>Education</b>                   | Undergraduate students | 266              | 79.6              |
|                                    | M.Sc. students         | 60               | 18.0              |
|                                    | PhD. Students          | 8                | 2.4               |
|                                    | <b>Total</b>           | <b>334</b>       | <b>100</b>        |
| <b>Most Preferred Foreign Club</b> | Chelsea                | 60               | 18.0              |
|                                    | Liver Pool             | 38               | 11.4              |
|                                    | Manchester City        | 36               | 10.8              |
|                                    | Barcelona              | 53               | 15.9              |
|                                    | Arsenal                | 41               | 12.2              |
|                                    | Real Madrid            | 35               | 10.5              |
|                                    | Manchester United      | 35               | 10.5              |
|                                    | Juventus               | 8                | 2.4               |
|                                    | Paris Saint German     | 28               | 8.3               |
|                                    | <b>Total</b>           | <b>334</b>       | <b>100</b>        |
| <b>Most Preferred Local Club</b>   | Kano Pillars           | 6                | 1.8               |
|                                    | Enyimba F. C.          | 219              | 65.6              |

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|                  |            |            |
|------------------|------------|------------|
| Warri Wolves     | 9          | 2.7        |
| Nassarawa United | 10         | 3.0        |
| Lobi Stars       | 5          | 1.5        |
| Bendel Insurance | 85         | 25.4       |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>334</b> | <b>100</b> |

*Source:* Researcher’s Fieldwork (2023)

### **Analysis of Data on Relevant Variables**

This section discusses the descriptive statistics of the independents and dependent variables

#### **Coach Factor (Experience and Expertise)**

The result in Table 2 shows that 48(14.4%) of the respondents strongly agreed that “I like my preferred club system of coach employment” while 217(65%) of them agreed, thus making it a total of 265 (79.4%) that either strongly agreed or agreed. Furthermore, 22(6.6%) of them strongly disagreed while 27(8.1%) of them disagreed. 20(6%) were unsure. Thus the finding here is that majority of the respondents are of the opinion that “I like my preferred club system of coach employment”. This is strongly supported by the mean value of 3.72.

As shown in Table 2, 48(14.4%) of the respondents strongly agreed they “like their preferred club because they always go for the best coaches in the world” while 196(58.7%) of them agreed, so making it a total of 244 (73.1%) of them that either agreed or strongly agreed. Furthermore, 18 (5.4%) of them strongly disagreed while 30(14.4%) of them disagreed, hence making it a total of 48 (18.1) of them that disagreed or strongly disagreed. 42(9.0%) of the respondents were unsure. Thus, majority of the respondents agreed that they “like their preferred club because they always go for the best coaches in the world”. This finding is in line with the mean value of 3.52

Also, Table 2 indicated that 17(5.1%) of the respondents strongly agreed that “the coaches in my preferred club are conditioned to deliver result or risk being sacked” while 193(57.8%) of the respondents agreed, thus making it a total of 210 (62.9%) that either agreed or strongly disagreed. In addition, 13(3.9%) of them strongly disagreed while 72(21.6%) of the respondents disagreed, thus making a total of 85 (25.5%) of them that disagreed or strongly disagreed. 39 (11.7%) of the respondents were unsure. Therefore, majority of the respondents believed that “the coaches in their preferred club are conditioned to deliver result or risk being sacked”. This finding is in line with the mean value of 3.62.

Similarly, the results show that 59 (17.4%) of the respondents strongly agreed that “my preferred club coach is tactically smart” while 244(73.1%) of the respondents agreed, thus making it a total of 303 (90.2%) that either agreed or strongly disagreed. In addition, 12(3.6%) of them strongly disagreed while only 5(1.5%) of the respondents disagreed, thus making a total of 17 (5.1%) of them that disagreed or strongly disagreed. 14 (4.2%) of the respondents were unsure. So, the preponderance of the respondents agreed that “their preferred club coach is tactically smart”. This finding is in line with the mean value of 3.99.

Table 2 reveals that 46 (13.8%) of the respondents strongly agreed that “my preferred club coach understands sportsmanship and rudiments of good football” while 182(54.5%)of the respondents agreed, thus making it a total of 228 (76.7%) that either agreed or strongly disagreed. Furthermore, 13(3.9%) of them strongly disagreed while 76(22.8%) of the respondents disagreed, thus making a total of 89 (26.7%) of them that disagreed or strongly disagreed. 17 (5.1%) of the respondents were unsure. Therefore, majority of the respondents agreed that “my preferred club coach understands sportsmanship and rudiments of good football”. This finding is in line with the mean value of 3.67.

**Table 2 Coach Factor (Experience and Expertise)**

| S/N   | Statements  | Strongly Agree | Agree          | Unsure        | Disagree      | Strongly Disagree | Mean        |
|---|---|----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1   | I like my preferred club system of coach employment                                     | 48<br>(14.4%)  | 217<br>(65%)   | 20<br>(6%)    | 27<br>(8.1%)  | 22<br>(6.6%)      | 3.72        |
| 2   | I like my preferred club because they always go for the best coaches in the world       | 48<br>(14.4%)  | 196<br>(58.7%) | 42<br>(12.6%) | 30<br>(9.0%)  | 18<br>(5.4%)      | 3.52        |
| 3   | The coaches in my preferred club are conditioned to deliver result or risk being sacked | 17<br>(5.1%)   | 193<br>(57.8%) | 39<br>(11.7%) | 72<br>(21.6%) | 13<br>(3.9%)      | 3.62        |
| 4   | My preferred club coach is tactically smart   | 59<br>(17.4%)  | 244<br>(73.1%) | 14<br>(4.2%)  | 5<br>(1.5%)   | 12<br>(3.6%)      | 3.99        |
| 5   | My preferred club coach understands sportsmanship and rudiments of good football        | 46<br>(13.8%)  | 182<br>(54.5%) | 17<br>(5.1%)  | 76<br>(22.8%) | 13<br>(3.9%)      | 3.52        |
| <b>Overall Mean for Coach Factor (Experience and Expertise)</b> |   |                |                |               |               |                   | <b>3.67</b> |

*Source:* Researcher’s Fieldwork (2023)

### **Trophies Won**

The result in Table 3 shows that 32 (9.6%) of the respondents strongly agreed that “they love their preferred club because it is a trophy driven club” while 191 (57.2%) of them agreed, thus making it a total of 223 (66.8%) that either strongly agreed or disagreed. Also, 8 (2.3%) of them strongly disagreed while 81 (24.3%) of them disagreed. Thus making it a total of 89 (40.0%) of them that disagreed or strongly disagreed. 22 (6.6%) of them were unsure. Thus, the

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finding here is that majority of the respondents fairly agreed that “they love their preferred club because it is a trophy driven club”. This is strongly supported by the mean value of 3.47.

Twenty seven (8.1%) of the respondents strongly agreed that that “they love their preferred club because as a club it has won all European cup” while 230 (69.9%) of the respondents agreed, therefore making it a total of 257 (78%) of them that either agreed or strongly disagreed. Similarly, 8 (2.3%) of them strongly disagreed while 42 (12.6%) of them disagreed, thus making it a total of 50 (14.9%) of them that disagreed or strongly disagreed. 27 (8.1%) of the respondents were unsure. Thus, majority of the respondents agreed that “they love their preferred club because as a club it has won all European cups”. This finding is in line with the mean value of 3.15.

The result also shows that 30 (9%) of the respondents strongly agreed that “my preferred club is the best club because it is the only club that has won competitive trophies nearly back to back every season in the last five years” while 174 (52%) of them agreed, thus making it a total of 204 (61%) that either strongly agreed or disagreed. Also, 11 (3.3%) of them strongly disagreed while 75 (22.5%) of them disagreed. Thus making a total of 86 (25.8%) of them that disagreed or strongly disagreed. 44(13.2) of them were unsure. Thus, the finding is that majority of the respondents agreed that “my preferred club is the best club because it is the only club that has won competitive trophies nearly back to back every season in the last five years”. This is strongly supported by the mean value of 3.12.

Similarly, the rest of the questions measuring trophies won are above the bench mark of 3 as shown in Table 3. The overall mean value for trophies won is 3.43.

**Table 3 Trophies Won**

| S/N | Statements   | Strongly Agree | Agree          | Unsure       | Disagree      | Strongly Disagree | Mean |
|-----|--|----------------|----------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|------|
| 1   | I love my preferred club because it is a trophy driven club.           | 32<br>(9.6%)   | 191<br>(57.2%) | 22<br>(6.6%) | 81<br>(24.3%) | 8<br>(2.3%)       | 3.47 |
| 2   | I love my preferred club because as a club it has won all European cup | 27<br>(8.1%)   | 230<br>(69.9%) | 27<br>(8.1%) | 42<br>(12.6%) | 8<br>(2.3%)       | 3.15 |

| S/N                                  | Statements   | Strongly Agree | Agree          | Unsure        | Disagree      | Strongly Disagree | Mean        |
|--------------------------------------|--|----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 3                                    | My preferred club is the best club because it is the only club that has won competitive trophies nearly back to back every season in the last five years | 30<br>(9%)     | 174<br>(52%)   | 44<br>(13.2)  | 75<br>(22.5%) | 11<br>(3.3%)      | 3.12        |
| 4                                    | I cannot fan a club that cannot win trophies   | 48<br>(14.4%)  | 217<br>(65%)   | 20 (6%)       | 27<br>(8.1%)  | 22<br>(6.6%)      | 3.72        |
| 5                                    | My preferred club is a club that is renowned for cup final competitions  | 41<br>(12.3)   | 190<br>(56.9%) | 36<br>(10.8%) | 23<br>(6.9%)  | 10<br>(3%)        | 3.52        |
| 6                                    | I love my preferred club because it is also among the top Europe elite clubs respected because rate of winning trophies                                  | 17<br>(5.1%)   | 193<br>(57.8%) | 39<br>(11.7%) | 72<br>(21.6%) | 13<br>(3.9%)      | 3.62        |
| <b>Overall Mean for Trophies Won</b> |  |                |                |               |               |                   | <b>3.43</b> |

*Source:* Researcher’s Fieldwork (2023)

**Brand Logo/Brand Identity**

The result in Table 4 shows that 59 (17.7%) of the respondents strongly agreed that “the history of my club is important to me” while 244 (73.1%) of them agreed, thus making it a total of 303 (90.8%) that either strongly agreed or agreed. Furthermore, 12 (3.6) of them strongly disagreed while 5 (1.5%) of them disagreed. Thus making a total of 17 (5.1%) of them that either disagreed or strongly disagreed. 14 (4.2%) of them were unsure. Thus, the conclusion is that majority of the respondents agreed that “the history of their club is important to them”. This is strongly supported by the mean value of 3.99.

Table 4 also revealed that 27 (8.1%) of the respondents strongly agreed that “I can only fan a club that has star players” while 230 (68.9%) of them agreed, hence making it a total of 257 (77%) of them that either agreed or strongly agreed. Also, 8 (2.3%) of them strongly disagreed while 5 (1.5%) of them disagreed, thus making it a total of 13 (3.8%) of them that disagreed or strongly disagreed. 14 (4.2%) of the respondents were unsure. Therefore, majority of the respondents agreed that “they can only fan a club that has star players”. This finding is in line with the mean value of 3.99.

The result also shows that 27 (8.1%) of the respondents strongly agreed that “I can only fan a club that has star players” while 230 (68.9%) of them agreed, thus making it a total of 257 (77%) that either strongly agreed or disagreed. Also, 8 (2.3%) of them strongly disagreed while 42 (12.6%) of them disagreed. Thus making a total of 50 (14.9%) of them that disagreed or

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strongly disagreed. 27 (8.1%) of them were unsure. Hence, the conclusion is that majority of the respondents agreed that “I can only fan a club that has star players”. This is strongly supported by the mean value of 3.62.

Similarly, all the other variables measuring brand logo/brand identity were above average as shown in Table 4. The overall mean value for brand logo/brand identity is 3.63, implying that football fans are satisfied with the brand logo/brand identity of their preferred clubs.

**Table 4: Brand Logo/Brand Identity**

| S / N   | Statements  | Strongly Agree | Agree       | Unsure    | Disagree   | Strongly Disagree | Mean        |
|---|---|----------------|-------------|-----------|------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1   | The history of my club is important to me   | 59 (17.7%)     | 244 (73.1%) | 14 (4.2%) | 5 (1.5%)   | 12 (3.6%)         | 3.99        |
| 2   | I can only fan a club that has star players   | 27 (8.1%)      | 230 (68.9%) | 27 (8.1%) | 42 (12.6%) | 8 (2.3%)          | 3.52        |
| 3   | I love and fan my preferred club because it is a house hold name in the world of football | 30 (9%)        | 174 (52)    | 44 (13.2) | 75 (22.5%) | 11 (3.3%)         | 3.42        |
| 4   | I like my preferred club football club logo   | 50 (14.9%)     | 217 (65%)   | 20 (6%)   | 27 (8.1%)  | 20 (6%)           | 3.38        |
| 5   | I like my preferred club jersey colours   | 42 (12.6%)     | 230 (68.9)  | 27 (8.1%) | 27 (8.1%)  | 8 (2.3%)          | 3.59        |
| 6   | I like my preferred club because of their values  | 244 (73.1%)    | 59 (17.4%)  | 5 (1.5%)  | 14 (4.2%)  | 12 (3.6%)         | 3.99        |
| 7   | I like my preferred club because they are known for charity works                         | 27(8.1%)       | 230 (68.9%) | 27 (8.1%) | 42 (12.6%) | 8 (2.3%)          | 3.52        |
| <b>Overall Mean for Brand Logo/Brand Identity</b> |   |                |             |           |            |                   | <b>3.63</b> |

**Source:** Researcher’s Fieldwork (2023)

**Testing of Hypotheses**

**Testing of Hypothesis One**

$H_0$ : There is no relationship between coach factors, trophies won and brand logo and football club fan loyalty among University of Benin Students.

$H_A$ : There is a positive relationship between coach factors, trophies won and brand logo and football club fan loyalty among University of Benin Students.

Table 5 shows that the  $R^2$  value of 0.572 indicates that the independent variables of coach factor, trophies won and brand logo jointly explain 57.2% of the systematic variation in the dependent variable (football club fan loyalty). Table 4.6 indicates that the Durbin-Watson score is 0.750 which by implication shows that there is an absence of first-order serial correlation in the model. The model is therefore fit to be applied without re-modification in policy formulation and development amongst football club fans in Benin City, Edo State.

**Table 5: Relationship between Coach Factors, Trophies Won and Brand Logo and Football Club Fan Loyalty**

| Variables    | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t     | Sig.  | Decision    |
|--------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|-------|-------------|
|              | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |       |       |             |
| (Constant)   | 0.606                       | 0.204      | -                         | 2.973 | 0.003 | -           |
| Coach factor | 0.35                        | 0.074      | 0.241                     | 4.708 | 0.000 | Significant |
| Trophies won | 0.188                       | 0.053      | 0.191                     | 3.573 | 0.000 | Significant |
| Brand logo   | 0.717                       | 0.04       | 0.732                     | 7.897 | 0.000 | Significant |

**R = 0.756;  $R^2 = 0.572$ ; F-Statistics= 146.832 (0.000); Durbin-Watson=0.750**

The F statistic of 146.832 is significant at  $p < 0.05$ . This means that there is a statistically significant relationship between the dependent variable (football club fan loyalty) and independent variables (coach factor, trophies won and brand logo) as a group. The regression results in Table 5 show that coach factor ( $t=4.708$ ;  $p= 0.000 < 0.05$ ), trophies won ( $t=3.573$ ;  $p= 0.000 < 0.05$ ) and brand logo ( $t=7.897$ ;  $p=0.000 < 0.05$ ) had a significant relationship with football club loyalty. This entails that there is a positive and significant relationship between football club loyalty and coach factors, trophies won and brand logo. We therefore accept the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a positive relationship between coach factors; trophies won and brand logo and football club fan loyalty among University of Benin Students and reject the null hypothesis which states that there is no relationship between coach factors, trophies won and brand logo and football club fan loyalty among University of Benin Students.

**Testing of Hypotheses Two ( $H_{02}$ )**

$H_0$ : Fans demographics do not have significant impact on loyalty to football Clubs.

$H_A$ : Fans demographics have a positive significant impact on loyalty to football Clubs.

T-Test was conducted to find out whether significant differences exist between gender and fans loyalty to football clubs. The result shows that male fans ( $X=4.21$ ) are more loyal than their female counterparts ( $X= 3.95$ ). The result further shows that gender ( $t= 1.526$ ;  $p= 0.375$ ) had no significant effect on fans loyalty to clubs at 5% level of significance. This simply means that respondents' gender does not have any effect on fans loyalty to football clubs. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test whether significant differences exist between the other

two demographic variables (age and education) and fans loyalty to clubs. The result in Table 4.7 shows that age ( $F=1.904$ ;  $p= 0.554$ ) and highest educational qualification ( $F=1.252$ ;  $p= 0.015$ ) had no significant effect on football club loyalty at 5% level of significance. This implies that respondents’ age and education do not affect fans loyalty to football clubs. We can therefore conclude that demographic variables such as gender, age and educational qualification do not have significant effect on fans loyalty to football clubs. Based on this, we accept the null hypothesis which states that fans demographics do not have significant impact on loyalty to football clubs and reject the alternative hypothesis which states that fans demographics have a positive significant impact on loyalty to football clubs.

**Table 6: Demographic Variables and Loyalty to Football Clubs**

| Demographic Characteristics | Categories     | Freq. | Mean | Test Statistics | Decision |
|-----------------------------|----------------|-------|------|-----------------|----------|
| Gender                      | Male           | 294   | 4.21 | t=1.526 (0.375) | Not Sig. |
|                             | Female         | 40    | 3.95 |                 |          |
| Age                         | Less than 20   | 44    | 4.36 | F=1.904 (0.554) | Not Sig. |
|                             | 20-25          | 192   | 4.28 |                 |          |
|                             | 26-30          | 73    | 3.94 |                 |          |
|                             | 31 years Above | 25    | 3.74 |                 |          |
| Education                   | Undergraduates | 266   | 4.35 | F=1.252 (0.601) | Not Sig. |
|                             | M.Sc.          | 60    | 3.44 |                 |          |
|                             | Ph.D.          | 8     | 3.69 |                 |          |

Source: Researcher’s Fieldwork (2023)

**Discussion of Findings**

Brand image and fan loyalty to football clubs among University of Benin students was considered in this research investigation. Based on the results from review of literature and theoretical frameworks relating to brand image and fan loyalty to football club among University of Benin students, some hypotheses were formulated and tested using research instruments modified from earlier studies. The result of the regression analysis revealed that there was a positive and significant relationship between football club loyalty and coach factors, trophies won and brand logo. This finding is supported by Ayorinde *et al* (2016) who established that many tertiary students in Lagos State become fans of their respective football teams mainly because of team success which translates to trophies won; however coach factor was a less motivating factor in the study as 34.6% respondents were of the view that the skill and personality of the team’s manager influenced loyalty. Bauer *et al* (2008) also found that head coach, success, club logo, colour and club history and tradition were very significant attributes of fan loyalty. Also, Tokmak *et al* (2016) in a study conducted in Turkey found that logo/colours of the club, past success of the club had positive and significant effect on fan

loyalty. Similarly, Regunathan et al (2020) found a significant relationship between fan logo and jersey to fan loyalty.

The findings from the t-test and analysis of variance show that there is a significant relationship between demographic variables (gender, age and education) and football club loyalty. This finding is in disagreement with the findings by Ayorinde *et al* (2016) who found that there was a significant difference in male and female tertiary students' tendency to fan loyalty. Similarly, in contrast to this study's finding, Tokmak *et al* (2016) in a study conducted in the Turkish super-league found a significant association between gender and educational qualifications and fan loyalty.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study has attempted to find out football club brand image and fan loyalty among University of Benin Students. To this end, this study has made useful contribution to knowledge by updating knowledge in the area of brand image and fan loyalty to football clubs. The findings of the study, being recent, represent fans' perception about the predictors (coach factors, trophies won and brand logo/brand identity). The result of the regression analysis revealed that there is a positive and significant relationship between football club loyalty and coach factors, trophies won and brand logo. Findings from the t-test and analysis of variance show that there is a significant relationship between demographic variables (gender, age and education) and football club loyalty.

The outcome of the demographic variables indicates that there is no significant relationship between demographic variables (gender, age and education) and fan loyalty. Since demographic variables do not appear to explain variation in football club loyalty, researchers should look elsewhere in the search for determinants of such loyalty.

Foreign and local football club managers should emphasize brand image, including coach factor (experience and expertise), trophies won and brand logo/brand identity as these variables are crucial for developing loyalty and serve as a source for competitive advantages.

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