Original Article

Female visitors and their behavior at football stadiums: Czechia case study

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Abstract

Problem statement: Football is the most widespread sport and entertainment worldwide. Football is enjoyed especially by men, but nowadays, we can say that the number of women visiting football stadiums is steadily increasing. We must state that this beautiful game is linked to visitor misbehavior (violence, racism, homophobia, and also corruption). **Purpose:** The goal of the paper is to analyze the conduct of female visitors in the example of SK Slavia Prague football club. **Methods:** The primary data were collected in a questionnaire survey carried out in the 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 seasons. The sample included 120 participants, aged 25.01 ± 10.20 years and every surveyed respondent attended the matches at a football end. The research mainly focused on respondents' experiences of unsportsmanlike behavior (whistling, booing, vulgar chants in the stand, firing pyrotechnics, etc.). Mathematical and statistical methods (e.g., Correspondence Analysis) were used. To evaluate the data, the program Statistica 13 EN was used. **Results:** We found that the surveyed spectators, fans, and supporters had no experience with demolishing stadiums and other riotous behavior. Similar results were noted for displays of racism. No groups were interested in this activity apart from 9.09% of fans, who sometimes used racist allusions. **Conclusions:** This case study brings a unique insight into the issue of female spectatorship in a selected top league football club. In Czechia, football matches are mainly attended by men, but we note that the number of women attending is gradually increasing – 9% were women in the 1990s, 19% were women ten years later, and 20% are women today. On the other hand, women are often neglected in academic research. If any data are available, they are not fully explored, unlike the male population. We state that the results are adequate for female visitors.

Keywords: Correspondence analysis, female football fans, negative phenomena, questionnaire survey, violence.

Introduction

Sport is one of the essential social phenomena, whether in the form of active sports population or passive spectator consumption. Sport not only affects the economy and politics, it also affects the arts and participates in education, etc. (Slepička et al., 2010). Moreover, sport is one of the essential elements of human physical culture. It is also a modern, organized, systematic, noble, and sophisticated manifestation of social culture (Oborný, 2001). Especially passive spectator consumption of sport has gained a mass character in recent decades. This is in line with the fact that the vast majority of the population does not play sport actively, and its contact with sport is only of a spectator form (Schreyer, 2019; Slepička et al., 2010).

This study is related to some previous interpretations of investigations concerning Slavia Prague football visitors. Some authors identify three major groups of them: football spectators, football fans, and football hooligans (Mareš et al., 2004). However, a more frequently used form of categorization distinguishes fans from supporters/ultras (Antonowicz et al., 2020; Doidge & Lieser, 2018; Hodges, 2016; Kossakowski et al., 2018; Scholz, 2016; Yusoff, 2016). These four kinds of classification were also applied in our investigation. Four groups of football visitors were established: inactive spectators, traditional fans, supporters, and hooligans. The practical aspects visible from our empirical research proved that this division makes good sense for practical research reasons.

At present, however, we can say that the number of female supporters at football stadiums is steadily increasing (McDowell, 2016), and women support their team at away matches and are proud of it (Ben-Porat, 2009). Some clubs provide women with better pricing of match tickets, while women do not pay for transport to away matches (Yusoff, 2017). If a woman is knowledgeable and understands football, she is more respected among men and can contribute to intelligent discussions. On the other hand, at the same time, a female fan may feel uncomfortable, as some supporters show her that as a football fan, she can never understand (Berg et al., 2014; Sveinson & Hoeber, 2016). In 2019, Iran allowed women to attend a World Cup qualifying match in Tehran. This is the first time women in the country have been allowed into a match since 1981. We have to state that although women will be allowed to attend international matches, they will not be able to visit any other football games, such as those in the Iranian domestic league or Asian Champions League. The decision also

followed the death of a young Iranian woman who set herself on fire after she was sentenced to prison for attempting to enter a stadium wearing a fake beard (Weber, 2019).

As far as European female fans are concerned, they dress in jerseys, wear football scarves, and in exceptional cases, they paint the colors of their favorite team on their faces. Some women wear tight-fitting clothes at football matches and then face sexist innuendo (Sveinsson & Hoeber, 2015). Scholz (2018) notes that 17% of people attending football matches in Czechia are women, and 19% in England (Pope, 2012). Fans are divided into two groups, namely: (1) passionate, enthusiastic, and (2) cool fans. The first group includes fans who visit every team match, participate in stadium cheering and chanting, are interested in club information on the Internet, etc. The second group of fans does not spend so much time watching the game or thinking about football during the week, and the results are not affected by the game. Instead, they enjoy the game on TV or on the Internet. Pope (2016) also notes that women are often neglected in academic research. If any data are available, they are not fully explored, unlike the male population.

Material & methods

The sample consisted of 120 participants (aged 25.01 ± 10.20 years) all of whom attended a stand of home team fans and supporters. Primary data were collected in a questionnaire survey mainly at the Eden stadium and other football stadiums in Czechia in the 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 seasons. The research focuses on the oldest football club (est. 1892) in the Czech Republic. The stand of the stadium for the home fans and supporters is called "Tribuna Sever", with a capacity of 3,065 seats. It consists of 5 sectors each with 25 seats in 28 rows. The end is mostly filled up to 2/3rds, and sold out during matches against attractive away teams, e.g., Sparta Prague, Plzeň, Ostrava and European teams, e.g., Barcelona, Inter Milan, Dortmund, Sevilla, Chelsea, etc.

The selection of participants was based on pre-defined factors; seats 1, 3, 5, 7 in the first row; seats 2, 4, 6, 8 in the second row, etc. from all the rows. It was a random selection. Because it is not easy to organize empirical research in a stand, the administrators tried to behave in a user-friendly way. All the participants were informed about the research and anonymity of the questionnaire. The participants were willing to participate in the research and were even entertained filling out the questionnaires before the match started. Once they had answered the inquiries, each of them received a small Slavia club badge. They also had the opportunity to contact the interviewer via the email stated on the questionnaire list and inform themselves about the research results.

Our research group includes Slavia Prague football visitors divided into the four described groups (especially in three groups, because there was no respondent in the hooligan group). The number of representatives in each group differed. This was due to the actual situation and the natural division of roles.

Our results come from quantitative research methods. In this research, we used mathematical, statistical methods, the analysis method – also Correspondence Analysis (henceforth CA) and the method of generalization. For evaluating the results, the Statistica 13 EN Program was used. Using the graphic tools of this CA, it is possible to describe an association of nominal or ordinal variables and to obtain a graphic representation of a relationship in multidimensional space – for readers, this is easier to understand. The analysis provides further evidence that dependencies exist between variables.

CA is a multivariate statistical technique. It is conceptually similar to principal component analysis but applies to categorical rather than continuous data. In a manner similar to principal component analysis, it provides a means of displaying or summarizing a set of data in a two-dimensional graphical form (Zámková & Prokop, 2014).

All data should be non-negative and on the same scale for CA to be applicable, and the method treats rows and columns equivalently. It is traditionally applied to contingency tables - CA decomposes the chi-squared statistic associated with this table into orthogonal factors. The distance between single points is defined as a chi-squared distance. The distance between the i -th and i' -th row is given by the formula

$$D(i, i') = \sqrt{\sum_{j=1}^c \frac{(r_{ij} - r_{i'j})^2}{c_j}} \quad (1)$$

where r_{ij} are the elements of row profiles matrix R and weights c_j correspond to the elements of column loadings vector c' , which is equal to the mean column profile (centroid) of the column profiles in multidimensional space.

The distance between columns j and j' is defined similarly, weights correspond to the elements of the row loadings vector r and sum over all rows. In correspondence analysis we observe the relation between single categories of two categorical variables. The result of this analysis is the correspondence map introducing the axes of the reduced coordinates system, where single categories of both variables are displayed in graphic form.

The aim of this analysis is to reduce the multidimensional space of row and column profiles and to save as far as possible the original data information. Each row and column of the correspondence table can be displayed in c -dimensional (r -dimensional respectively) space with coordinates equal to the values of the corresponding profiles. The row and column coordinates on each axis are scaled to have inertias equal to the principal inertia along that axis: these are the principal row and column coordinates (Hebák et al., 2007). For the

correspondence analysis model, the degree of dispersion of points is defined, i.e., row and column categories, the so-called total inertia. The term inertia comes from mechanics, where it is defined as the sum of the product of mass and square distances from the centroid of all the object's particles.

Geometrically, inertia expresses the degree of dispersion of points in multidimensional space and can be understood as an analogy to the dispersion known from statistical modeling. In the correspondence analysis, the total inertia (I) is equal to the weighted average (with weights p_{i-}) chi-square of the distance of the row profiles from their average/mean (vector $\mathbf{c}$)

$$I = \sum_{i=1}^r p_{i-} (\mathbf{r}_i - \mathbf{c})^T \mathbf{D}_c^{-1} (\mathbf{r}_i - \mathbf{c}) \quad (2)$$

the same as the weighted average (with weights p_{-j}) chi-square of the distance of the column profiles from their average (vector $\mathbf{r}$)

$$I = \sum_{j=1}^c p_{-j} (\mathbf{c}_j - \mathbf{r})^T \mathbf{D}_r^{-1} (\mathbf{c}_j - \mathbf{r}) \quad (3)$$

A significant part of the total inertia of the original table is usually explained by the first several axes. That is why it is generally sufficient for the result of the correspondence analysis to be represented in the space of the first two or three ordinal axes. Total inertia equals the sum of all eigenvalues of the matrix. Therefore, it is possible to specify how many ordinal axes it is reasonable to interpret.

This can be decided in either of two ways.

1) We set the threshold value (e.g., 80%) and determine how many axes have cumulative inertia higher than the set threshold value. 2) We interpret the ordinal axes whose eigenvalue is above-average, i.e., higher than the average of all eigenvalues.

The contributions of the row points to the inertia in the corresponding dimension are defined by the quotient

$$\frac{r_{ij} f_{jk}^2}{\lambda_{ik}} \quad (4)$$

where f_{jk} corresponds with the elements of the matrix $\mathbf{F}$ (the score of the i -th row category in the k -th dimension), r_{ij} elements of the row loadings vector and λ_{ik} is inertia expressed by the k -th dimension (an eigenvalue of the matrix). A contribution of the row points to inertia expresses the relative degree of the effect of the given category on the final orientation of the main axes.

In a similar fashion, the contributions of column points to inertia are expressed in the corresponding dimension

$$\frac{r_{ij} f_{jk}^2}{\lambda_{ik}} \quad (5)$$

For each row category, we can calculate the total row inertia, defined as

$$\sum_k r_{ij} f_{jk}^2 \quad (6)$$

Similarly, for column categories, the total column inertia is defined as

$$\sum_k r_{ij} f_{jk}^2 \quad (7)$$

The values of inertia for individual columns and rows give us an indication of the significance of the various categories on the resulting ordination.

Results

If we look at the various categories of football-goers, it can be said that they differed in terms of their age structure. The correspondence analysis shows that the spectators' age ranged between 20-26, while the fans were between 13-19 years of age, and the supporters mostly 34 and older. No female hooligans were among the respondents (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Age composition of visitor groups

Source: Ownelaboration, 2019.

It needs to be said that none of the spectators (100%) knowingly brought to the stadium any object that could be used as a weapon. A similar statistic was true for fans (93.18%). However, the supporters (40.00%) had deliberately brought with them to the stadium objects that could be used as a weapon. That is why it is forbidden to bring to the stadium things like laptop computers, umbrellas, empty water bottles, etc. If a visitor wants to purchase a refreshing beverage of any kind at the stadium, the beverage is sold in a bottle without a cap, the reason being that if the bottle was sold with a cap, it could be thrown onto the pitch capped, which might result in either a player or a referee being injured. A high percentage (90.91%) was detected with respect to assisting with firing pyrotechnics. Approximately the same results were achieved for the remaining groups (fans 93.18%, supporters 80.00%). Only a handful of fans (2.27%) assisted with the use of pyrotechnics during each match. They also stated that they could not imagine a football match without the use of pyrotechnics. They claim that firing pyrotechnics is not a crime, but rather part of football culture. Some fans and supporters attend football matches primarily because of the atmosphere and pyrotechnics.

More than half of the spectators (54.55%) have used vulgar expressions during football matches. The rest of the spectators (45.45%) have never used an expletive during a match. Compared to fans and supporters, we have to state that the trend in using vulgarisms is increasing. Almost three-quarters of the fans (72.73%) sometimes used vulgarisms; supporters even 80.00%. Vulgar language during a football match is used by as many as 20% of supporters. These vulgarisms are directed mostly at the Head of the Football Association of the Czech Republic and the Head of the Referee Committee. In some cases, vulgar expressions were used to refer to members of the opposing team excited about scoring a goal in front of the fans of the home team.

If we look at alcohol consumption, 45.45% of spectators have never consumed alcohol prior to or during a football match. More than a third of spectators (36.36%) have at times consumed alcohol during a football match. The alcoholic beverages consumed were mostly draught beer or alcohol smuggled into the stadium in a hip flask. The remaining 18.18% of spectators consume alcohol during each football match. More than two-thirds of the fans (68.18%) never drink alcohol. A similar value was noted by 60.00% of the supporters. This is an interesting finding, because we expected higher values with fans and supporters. Nowadays, football stadiums offer and sell alcoholic beer during matches in the Czech football league, the European League, or the Champions League. We must state that it is a step forward and a welcoming gesture towards visitors. Compared to three years ago, alcoholic beer was sold during non-risk matches but was not offered during derbies or riskier matches. We believe that to offer and sell alcoholic beer inside the stadium is a better option than offering non-alcoholic beer. Some visitors used to drink more beer outside the stadium. They entered the stadium already drunk, which in our opinion was more likely to lead to violence. None of the respondents had any experience with damaging stadium equipment or wreaking havoc in any other way (destroying the toilets, writing or

drawing on mirrors, spray painting the walls, etc.). It is worth noting that there have been no cases recently of women causing damage at stadiums. No groups were interested in racism unlike 9.09% of the fans, who sometimes used racist allusions. Our research has confirmed that the least serious activity is booing. All the respondents have had, in varying degrees, experience with booing, except for supporters, who never boo members of their football club. On the other hand, more than three-quarters of the spectators did not use booing (81.82%). In terms of running onto the pitch and throwing objects onto the pitch by the surveyed respondents (women), we feel that the results correspond with reality. For a long time, the club as well as the fans have made an effort to prevent this type of conduct. Throwing objects onto the pitch tarnishes the good name of Slavia as well as of other fans. UEFA views throwing objects onto the pitch area as the gravest violation, and its repeated occurrence can realistically result in the stadium being closed for further European Cup matches (Table 1).

Table 1: Participation in the selected actions during football matches (%)

	SPECTATORS			FANS			SUPPORTERS		
	always	sometimes	never	always	sometimes	never	always	sometimes	never
<i>bringing objects to the stand with the intention of using them as a weapon</i>	0.00	0.00	100.00	0.00	6.82	93.18	0.00	40.00	60.00
<i>firing of pyrotechnics</i>	0.00	9.09	90.91	2.27	4.55	93.18	0.00	20.00	80.00
<i>individual vulgar expression</i>	0.00	54.55	45.45	6.82	72.73	20.45	20.00	80.00	0.00
<i>alcohol consumption</i>	18.18	36.36	45.45	9.09	22.73	68.18	20.00	20.00	60.00
	often	sometimes	never	often	sometimes	never	often	sometimes	never
<i>damaging the stadium</i>	0.00	0.00	100.00	0.00	0.00	100.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
<i>racist displays</i>	0.00	0.00	100.00	0.00	9.09	90.91	0.00	0.00	100.00
<i>booing the referee</i>	9.09	9.09	81.82	11.36	34.09	54.55	20.00	80.00	0.00
<i>booing the club</i>	0.00	9.09	90.91	0.00	25.00	75.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
<i>booing the rival players and club</i>	9.09	27.27	63.64	15.91	45.45	38.64	20.00	80.00	0.00
<i>booing the Head of the Czech Football Association</i>	9.09	9.09	81.82	11.36	27.27	61.36	20.00	60.00	20.00
	yes	no	-	yes	no	-	yes	no	-
<i>pitch incursion</i>	0.00	100.00		4.55	95.45		20.00	80.00	
<i>throwing objects onto the pitch</i>	0.00	100.00		9.09	90.91		0.00	100.00	

Source: Own elaboration, 2019.

Discussion

The motive for elaborating this manuscript was the author's interest and the fact that there is not enough current information on this issue. In Czechia, no publication has been devoted to a more significant number of men and especially women (spectators, fans, supporters, and hooligans) at a "football end" and visitors' conduct in one club. Exciting, but sometimes dangerous, is also getting information and interviews from supporters, especially when it comes to away matches. This case study brings a unique insight into the issue of female spectatorship in a selected top league football club. In Czechia, football matches are mainly attended by men, but we note that the number of women is gradually increasing – 9% were women in the 1990s (Slepička, 1990), 19% were women ten years later (Slepička et al., 2010), and 20% are women today (Scholz, 2018).

We have to agree with Pope (2016), who also notes that women are often neglected in academic research. If any data are available, they are not fully explored, unlike the male population. There are various triggers that led to the progression of women's football in other nations (e.g., Europe vs Africa, the Republic of Korea vs the Democratic People's Republic of Korea), and these factors may include government support, particular strategies introduced by football governing bodies, and the specific contributions of the media and businesses (Hong, 2012). There are numerous studies focusing on, e.g., the image problem in women's football (Harris, 2005), women as new consumer fans (Pope, 2010), and sports fan from a female perspective (Sveinson & Hoeber, 2015). Toffoletti (2017) describes and analyses female sports fans from a feminist point of view, more precisely, using transnational feminism. According to the author, this perspective makes it possible to notice the diversity of female fandom and take into account the different socio-cultural contexts in which particular categories of fans function (ethnicity, race, sexuality, etc.).

In this manuscript, there are several limitations, too. On the other hand, the mentioned limitations provide directions for further research. Firstly, our research cannot be generalized and an in-depth analysis was not carried out. We were merely interested in a Czech football club. We would like to investigate other important football clubs in other countries and compare these data with the results of this elite Czech football club. We assume that a comparison of other countries would be desirable. Furthermore, in our future research, we would like to investigate the implementation of preventive measures including thorough personal inspections of football visitors to see if there is any correlation. In our opinion, the results would be more meaningful.

Conclusions

This case study discusses the issues of female spectatorship in a selected top league football club. In Czechia, football matches are mainly attended by men, but we note that the number of women is gradually increasing – 9% were women in the 1990s, 19% were women ten years later, and 20% are women today. The higher representation of women in younger age categories corresponded with their concept of spectatorship as a leisure activity and with accompanying their partners to football matches. We found that the surveyed spectators, fans and supporters had no experience with demolishing stadiums and other riotous behavior. Racist displays scored similar results. No groups were interested in this activity, but 9.09% of fans sometimes used racist allusions. We state that the results are adequate for female visitors.

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