

EXAMINING OFFICIAL SUPPORTER GROUPS: A CASE STUDY OF
THE CAL POLY MEN'S SOCCER PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

EXAMINING OFFICIAL SUPPORTER GROUPS: A CASE STUDY OF THE CAL POLY MEN'S SOCCER PROGRAM

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Official supporter groups are a critical component of any athletic program. One sport in which this concept is particularly apparent is soccer, a large part of the athletic culture at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. In order for these supporter groups to function at their highest level, they must be continually evaluated. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the official supporter groups of the Cal Poly Men's Soccer program. Data were collected online from websites and social media outlets associated with each of Cal Poly Soccer's official supporter groups, the Green Army and the Manglers. The instrument used was a case study guide with sections for descriptions and notes. The results portrayed two distinctly different groups, each with specific areas that will benefit from further development. This study can serve as a basis from which to perform further research as programs and their supporters change over time.

Keywords: sports, sport, supporter groups, fans, soccer, loyalty

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background of Study

There are many components vital to the livelihood of any sport-related body, but there is at least one that frequently and clearly presents itself: support. It is no mystery that without supporters and a fan base, any professional or collegiate athletic program would simply not be able to function. As Cleland (2010) points out, income generators such as sponsors, advertisers, merchandise, and media contracts are not attainable if a team or league does not have a strong relationship with its fans and encourage them to take an interest in the organization's affairs. More simply put, "Any risk posed by non-attendance would threaten the very existence of any professional club" (Cleland, p. 549).

One sport in which the benefits of fandom are particularly apparent is soccer. Due to their huge fan bases, larger soccer clubs such as Real Madrid, Manchester United, and Juventus have operating profits comparable to those of large corporations (Moreton, 2001). Thus, it comes as no surprise that modern sporting bodies, particularly soccer clubs, should place a high value on seeing to the management of their relationships with their supporters. One way of accomplishing this is through the creation and management of supporter clubs and organizations. By creating specialized groups for fans, individual teams can establish a way to easily access their most loyal supporters and extend to them marketing promotions, feed them up-to-date team news, and easily circulate promotional materials.

The idea of fan loyalty and supporter groups has become particularly widespread in intercollegiate athletics, with season ticket holder and student fan clubs existing at the majority of schools with athletic programs. Cal Poly offers a variety of these programs, including the Stampede Club for season ticket holders and donors, and the Mustang Maniacs for students. The focus here, however, is on the groups maintained by the men's soccer program: the Green Army (season ticket holders), and the Manglers (student loyalist group). As such, the purpose of this study was to examine the official supporter groups associated with the Cal Poly Men's Soccer program.

Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted at Robert E. Kennedy Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: Academic Search Premier, SPORTDiscus, Hospitality & Tourism Complete, and Sociological Abstracts. This review of literature will provide background on supporters and their relation to the game of soccer. It will first investigate soccer as a global sport and examine the club-supporter relationship before exploring supportership itself and its manifestations within the sport.

One concept history has made exceptionally clear is that soccer is a global game. There is perhaps no better evidence of this than the 2010 Men's World Cup in South Africa. In addition to a physical attendance of over 3 million people, an additional 3.2 billion (46.4 % of the global population at the time) tuned in at home to a television broadcast that reached every single territory and country on earth (FIFA, 2011).

Admittedly, the World Cup is a particularly special event that occurs only once every four years, but there are several far more ordinary examples that still attest to the sport's universal nature. As Boon, Jones, and Parkes (2003) note, Manchester United (Man U) of the English Premier League has become a brand so large that it is not confined by regional or even national boundaries. At the time of the article's publication in 2003, Man U had an estimated worldwide fan base of 53 million, and saw 40% of its merchandise sales occur outside of the United Kingdom (UK). Similarly, Allan, Dunlop, and Swales (2007) provide the examples of Celtic FC and Rangers FC, two of Scotland's oldest clubs. In reference to the widespread nature of the game, they note, "The geography of season ticket ownership reflects this spatial dispersion with the majority of the season ticket holders of both clubs living outside Glasgow and over eight percent living outside Scotland" (p. 64).

Similar cases can be found in populations outside of the UK. Hognestad (2006) uses the example of Norwegian football (soccer) supporters, who are fiercely loyal to their favorite English teams. The majority (84.4%) stated that they supported a Norwegian team as well, but over 60% of these individuals maintained that they held a stronger allegiance to the foreign club. The reason for all of this internationalization boils down to one source: the media. Cleland (2009) points out the interdependency between soccer clubs and the external media, wherein they rely on one another to attract viewers and fans. As Cleland (2010) continues, this is largely because fans have reached the stage where they have become more skilled and specific in their consumption of the media, as opposed to past paradigms in which their role was more passive. As Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) explain, the audience has developed in conjunction with mediated

sources. Whereas passive acceptance used to be the norm, society now chooses the media that it wants and rejects or reinterprets messages accordingly.

Given this universality, it becomes clear that no examination of specific fan supporter groups can exist without an examination of the fans themselves. Smith (2000) exemplifies this by stating, “Football supporters hold the key to football’s future. They are the game’s greatest asset, the people who pay the ticket prices, TV subscriptions and buy the merchandise. They keep the game in business” (p. 14). This club-supporter relationship is well defined by Dixon (2011) in his discussion of structuration theory, which maintains a fairly simple idea: the subject (fans) and the object (the club), struggle to exist independent of one another. They are related at an almost intimate level, and thus neither should be glorified at the expense of the other.

This idea that the club-supporter relationship should be inclusive is a relatively new one, however. Theysohn, Hinz, Nosworthy, and Kirchner (2009) point out that clubs have finally started to understand that via increased loyalty, a focus on long-term relationships translates into long-term profits. Cleland (2010) mirrors this notion in using the example of fan forums, whereby supporters can have their say and feel that their voice is being heard in a two-way dialogue with the club. Unfortunately, the relationship between fan and team has not always been this way. As Russell (1997) points out, fans in the 1980s were largely neglected and ignored by their teams because of a stereotype of bad behavior, and responded by creating their own organizations. First came the Football Supporter’s Association (FSA), which gave fans a channel for public expression to give them greater club and community involvement. Following this model, fans of individual teams created Independent Supporter Associations (ISAs), in order to provide them with

greater involvement in the team's affairs such as protesting price increases or setting the match day atmosphere.

As Smith (2000) states, it is critical that any supporter organization be representative of the fans that it consists of. As such, the formation of the FSA and several ISAs came to a head in October of 2000 with the creation of Supporter's Direct (Jaquiss, 2000). As Jaquiss simply puts it, "The aim of Supporter's Direct is to help people who want to play a responsible part in the life of the club they support" (p. 52). This program established a series of trusts for the various clubs, which ultimately served (and continue to serve) as a useful counterbalance to the massive amount of control held by the club's management (Lindberg, 2005). To ensure that Supporter's Direct was fully functional, Jaquiss (2000) indicates that three key tenets had to be in place. First, the trust had to be democratic, meaning that no one fan could have more control than another (p. 53). Second, it had to be a non-profit in the sense that it was for the benefit of the community and not the members (p.54). Finally, it had to be based in mutualism, meaning that the community is both served by the club *and* helps to guide it (p. 54). As Jaquiss continues, this generated two key aims that are still the goal of Supporter's Direct today: (1) to strengthen the bond between club and community, and (2) promoting and encouraging football as a recreational activity and a community focus (p. 55).

Just as important as the way it is structured is the act of supportership itself. As Malcolm (2000) points out, being a fan can be viewed almost as a career that develops through a set of distinct stages. As a child, new fans attend games with their parents, and then as they grow they older begin to attend with friends. These new fans develop into more traditional fans, and those that have become disaffected can be brought back

through children, friends, and colleagues. As Brown, Crabbe, and Mellor (2008) point out, it is simply part of everyday life:

Being a member of a football club's supporter community is not a limited or marginal experience for some of the supporters with which we have spent time.

For them, being a supporter is a key part of their 'real' lives: a regular, *structuring* part of their existence that enables them to feel belonging in the relative disorder of contemporary social formations. (p. 308)

Pietersen (2009) furthers this notion in indicating that fandom is not just apparent at match time, but across the entire week through fan interaction and tracking team news on the web, or through the circulation of team-specific publications.

Part of this ongoing fandom is consumerism. As Crawford (2004) points out, "Seeking to isolate fan culture as somehow separate and distinct from all other forms of consumption severely limits our potential understanding of fan culture and its location within wider (consumer) society" (para. 2). This is part of what Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) would call 'identity production.' In other words, the consumption of consumer goods related to the team is drawn upon to assist in the construction of self-identity. This goes hand-in-hand with what they term 'cultural production,' wherein fans produce publications, websites, and artwork to create a culture around their sporting team.

Given the variety of roles fandom plays in each respective supporter's life, it makes sense that fans can be broken down into various levels of involvement. Giulanotti (2002), designates these groups as supporters, followers, fans, and *flaneurs*. Supporters, followers, and fans all fall under the same umbrella, respectively consisting of

fundamental support and knowledge, a commercial and market-centered relationship, and a longer, more local and popular cultural identification with the team. *Flaneuers* exist as the most detached form of spectator, preferring to casually consume and enjoy the various media forms available rather than picking a specific event or team.

Of the three more solidified fan types, however, one aspect that remains consistent is their belief in their contribution to the team's success. As Wolfson, Wakelin, and Lewis (2005) state:

Indeed, affiliation may become so incorporated into self-identity that supporters may not have the option of abandoning their team, but instead perceive a reciprocal relationship in which both they and the team are expected to do their best to achieve success. (p. 365)

This particularly comes into play in the home arena. Wolfson et al. continue that since spectators believe in the home advantage, a confidence boost manifests itself in both the fans and the athletes on the team they support. Their survey highlighted this, pointing out that belief in crowd support, at 59 %, was the number one reason for the perceived home advantage and was more popular than all other explanations combined (41%). However, Wann and Schrader (1996) indicate that fan identification does not change even if the team is not winning. To augment what has been said before, they suggest that the rewards of fandom outweigh any costs. Membership in the greater fan group is valuable regardless of the results.

The central idea that membership in a body of fans is important leads to one concept that is common to fan groups across every sport: tribalism. Meir and Scott (2007) note that this is particularly prevalent in soccer, where the tribal nature of each team's

fans is critical to the sport consumption experience. The emotional attachment to the team, the display of logos and merchandise, and the camaraderie all contribute to what Pietersen (2009) calls the “us against them” mentality, where support is as much about backing up your own team as it is ridiculing the other.

Any follower of international sport will know that this concept is especially apparent in European soccer, where two major types of fan groups exist: Roligans and Hooligans (Pietersen, 2009). Roligans, which are more commonly associated with national teams and large, celebratory European tournaments, are distinguished by their humorous social behavior and creative events. Even the root of the word, rolig, translates to “calm” in the Danish language. This is appropriate, as Danish national team supporters are regarded as the prime example of Roliganism, even going so far as to win the UNESCO fair play trophy, thus earning themselves the title of “World’s Best Fans.”

The more prominent group of the two, however, and the one with more familiarity among the international sporting population, are the Hooligans. Pietersen (2009) notes that these groups are more typically focused on individual, local clubs, and are perhaps best exemplified in the English Barclay’s Premier League. Pietersen states, “No one will argue against the claim that for decades English fans have been the absolute leaders in creating a vibrant atmosphere” (p. 378). At what cost does this atmosphere come, however? Panton (2008) discusses the fact that hatred between rival English teams has become so strong through the generations that it has spawned a generation dubbed the ‘hooli-sons’, represented by groups such as Millwall’s Wacky Youth, Liverpool’s Urchins, Barnsley’s 50 Up, and Arsenal’s Tooty Fruities.

Still, this type of fanship does bring with it a high level of passion and excitement, and as countries such as Spain and Italy demonstrate, Hooliganism is not always so deserving of its negative stereotype. Roversi (1994) gives the example of the Italian *ultras*, such as AC Milan's La Fossa de Leoni (Lion's Den) and Bologna's Inter Boys and Red-Blue Commandos. Roversi continues that the various *ultra* groups are very distinct in that they have developed not only along club lines, but along political lines as well, granting their members an extra degree of interconnectedness. More importantly, though, these *ultras* are key for the team in areas such as ticket distribution, merchandise sales and production, as well as more typical functions, such as generating away game plans and building relationships. Another aspect is the creation of the match day spectacle, which Roversi calls coreographics. Instrumental in this process is 'el capo,' or the fan leader who Pietersen (2009) notes as leading the charge in chants and the tifo flag and banner displays that have now become common practice at soccer matches internationally. Similar to the *ultras* are the Spanish *socios*, who Brown and Walsh (2000) describe as participating in team ownership, in addition to many of the above functions. One particular group that displays these functions is the association of FC Barcelona fans known as L'Elefant Blau. Akin to the many of the English ISA's of the 1990s, the group is comprised of not only thousands of fans, but ex Barcelona general managers and players as well, lending the organization a strong say in team political and operational matters.

The variety found within and between these groups goes to show that no two supporter organizations are the same, and that not all of the stereotypes associated with them are universally applicable. One component that is universal, however, is the use of

song. As Clark (2006) points out, fan singing has received very little scholarly attention for something that is so fundamentally part of the fan's engagement with the game and can be found among fans in any country. Power (2011), notes the variety of uses that chants and song bring with them. In addition to its critical contribution to the fan bonding process and acting as a means for fans to contribute to the team they support, it has also been used in more unconventional ways, such as when Liverpool FC fans sang for the 96 supporters who perished in the 1989 collapse of Hillsborough Stadium. Kyto (2011) describes a similar situation in Turkey, a location where allegiance is so important that it becomes an expected introductory question among Turkish locals. The Carsi supporters of Besiktas FC have chants that take their root in the military, to which the fans have then added new lyrics and a clapping rhythm. The fans then take these songs and practice them in public places such as market squares, seeking to test new chants and generate an excited atmosphere prior to each match.

Ultimately, the components of fandom are many, and there really is no definitive way to structure a supporter group, as each has its own distinct identity. This does not mean that commonalities aren't shared, however. Even with soccer maintaining its status as a global sport, it is clear that supporter and fan groups everywhere all share the same intense passion for their team and what it does for their community, and will go to the utmost lengths necessary to ensure that their interests are attended to.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the official supporter groups associated with the Cal Poly Men's Soccer program.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the marketing practices associated with Cal Poly Men's Soccer supporter groups?
2. What is the composition and structure of these groups?
3. What fan loyalty initiatives are associated with these groups?
4. What membership benefits exist in these groups?

Delimitations

This study was delimited to the following parameters:

1. Information on soccer supporters and supporter groups was gathered from a variety of scholarly and popular sources found online and in text via the school library, and from career experience with the Cal Poly Soccer Program.
2. The marketing practices, structure and composition, fan loyalty initiatives, and membership benefits of CP Men's Soccer supporter groups were analyzed.
3. The data were collected during the fall of 2013.
4. Information for this study was analyzed using a case study guide of the components of CP Men's Soccer supporter groups.

Chapter 2

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine the official supporter groups associated with the Cal Poly Men's Soccer program. This chapter includes the following sections: description of context, description of instrument, and description of procedures.

Description of Context

A case study was conducted on the Men's Soccer program at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. The Men's Soccer program is one of twenty NCAA Division I athletics programs that comprise Cal Poly Athletics, all of which are identified by the university's mascot, the Mustang (Cal Poly, 2013). The athletics department maintains an annual operating budget of roughly \$12-13 million dollars ("Oberhelman officially," 2011).

The athletics department is situated within the larger university. Cal Poly maintains an undergraduate student population of around 18,000, which breaks down into about 10,000 men and 8,000 women. Ethnically, around 62% of the student population is Caucasian, 14% Hispanic/Latino, and 11% Asian. All other ethnic groups make up the remaining 13% (The California State University, 2013).

The university is situated within the city of San Luis Obispo, which is located on California's Central Coast halfway between the major cities of San Francisco and Los Angeles. As of the latest census, the city had a population of just over 45,000. The median household income within the city is approximately \$43,000. In addition to Cal

Poly, San Luis Obispo also contains Cuesta Community College, with an enrollment of around 12,000 students (City of San Luis Obispo, 2012).

Description of Instrument

The instrument utilized in this study was a case study guide developed by the researcher (see Appendix A). The instrument consists of three sections: supporter group component, component description or list, and a notes section. To develop the short list of components, the researcher referenced the research questions developed for the study.

Based on these four components, a section was created that would allow for a general listing or description of the pieces that made up each component. The instrument was fluid so that changes could be made if the structure needed improvement. A notes section was included to append any additional information that might be found relevant to each of the four components, but that did not fall under the listing or description.

The instrument was pilot tested utilizing another men's NCAA Division I soccer program of comparable size and following that was not used in the study on October 27, 2013. Based on the pilot study, only one change was made to the instrument. Upon examining group structure the researcher also took an interest in group composition, and accordingly changed that category of the instrument to include this information. Otherwise, information gathered from the selected program's website related to the four components was readily available and easy to plug into the matrix, so it was deemed that no other manipulations were necessary.

Description of Procedures

A case study was conducted on the Men's Soccer program at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. The instrument utilized was a case study guide developed by the researcher. Research for this study was conducted over a ten day period from October 29, 2013 to November 8, 2013.

Two methods were used for data collection. The first consisted of completing the instrument once for each group, the Green Army and the Manglers, using the researcher's existing body of knowledge that had been accumulated through career experience. The second consisted of conducting research based on other sources of information. For each of these sources, the guide was filled out again for each group. These sources included: The Men's Soccer program Facebook page and section of the Cal Poly Athletics website, the Manglers' Facebook and Wordpress blog pages, and accumulated promotional flyers for each group.

Once the instruments were completed for each source, they were aggregated together to form two final guides, one for each group. Given the narrow focus of the study, the data collected consisted of qualitative lists and descriptions. In the results section, the data were formulated into five headings, one containing relevant background information, and four containing the results for each group. Each of these four headings was derived largely from the study's four research questions. In addition to program background, the headings were: structure and composition, marketing practices, loyalty initiatives, and membership benefits.

Chapter 3

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the official supporter groups associated with the Cal Poly Men's Soccer program. A case study approach was utilized to look at two distinct groups: The Green Army and the Manglers. This chapter includes the following sections: program background, group structure and composition, marketing practices, fan loyalty initiatives, and membership benefits.

Program Background

The Cal Poly Men's Soccer program is one of twenty NCAA Division I teams at Cal Poly, all of which are identified by the university's mascot, the Mustang. The 2013 roster consisted of 34 players, and its employed staff includes a head coach, associate head coach, two assistant coaches (one volunteer), and a director of operations. In addition, the program maintains a team of marketing and planning student interns to assist with publicity, camps and events, and game-day operations. The Cal Poly Men's Soccer program maintains two primary fan groups: The Green Army (season ticket holders) and the Manglers (student supporters).

The Mustang's home field is Alex G. Spanos Stadium, with a seating capacity of 11,075. At the conclusion of the 2012 season, the program held a 36-13-8 (57 matches) home record in six seasons at Spanos. Of those 57 matches, 44 drew 1,000 or more spectators, and the average attendance in 2012 was 2,709. Furthermore, during those six seasons, Spanos hosted eight of the sixteen largest crowds in NCAA soccer history, and

has seen Cal Poly outscore opponents 89-44 with 26 shutouts. Cal Poly tied for the regular season national lead with 42 total goals during the 2013 season.

Group Structure and Composition

The Green Army, as previously mentioned, consists of Cal Poly Men's Soccer season ticket holders. Adults pay \$100 for a year's membership, youth (12 and under) pay \$50, or a family of four can join for \$250. Half of these proceeds go to the athletic department, and the other half go directly to the team's operating budget. The group consists primarily of local community members, player's parents, and Cal Poly boosters. The individuals incorporated within this group represent the bulk of the non-student home match attendance, and a select few follow the team on its road trips. The group has no formal structure or elected positions, although those who have held membership since the group's origination seven years ago are more prevalent in their attendance of non-match team events. Green Army members respond most directly to the team's head coach, who helps organize them in their activities and passes along relevant information.

Started in 2006 by a small group of students attending home soccer matches, the Manglers are the student loyalist group exclusive to the Men's Soccer program. Consisting entirely of Cal Poly students and recent alumni, the group brands itself as "A delicate balance between debauchery and class." Within the past two years the group became an official club at Cal Poly, and therefore has a formally elected president that manages the club's finances and organizes group events. Unofficially, the Manglers are structured by year and experience. Those students in their third and fourth years as supporters generally create the cheers, which are derived from English Premier League

chants, and lead these cheers during matches. These senior Manglers typically have their place reserved for them at the front of the student section, and are viewed as the de facto leaders during the course of the game. The Manglers also take direction from the head coach in generating events, chants, and promotional materials.

Marketing Practices

The Green Army relies most heavily upon electronic communication and event outreach as sources of information. During the course of the season, most necessary details are passed on via email, the website, and the team's Facebook and Twitter pages. Similarly, attempts to boost membership and attendance generally involve going into the community and handing out promotional publications, placing a-frame advertisements, handing out promotional items (stickers, schedule cards, etc.), and attending youth soccer events. Other important promotional channels include pre and post-season events, word of mouth, and following group tradition.

Marketing for the Manglers is very interaction-based. Events and the distribution of promotional materials work hand-in-hand with electronic channels such as the club's email list, Facebook page, and Wordpress blog page. Event-based marketing for the Manglers includes: Freshman orientation activities, maintaining a tent at the University Union's student hour on Thursdays, distributing promotional materials around campus, off-campus rallies and events prior to home matches, and a dedicated Mangler tent at home matches. The Manglers also utilize word of mouth and tradition as promotional channels.

Fan Loyalty Initiatives

The Green Army's primary loyalty initiative stems from the soccer program's partnership with the San Luis Obispo Boys and Girls Club. Members of the Green Army who may not be local or are unable to attend a match can donate their ticket(s) to allow these youth to attend a match, and in return are granted a commemorative scarf.

The Manglers main loyalty initiative is the Mangler loyalist program. Unofficially, the program has existed as long as the group itself. Members were encouraged to take pictures of themselves with the scoreboard at every home game and the Santa Barbara away game to prove their loyalty and hold a position of respect. With the 2013 season, the program became an official aspect of the club. Stamp cards containing the home schedule were handed out during freshman orientation and the first week of the school. Manglers who had their card stamped at the tent for every home game and who will be able to provide proof of this will be invited to the post-season banquet, where they will be recognized and receive a special edition loyalist headband from the head coach. For the loyalist program's first year, it was directed mainly towards freshman students in order to test its viability.

Membership Benefits

With the price of membership, each individual in the Green Army receives the following specific set of benefits:

- Tickets for all home matches
- Commemorative scarf and annual t-shirt

- Invitation to pre-season meet the team BBQ
- Reserved chairback seating for UCSB home game
- Access to postseason banquet and all spring matches
- Regular team updates and email information blasts

Additionally, intangible benefits include involvement in the game-day atmosphere, inclusion in the Cal Poly soccer family, and the perpetuation of community pride in Cal Poly athletic teams.

Students that maintain membership and play an active role in the Manglers receive the following benefits:

- Annual t-shirt
- Unofficial priority seating in student section at home games
- First access to promotional gear and materials
- First access to buses for away game at UCSB
- First access to new cheers and participation in their creation

These students also maintain a position of leadership within the student crowd, and get the opportunity to develop deep relationships with fellow students who share the same passions.

Summary

The Cal Poly Men's Soccer program maintains two supporter groups, the Green Army and the Manglers. The Green Army consists of season ticket holders, and has a prescribed set of membership benefits and one distinct loyalty program. The Green Army's marketing practices rely heavily on electronic communication and events. The

Manglers consists primarily of students, and has a basic set of largely intangible benefits in addition to one official loyalty program. The Manglers' marketing practices are mostly interaction-based, focusing on social media and on-campus promotions. The following chapter will provide an evaluation of each these groups, make conclusions on their effectiveness, and provide a set of recommendations for their improvement.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In order to make improvements to any official athletic fan group, the parties with oversight of said groups must first be aware of the current situation. This case study will allow such adjustments to be made to the Green Army and the Manglers. This concluding chapter will include the following: a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, limitations, conclusions based on research questions, implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the official supporter groups associated with the Cal Poly Men's Soccer program. More specifically, this research analyzed the marketing practices, structure and composition, fan loyalty initiatives, and membership benefits of each group. Background information was gathered via Cal Poly library sources, and the data were collected during the fall of 2013 and analyzed using a case study approach. Research conducted on supporter groups substantiated their importance within the structure of a team or athletic organization, particularly within the sport of soccer. To develop this concept more thoroughly, soccer was examined as a global sport, and the club-supporter relationship was established. Finally, the act of supportership itself was investigated before discussing its manifestations within the sport.

To conduct this study, a case study guide was developed by the researcher. The instrument's structure and categories were derived from the study's research questions

and was pilot tested on another NCAA Division I men's soccer program of a comparable nature. Data were collected over a ten-day period using two methods. First the researcher's existing body of knowledge regarding the programs was used to complete the guide for each group. The guides were then completed again, this time using information found online. Finally, the guides were aggregated to form a final portrait of each group.

The results painted a clear picture of each group studied. The Green Army, which consists of season ticket holders, has paid membership and a prescribed set of membership benefits. They maintain one distinct membership loyalty program, and the marketing efforts directed at them were focused primarily on electronic communication and special events. The Manglers, which consists of students, does not include a paid membership and thus has a basic set of largely intangible benefits. The Manglers also maintain one distinct loyalty program, and the marketing efforts directed at this group were based mainly in social media and campus promotions.

Discussion

The Green Army and the Manglers are distinctly different groups, as a broad overview of each reveals that they serve generally different purposes. The first primary difference is in their structure and composition. Whereas the Green Army is composed primarily of adult season ticket holders and their families, the Manglers are much looser and rowdier group that draws its membership from the student body. Similar differences exist in their structure. The season ticket holders appear to be less diverse in their formation and have no true leadership other than those directives that are passed down

from the head coach regarding group functions. The Manglers, on the other hand, in addition to an officially elected president, encompass a wide variety of students. This ranges from incredibly devoted members who can be found at every home match to newer members who will only attend a handful of games.

The differences between the two groups are not so unlike those between the Football Supporter Association (FSA) and Independent Supporter Associations (ISAs) that Russell (1997) discusses. The Green Army, which is akin to the FSA, is more formal and official, and in addition to supporting the program seeks to be involved in giving their input. On the other hand, the Manglers are more independent and less controlled, in the spirit of one of the many ISAs. They would prefer that their activities be more related to setting the match-day atmosphere, leading the crowd and giving voice to their opinions, no matter how unpopular. Furthermore, the more senior Manglers could certainly be compared to ‘el capo,’ the fan leader described by Pietersen (2009), and the group as a whole compared to one of the Italian *ultras* described by Roversi (1994) in which this leadership figure holds status. For all intents and purposes, the Manglers meet Pietersen’s definition of hooliganism, perhaps minus the more violent aspects. Given that the English Premier League provided the inspiration for their creation, this is in apt comparison. Ultimately, changing the way either of these groups is built would be contrary to its purpose. Each is structured and composed appropriate to its function, with the Green Army as an official booster club and the Manglers as a rowdy, independent support group. The groups have been well designed, and the recommendation is to leave them intact structurally.

The second set of differences is in each group's marketing practices, although the separation here is less dynamic than the one that exists between their structure and composition. Both focus on web-based communication and events, but the manifestation of these practices is different for each group. The Green Army's electronic communication is mostly email based, and their events are mostly larger scale official team functions. For example, the Green Army does not have their own dedicated Facebook page. In contrast to this, the Manglers rely more heavily upon their Facebook page than their email list, and focus on smaller, more frequent events like on-campus merchandise sales and last-minute gatherings prior to games.

The existing body of knowledge on such supporter groups had surprisingly little to say regarding the use of email and social media. While a quick perusal of Facebook or Twitter will show that supporter groups for most European teams maintain these forms of communication, both Pietersen (2009) and Longhurst (1998) discuss the creation of promotional materials and publications as an important function of any fan group. It is worth noting that these European groups have been in existence for far longer and that, as Malcolm (2000) discusses, their members often grow up in their shadow. Thus, as Brown et al. (2008) show, supporting their team becomes an ingrained part of their person, and tradition takes care of the marketing itself. Given that Cal Poly's groups are both less than a decade old, it is not reasonable to expect the same degree of the tradition within the Manglers or the Green Army. What could be expected, however, is greater involvement in the production of promotional channels. The Green Army would benefit from the creation of a dedicated Facebook and Twitter account, and the Manglers might see value in circulating some form of weekly or monthly e-newsletter with lists of

activities and new chants or game-day traditions. Simply put, the groups need a greater degree of involvement in their own activities.

Where the two groups are most similar is in their overall lack of fan loyalty initiatives, each maintaining just one program. While Green Army members do generally come back year after year, there is nothing to reward them for doing so. Their loyalty program only comes into play when they donate tickets, and has no relation to time spent as a member of the group. Similarly, the Mangler loyalists program only became an official function of the club as of the 2013 season. It was implemented almost exclusively within the freshman class, and did show a return with a number of freshmen attending every home game, but it requires more planning and unified oversight.

As Theysohn et al. (2009) point out, increasing loyalty translates into heavier support and more profit. While the Cal Poly Men's Soccer program certainly realizes this, it hasn't really translated into any official programs for the Green Army, who are their paying fans. Ideally, some kind of seniority system could be established. The more years that an individual spends as a member of the Green Army, the better or more exclusive their membership benefits get. This might include different t-shirts for various years of membership, or even more prioritized seating for those have been part of the group the longest. Again, there doesn't appear to be an issue with getting members to return, but letting them know that their loyalty and dedication to the program is appreciated would be a positive next step.

While the Manglers may not be producing any income from ticket sales for the program, they nonetheless make up the most vocal portion of the supporting crowd. Like the Hooligans and *ultras* described by Pietersen (2009) and Roversi (1994), their

attendance at matches can be counted upon without fault. As such, the Mangler loyalist program is a good step towards recognizing these fans for their ongoing passion. After a successful trial run, it needs to be better implemented via application to all grade levels. An additional layer could also be added that would increase the rewards of the program with each year a student fulfills its requirements. All of this would require more streamlined and unified management by the coaching staff and interns, but is certainly feasible now that a solid foundation has been created.

The final point on which these two groups differ is in their membership benefits. Given that one group has paid membership and the other does not, this is not an entirely unreasonable disparity. The merits of membership in each group are aligned with their respective prices, wherein Green Army members receive a number of items and bonuses for their money and Manglers receive a mostly intangible set of benefits.

Previous research does not indicate any one set group of membership benefits, as such things will naturally depend on any number of factors such as culture, club size, club net worth, and so fourth. As Boon et al. (2003) exemplify in their discussion of Manchester United, it logically follows that larger teams with more revenue can provide more for their fans. The one thing that all the authors seem to agree on, however, are the intangibles. Membership in part of a greater fan group, and all of the emotional highs and unofficial benefits it brings are, for the most part, worth the cost. As such, it is unnecessary make any adjustments to the benefits that already exist for each group, save for any additional bonuses that would come from the new loyalty programs. In both cases, the price more than matches the payoff.

This research study was impacted by several limitations. First, as an employee of the program selected for the case study, the researcher may have unintentionally impacted the findings through subjective bias on the topic. Similarly, because the study was only limited to one program, it should not be generalized to other programs of the same sport, even those of a comparable nature. Finally, since research for this study was restricted to online means, the quantity and quality of information may have been negatively impacted. Despite these limitations, however, the findings here have given some insight into the functionality of supporter groups for collegiate athletic programs, and can be used to provide a basis for future evaluation.

The results from this study generate several ending thoughts. First, as with almost any program, there is a need for constant evaluation and improvement when it comes to official supporter groups. Membership and constituency is dynamic, and as such the groups will need to be adjusted incrementally to suit their composition. Furthermore, it is important that future research be extended to include a wider variety of programs to paint a better overall picture of the topic area, with studies such as this used as baseline. Research guidelines such as the categories utilized here may be helpful in paving the way for future studies and setting the stage for the development of even more components for evaluation. The contributions that this study makes to the management of intercollegiate athletics are worthwhile, and can serve as a basis from which to perform further research as programs and their supporters change over time.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The Green Army focuses on the use of electronic communication (primarily email) and special events, whereas the Manglers rely on social media and campus events/rallies for information.
2. The Green Army (season ticket holders) has no official structure, and the Manglers (student supporters) have an elected president and senior members who serve as unofficial leaders.
3. Green Army members receive a special scarf for donating tickets, and the Manglers have an official loyalist program for consistent attendance.
4. Green Army members receive a prescribed set of benefits that includes tickets, apparel, and event access, whereas the Manglers have more intangible, emotion-based benefits.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Retain the current structure and composition of both groups studied.
2. Create dedicated social media channels for the Green Army.
3. Develop a weekly/monthly e-newsletter for the Manglers.
4. Establish a time-based rewards program within the Green Army.
5. Fine-tune the implementation of the Mangler loyalist program.

6. Maintain the current set of membership benefits, save for any changes made with reward programs.
7. Continuously evaluate these groups to make further improvements.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Instrument

Cal Poly Men's Soccer Program

Component	Description/List	Notes
Marketing Practices Employed		
Group Structure		
Fan Loyalty Initiatives		
Membership Benefits		