

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

An examination of social activism in contemporary fan owned
football clubs: investigating Football Club United of
Manchester as a case study

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Contents Page

Abstract:	4
Chapter 1 Introduction:	5
Chapter 2 Literature Review:	7
<u>The working class game in a capitalist society:</u>	7
<u>Class divides in a Thatcher government - the rise of hooliganism</u>	10
<u>Sky Sports</u>	11
<u>Are football supporters ‘fans’ or consumers’?</u>	12
<u>Current resistance within football</u>	15
<u>FC United, a model for fan ownership</u>	18
Chapter 3 Methodology:	19
<u>Semi Structured Interviews</u>	19
<u>Email Interview</u>	20
<u>Focus Group</u>	22
<u>Reflexivity</u>	24
Sampling:	24
Ethics:	26
<u>Anonymity and Confidentiality</u>	26
<u>Informed Consent</u>	27
<u>Rights to withdraw</u>	27
<u>Risks</u>	27
Research Process:	28
<u>What I did</u>	28
<u>How it went</u>	28
<u>Positives and Negatives</u>	30

Chapter 4: Findings	31
Political Opinion	31
Social Activism	32
Community	33
Feelings and Relationship with the club/s	34
Critique of the footballing industry	35
Critique of wider Structural and Global Issues	36
This club is your club, this club is my club	38
Pride and Soul	40
The Political Route of FC United	42
Revolution	44
Chapter 5 Conclusion:	45
Bibliography:	49

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to identify in what ways FC United of Manchester is a social activist football club. The co-operative, non-profit ethos of the club will be interlinked with wider social and global issues in the literature review, as well as the historical background to football as both a sport and a business. Supporters at the club will be interviewed to find out their reasons for both setting up the club and supporting it, focusing on the reasons for the introduction of FC United as a 'supporter owned' football club. The results of the investigation found that the supporters at FC United have a deep rooted connection to the morals and beliefs they feel a football club should uphold. Further, the study demonstrated how these qualities transcend the game of football, providing an emotional link to the traditions of football fans. How the fans interlink these traditions, with the new ideals FC United have will be observed in how they have established themselves as a model and 'revolutionary' football club within their communities.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Football has seen substantial change over the past twenty years. Spotlights in mass media and mass culture across Europe, the changing nature of football has been transformed from a sport and game, to front page news. Whilst contemporary football transcends the boundaries of the traditional game, those within the Premier League have become idolised or disparaged celebrities. The “*alleged indiscretions*” of the private lives of high profile football players, (footballblog.co.uk, 2010) are frequently covered stories exhibited to the general public, along-side articles on Premier League footballers wages and transfer lists. An apt example of this can be observed in Television series drama, *Footballers Wives*. Starting in 2002 (indb.co.uk, 2013) the show provided a platform for the “*glamorous lives*” of footballers wives, paralleling the multimillion pound incomes that could be witnessed off screen. (Nauright et al, 2012: 85). The series often devised plots that reflected the real life stories of the wives and girlfriends, or ‘WAG’s’ that were told in British tabloid newspapers: a life of “*designer gear, and flash cars,*” (footballerswives.tv, 2008).

The cracks in the footballing world have been argued by some academics to delve into much deeper and fundamental issues than football players’ public or on screen misgivings. Football’s “*beautiful game*” (wsc.co.uk, 2009) has come under disrepute, with its changing nature leaving football a business, not a sport. New directors, with the objectives of making profit have taken away football as a “*public utility*” and transformed it into a business that is there to “*make a profit,*” (King, 1998: 132). Demonstrating this, Swansea Cities ‘custodians’ have become perceived money makers in their club as they “*pocket £2 million windfall*” (Conn, 2013) out of the £16 million profit announced for the club the six months running up to November 2012. The clubs chairman believed a £2 million dividend was a just payment to

its directors and owners. However, this 'just' payment risks Swansea's reputation, as it slips into a club directed by profit-making, and not by custodians.

The 'beautiful game,' in this sense, has been taken away from football supporters, providing the backbone of what Millward aptly discusses in his work as the basis for the collective action observed in protest groups. "*Disharmony*," according to (Millward, 2012:3) is not a new concept in football, although the loss of the game in the supporter's eyes cannot be more apt within the changing nature of modern football and the resistance against it.

This dissertation will aim to unravel the reasons behind the creation of fan owned football clubs. Focusing on several aspects of their development including: Football in the wake of the industrial revolution, with 'working class' roots being the backbone of the clubs survival. The rise of capitalism and consumerism will also be analysed, with Sky Sports and the impact of the monopoly of power that business men such as Rupert Murdoch have within the movement of football into the mass media. Murdoch's invention of football as "*global business*" (Tuccille, 1989:210), in television will lead on to further issues within the structure of football such as fan activism. Subsequent to this, existing resistance within football club Manchester United will be observed, focusing on the idea of the fan owned football club, 'St Pauli' as notable example of this. The symbiosis of differing subcultures in FC St Paulo offers an alternative view on football. Punk mixed with an alternative scene, with the principles of solidarity and liberalism, (Falbe, 2011). The importance of these aspects will be laced within the arguments of this dissertation, discussing the necessity of this model to grow within the global football scene.

The main aim of the research is to advance the argument of activism in football, using a range of interviewing techniques with the participants in the study. The largest application of this will be a focus group, asking questions surrounding their personal opinions on football as an institution and their opinion on how their own teams function as a part of society. It is hoped that the participants within the case study will reflect upon their own forms of activism and create links between them with the social and political structures a fan owned football club lie within. Further to this, the aim of this study is to build and understanding of the outcomes of fan owned football clubs. What do they offer as part of their alternative model? Does this model benefit the wider community? And should this club be seen as a 'revolution' in the footballing domain.

Chapter 2: Literature review

The working class game in a capitalist society

The medieval stages of the game, offered footballs first written appearance as the establishment of 'Folk Football'. (Sandvoss, 2003: 3) This version of the game significantly lacked rules and regulations and so faced varying initiatives by authorities to have it banned, as they believed the players were creating social unrest. In order to create the stable game that the authorities wanted, a 'moral ethic' had to be introduced. This was done by utilising a Puritanical philosophy of "*fairness*" and "*honesty*" into the game, through relating it to the protestant work ethic that dominated this period, (Brailsford, cited in Sandvoss, 2003: 4). This control over public space however, appropriated the hegemonic control of football that would be carried throughout the history of football and allowed for classes to be subjected to

a dominated ideal of football in place of inclusive participation. This is particularly reflected through the workers who played for their local areas or factory teams, as they were seen as 'commodities,' to be valued as an "*exchange value of labour*" by the bourgeoisie, (Marx, cited in Calhoun et al, 2007: 122).

During the Late Victorian Period, this form of hegemonic control within football was at a high. The introduction of Industrial towns provided a platform for a profusion of labourers within industrialised cities. Organised sports and their establishments took root within these busier cities and with it, the need for football governance. The Football Association (FA), created in 1863 (Baker, 1979: 241) marked the foundations on which modern football has been governed, bringing an elaborated uniform code to the sport. For football to function in Victorian capitalist society, it required a shortening of the existing six-day working week to allow the time for competing factory teams to play and thus, allowed future business for the owners through spectator attendances.

Those within the top rungs of socio economic classifications dominated the organisation of Victorian football, with Eton and Cambridge graduates leading the FA throughout this period. Although football clubs were played and watched by the working class, they were organised and dominated throughout this period by those of bourgeois status. In a study of this form of football culture in Victorian England, Baker (1979) states that sports resulted from a class divided society that tended to "*accentuate rather than to heal those divisions,*" especially so in football where peoples' aggressions were played out by setting class against class, (Baker, 1979: 242). These undertones of control in football therefore allowed the middle classes to maintain a pacified workforce, one that allowed labourers to play and watch football but on the terms to which the bourgeoisie had set out. This process, as Maguire describes

transformed the game in a process of “*Pacification, privatization, and commercialisation,*” (Maguire, 1992, cited in Sandvoss, 2003: p5).

A quote taken from a 1922 letter to the South Wales Echo encompasses this depiction of the social structures of football with this poignant quote:

“It would be wise to give all classes an opportunity to see the match, because, after all, the working man is the backbone and stay of the club. It is a pity that the directors should confuse and misconstrue sport for greed.” (South Wales Echo, 1922, cited in Johnes, 2013).

As early as 1922, the infrastructures of what can be observed in the most modern football clubs were being postulated in the principles and divides of footballing culture. The embryonic stages of commercialisation in football were not only observable through its governance, but through the introduction of wages and salaries for players.

Kuhn, (2011: 70) describes footballers’ wages during the industrial revolution as a “*small financial boost,*” to be added onto the players other careers. But as the culture industry progressed, commercialisation and the economic worth of players and the game became what Kuhn (2011) goes on to describe as the emergence of the “*new football economy.*” Taking shape during the 1930's, footballers began to be perceived as celebrities and progressing into the 1960's, the lift on the capping of salaries for players then inevitably pushed the economically driven structure upon football that has continued since. These divides were to become some of the fundamental reasons behind the development of social unrest in the 1980's, and with it, the further demonization of the working class through hooliganism in football.

Class divides in a Thatcher government – the rise of hooliganism.

The class divisions that had been embedded into the culture of football were particularly evident through the period of social unrest in the 1980's. Therefore it is essential to establish the grounds as to why resistance was expressed through football during this period. Post 1960's, individuals had much wider access to being able to “*map their position in the world.*” (Jameson, 1991, cited in King 1997: 578). Contemporary culture then began to blur the class boundaries that restrained class differences through the public and private sphere pre 1960's. Continuing this, (Martin, 1985, cited in King 1997: 578) discussed the counter culture of 1960's and that the blurring of class boundaries undermined social order and through 1970's, which spread and resulted in the loss of social control, especially within the realm of football.

Spectator disorderliness and its' surrounding perceptions of social unrest have been evident from the medieval game. But as a form of resistance, hooliganism can become a way of life to some fans, (Dunning et al, 1988). A conducted interview of Twenty Six year old lorry driver, 'Frank' supports this in Dunning's' work, stating that attending matches was for, “*The aggro, it's an obsession*” (Dunning, Murphy & Williams 1986:222). This view of hooliganism was pushed into the public eye through the media and hooligans were portrayed as social phenomenon. As non-neutral agents during the rise of hooliganism, the media coverage of hooligans involved linguistics such as 'thugs' 'lunatics' and 'savages,' (Dunning et al, 1988:8). Linguistics such as this, were endorsed by Thatcher and the conservative government. Kenneth Clarke, Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer, described Thatcher's view towards football fans as problematic, or the “*enemy within.*” (Conn, 2010). Through media coverage, football hooligans and the explanation for their existence were dismissed as a derivative of levels of unemployment and the growing size of crowds.

(Dunning et al, 1988: 18) This view of hooliganism separated fans from society, and dismissed the root causes of social unrest.

Millward illustrates segments of these root causes of football hooliganism. From this position, hooliganism was a form of protest, a social collective in which football fans essentially build “*supporter mobilisation*” (Millward, 2012:3) against what they disagree with about their club. In this sense, football hooliganism is a “*reform based*” (Taylor, cited in Millward, 2012: 3) collective action set up by supporters. Especially prominent when there is deep rooted concern over the perceived loss of their football club to commercialisation and outside forces. This can be aptly demonstrated with the introduction of Sky Sports as a marketed tool within football and mass media.

Sky Sports

Growing accessibility to satellite and cable Television instigated the broadcasting market in the 1980's. Jonscher, a London partner at the U.S. Management consulting firm 'Booz', stated in 1989 that within the next five years, “*Millions of people will be watching Satellite TV,*” (Jonscher, cited in Tuccille, 1989: 209). Meaning there would be a dramatic change in the way people watched and ‘consumed’ football. After Murdoch signed a multimillion agreement with Maxwell Cable TV in May 1989, he claimed the distributing rights of Satellite channels within the UK and found his way into the monopoly of television ownership. Later labelling sport the “*Battering ram*” of paid television in the UK, (Cowie & Williams, 1997: 619). Murdoch's global media empire was fraught with opposition however, when he proposed to take over Manchester United.

This issue of Murdoch's proposition was not only that he was a justifiably unpopular buyer, but also with the principle that Manchester United fans believed the club should not be corporately owned. As Harverson states in the footballing magazine, 'When Saturday comes,' what is most problematic with this form of takeover is that if such a takeover was successful, any further decisions made by the club would not lie within its' interests, but with selling "as many subscriptions to its pay television channels" as possible, (Harverson, 1998). The effect of these changes demonstrates an initial disturbance in the fans relationship with their club, leading onto a number of further movements against Murdoch.

A number of campaigns shortly followed Murdoch's initial bid. The BBC and former Manchester United players supported Manchester United fans in what was to become "the most significant victory" in the clubs history; defeating Sky's attempts to take over the club, (Brown, 1999). The BBC's concerns over the takeover centred on the potential for Sky to create a monopoly of power centred on the broadcastings rights of Match of The Day. This was not a revenue issue for the BBC, but rather, a rights issue (BBC, 1998). Former Manchester United players also supported the Independent Manchester United Supporters Association, when a rally of 700 supporters was held to oppose the deal. Brian McClair wrote in a statement to the fans at Manchester United, that the club was not a commodity and that together, they needed to ensure that the club "remains the property of genuine fans", (BBC, 1998).

Are football supporters 'fans' or 'consumers'

Foreign ownership of football clubs would have been greeted with "great incredulity," twenty years ago and further, foreign players would have been novelties in the English Leagues,

(Wilson, 2007). But has the game 'kicked out fans' in the name of consumerism as Wilson states? Ian Taylor wrote in 1971, that football fan 'hooliganism' was a response from working class males who were resisting the "*bourgeoisification*" of association football, (Taylor, cited in Crawford. 2004 :30). This rhetoric has been passed through to the most modern models of football, in which football fans have become 'passive' consumers in the game. Contemporary football collects support through the sale of consumer products, as opposed to the team supporting itself. What is also noted is that this form of football parallels Wilson's assumptions that this form of fandom with consumption of products attracts a more affluent audience. As a consequence, the working class supporters are forgotten.

Giulianotti supports this, drawing on two distinctive groups of fans: The 'Consumer' and the 'Traditional'. The consumer fans centre support on a "*market- centred relationship*," (Giulianotti, 2002, cited in Crawford. 2004:31) with football. What Giulianotti also notes, is that fandom manifests itself in differing ways and so, although this format is one that offers guidance on the recognised differences in these fans different supporters will not have a universal meaning for football. Supporters will therefore, have multiple meanings towards their club. What Wilson (2002) previously discussed, is that although there may be rhetoric of these traditional fans being priced out of football, when people pay more, they get more for their money. It is the opinion of a growing minority of football supporters such as those at FC United that the game is being crudely reconstructed by this new economic organisation.

Others however, feel that the money invested has 'vastly improved' the game. Wilson concludes that football would have to 'split into two' in this case, for everyone to be satisfied.

Taking the example of the Turkish football industry, Yinanç discusses Turkish football as facing a new crisis. Financial problems, such and an increase in debt has resulted in a lack of

transparency of the financial structures in Turkish football, which has been “*sinking into a morass*,” (Yinanç, 2013). Yinanç further states that having 'all powerful' chairmen takes them away from the goal of financial discipline and responsibility for a club and as a result, revenues are not enough to cover a clubs expenses. Football therefore, not only exists as a game to its supporters, but is intrinsically linked in some cases to politics, and the political nature of football clubs.

The Social Issues Research Centre (SIRC) researched an alternative view of fandom. Investigating the feelings, behaviour and expressions of football fans across several countries. The study found that being a football supporter is associated with feelings of: “*Passion, emotion, excitement and dedication*,” (SIRC.org, 2008:1). Football fans consider themselves to be the ‘Twelfth Man’ in football and stated that their ritual chants and songs motivate their team. Further, fans attend games to “*help the team win*,” not to just observe, (SIRC.org, 2008:4). According to the research, much of the meaning of being a football fan surrounds notions of escapism. It is about being “*transformed into a different consciousness*.” (Brentnall, 2009:28). Football fandom from this perspective therefore, lies within the realms of supporters sharing this notion of being ‘transformed’ within the culture of football. The feelings of fandom, to who settle within being fans within a commercialised view of football intertwine with those who disagree with modernised football. As Wilson formerly stated, football means a great many things to every differing fan and consequently, ‘fandom’ stands as a complex structure.

Current resistance within football

What needs to be assessed is how football is defined to its supporters and more prominently, how these definitions come into question when supporters feel the structure of football needs to change. This is where the impact of social movements comes into form. Its' definition, depicted by McCarthy and Zald delineates social movements as a group of beliefs and opinions, set out by a population of people that want change in “*elements of the social structure and/or rewards distribution*” of society, (McCarthy & Zald, 1977, cited in Giugni et al, 1999:7). It is empirical to this study to consider this structure of social movements, as it not only reflects the motives for the creation of FC United, but also a wider social and political view of the capitalist structure and how this has a bearing on the introduction of supporter owned football clubs. Further, this reflects Millwards (2012) work on ‘supporter mobilisation’, where football supporters act against the views they disagree with, creating collective action against the structures they feel are not suited to football, which can be observed on a global scale.

In contrast to the focus of media narratives, which often denote football fandom as seemingly apolitical, or at least in terms of hooliganism, where there is an assumption that it lacks any overt social or political focus. Academic literature has increasingly considered the ways in which supporters can be seen as social movement. For example, the ‘Boys Roma’ and the ‘Irriducibili’ of Lazio, located in Italy’s capital of Rome, formed an “*ideological alliance*” (Testa, 2009: 54) in opposition to what they perceived as the oppressive Italian State. Their emergence of a social movement, first illustrated a neo-fascist ideology was a response to the cultural, political and social restrictions in Italy’s broader system. These supporters, typically denoted as ‘hard_core,’ embodied a movement in the first half of the 1970’s that

demonstrated an unintentional political movement, (Grispigni 1993, cited in Testa, 2009:55) which was argued to be the death of politics in a disillusioned populous. This disillusionment, especially of the Italian youth created a space in which social movement took root. This culture of passion and ideological support for one's team is observable in supporters acting against the ever imposing commercialisation of football, where "*Gegen den modernen Fussball*" Against Modern Football, (Honigstein, 2008) is readily used in modern football movements such as in the German team, Bundesliga.

St Pauli, a football club in the North German city of Hamburg is "*not a club that tries to disengage itself from politics*," (YouTube, 2010). Set up as a 'fan powered', socialist club around the squatting movement in Germany in the 1980's, those who lived around the area went to watch the games. St Pauli embodied the 'punk football' character from its early supporters, who sported Mohawks and Che Guevara flags. These "*radical fans*" (Kuhn, 2011:137) from the squatters movement dominated the stands and provided the symbolisation of "*the poor against the rich clubs*" (Shortlist, undated). Harboring a skull and cross bones as a symbol for the club, the fans symbolised their political motif as an 'anarcho-libertarian' club, one that is still consistent with the route of the club today. Further, St Pauli contains the highest proportion of female fans in any German club, offering a contrasting set up. In a typically 'masculine gendered' sport, St Pauli settles itself in promoting a contrasting view: Anti-sexist, anti-racist and anti-fascist. (Knight, 2012:7). These are the social and political values that still remain the backbone this club.

Football fans at Manchester United developed resistance through associations such as the Manchester United Supporters Trust (MUST) and the Independent Manchester United Supporters Association (IMUSA). Steering towards reclaiming "*meaningful ownership*"

(www.joinmust.org, 2010) these associations have become prevalent in times of economic change. Most prominently when it not only affects one club, but becomes part of a wider, global field of issues surrounding the role of corporations.

(MUST) demonstrated activism within the grounds of Old Trafford football ground itself, through the 'Green and Gold' Protest campaign. Its' aim was to have a visual impact within the ground, showing opposition to the Glazer takeover and a visible protest against the leverage of the club. This began in 2010 after the Glazers secured a £500 million bond issue, which would allow them to also take out up to £95million to “*pay down the poisonous PIK debts,*” (Dailyfootballnews.org, 2011). The growth of this campaign shows responsiveness to the “*true implications of the takeover,*” (Fc-utd.co.uk, 2010). The colours used for the scarves signified a return to the roots of the club, (SharpeyCol, 2010) in which Green and Gold were the colours of Manchester United's original strip of their original team, Newton Heath in 1878. What is most prominent about this form of resistance according to Bhatt is that this median of protesting, “*Does not create violence,*” (Bhatt, P. 2010) a far stretch from the strands of protesting seen in 'hooligan football,' seen during the Thatcher governance.

The campaign became closely affiliated with another visual campaign to the takeover. The Love United Hate Glazer campaign, (LUHG) initiated in late 2005 was initiated to promote the on-going boycott of official Manchester United Merchandise and the purchasing of any official products associated with the club. These forms of activism were a statement, a chance for supporters to “*publicly and visibly, vent their anger*” over the takeover, (Ashford, 2012). These forms of activism demonstrated an apparent commitment to campaigns being recognised by the Glazers and the media, remaining a form of resistance and activism for

those who still attend Manchester United matches.

FC United, a model for Fan Ownership

On the 12th May 2005, fans from Manchester United Football Club felt that the club was no longer theirs and these fans were “*forced out to fight*” (Brady, 2006: 32). Malcolm Glazer and his family had taken over ownership of the club, against many of the supporter’s wishes. As a result, some of the disenfranchised fans at Manchester United decided to start their own football club, FC United of Manchester (FC United). May 2005 was not however, the singular reason for FC United. The commercialised model of modern football, and everything contained within that stood as the catalyst for its change.

The Inaugural season at FC United began in Leigh, playing a match with a crowd of 2,552 of the fans who would have previously attended games at Manchester United (Fc-utd.co.uk, 2013). FC United set out to be a community football club, member owned and incorporating a democratic structure to its co-owners; an alternative which was to be integral to the ethos of the club. The clubs members have an equal stake: “*One Member, One Vote*” and so each member is an equal owner in the club, no matter what financial stake they have, (FC-utd.co.uk, 2013). This form of ownership is a purposeful alternative to Premier League structure and further, as FC United exists as a non-profit organisation, created for sustainability, the club offered resistance to the commercialised route Manchester United was taking. One in which the fans and members of the club are owners and have a full say in how the club is run.

This rhetoric of resistance is backed by Stahl. FC United position stood as, in Stahl's opinion, “*the valorization of the underdog and outsider,*” Where the club offered the re-emergence of a political working class consciousness, (Stahl, 2003:27). FC United was formed by disenfranchised supporters of Manchester United and they rose to the challenge of creating their own footballing history. This new supporter culture formed by FC United is captured by one of the motto’s “*I don’t have to sell my soul,*” (Porter, 2011: 183). The rationale of this club is that it offers an alternative model of football. Bourdieu brings this to the framing of the FC United model as a ‘habitus’. Outlining the way the everyday world is perceived and constructed, the term habitus envelops the way social practices are structured, (Bourdieu, cited in (Hillier & Rooksby, 2005:284). This discourse embodies the symbolic principles of what Bourdieu refers to as “*organising action*”, (Bourdieu, 1977 :214) where those at FC United have a secured meaning of their 'way of being' and a consensus for the structure and 'habitus' of their club. FC United’s habitus therefore, is constructed out of the values of ‘grass roots’ football. One that should not be seen as a step back, but a step forward in the way football clubs are managed.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Semi structured interviews

Semi structured interviews are defined as “*predetermined questions*” (Schensul et al, 1999:149) that relate to the subject of interest. The sample study domains that have a list of variables can act as a guide rather than a solid structure for finding answers, combining the flexible nature of unstructured interviews with the directionality of a more structured form of interview such as a survey. The medians in which semi structured interviews are used largely

base around an exploratory model of investigation.

The researcher in semi-structured interviews must be able to not only strike a balance between maintaining a professional level emotional human interaction, but must also be able to create a rapport and sense of safe atmosphere for the participant, (Kvale, 1996:125). This is a skill that is remarkably difficult to achieve fully, as all humans will inevitably behave differently in the interview setting. There resides within this form of interview, as with many others, an “*asymmetry of power*,” (Kvale, 1996: 126). Meaning that, the researcher steers the questions and conversation, allowing for those within the interview to avoid a reversal of roles, but more so, ensuring that the participant and interviewer can stay within the ethical guidelines set out by the British Sociological Association.

The motive for choosing to use semi-structured instead of structured interviews is that the research will target participants that will already be aware of each other and the researcher. Structured interviews do reduce the risk of interviewer bias and increase reliability, (Jolley & Mitchell 2012:301). However, if a semi structured interview is used within this study, it allows for participants to feel comfortable enough to provide fluidity to their answers. This is integral to this study, as the opinions of the supporters are needed, and the versatility within questioning participants is needed to gain a more versatile and contrasting opinions.

Email Interview

Email interviews offer an interesting difference as an interview technique. Firstly, they provide the interviewer with a written record, (Trimbur, 2011:465). Which not only saves the

time normally used transcribing. It also allows for the interviewee to take part in the study without having to take too much time from their personal life. This view is supported by Buchanan & Bryman, (2009) who state that email interviews can take place any time, and allows for those with a busy schedule to take part when it is most suitable for them. Email interviews offer further practical advantages, saving both the participant and interviewer the inconvenience of travel costs and can be an effective way to interview when a scheduled time cannot be arranged that suits the participant, (Halperin & Heath, 2012: 270).

Another aspect of email interviews is that they can inhabit both advantageous and detrimental factors to a study. Email interviews offer a way for the participant to amend their ideas, meaning that the email interviewee will have time to think more carefully about their answers than they would do face to face. It is hoped that this would lead to an interview that, “*will be, or ought to be free of mistakes*” ensuring that they cannot be misquoted. (Adams & Hicks, 2009:22). However, it is essential to also point out the alternative argument within this. That email interviews may not therefore, give a true representation of interviewee’s opinions as they may feel the need to change and amend their thoughts in line with what they believe the interviewer wants to read. This raises an interesting debate into the levels in which email interviews compare with other forms of interviewing such as face to face interviews.

When conducting face to face interviews, there is an opportunity to build the type of rapport with a participant that is far less likely to occur when completed over email. For example, if someone takes more care over what they write in an email interview, the tidy nature of this form of interview does not allow for the “*engaging candour of remarks*” that can be made spontaneously within a successful face to face interview. (Gillham, 2005:109). Another important issue in email interviews is also discussed by Gillham, that when conducting an

interview that is not face to face it allows for some information to be open to misinterpretation. The “*emotional tenor*” (Gillham, 2005:111) of an email can be hard to interpret.

When opting to take out an email interview as part of the study, the above was taken into consideration. The opportunity to conduct an email interview with one of the participants would offer ways in which to compare the differing forms of interview used in the study. It also poses an interesting difference from face to face interviews. It allows for both participants to save time from busy schedules and to save money on travel expenses. Whilst also providing the participant within this study to take their time answering the questions, without feeling there is a time limit on the answers.

Focus group

When conducting a focus group within any research, knowing when is best to use them and why, is part and parcel of shaping the study. The focus group is an effective way of promoting discussion and comments on an issue. The researcher in this setting has a less directive and dominating role, allowing participants to “*share ideas and perceptions,*” (Krueger, 1994: 6). The focus group within this study will be encouraged to share ideas, using their mutual connection of FC United as a base to exchange ideas of activism. This brings forward the ‘myths’ that relate to focus groups one of which contends that focus groups must consist of strangers. However, it makes it difficult to gain knowledge from a group or community and particularly so in this case, where the participants are part of a network of people who are all involved within the same club, (Morgan, 1993: 6).

When beginning to evolve the selection process of the group, it became clear that not only would some of the participants know each other, but that this may be beneficial to the research. Focus groups normally consist of several groups being interviewed and their thoughts being collaborated. However, this one focus group must bring together of a range of people within FC United. Mixed groups often give a different group dynamic and offer different outcomes, (Shamadasani & Stewart, 1990: 51) so when reflecting upon the structure of the group, it is important to discuss the limitations and benefits of how this particular focus group is constructed.

It is important to note the issues that typically arise when using focus groups. The participants knowing each other is advantageous, however, the very idea that all the participants may well be aware of each other and may vary in levels of friendship can be viewed as an issue. Using such a diverse group brings versatility, but with this issues can arise within its application to the study, (Shamadasani & Stewart, 1990: 98). The power relations that lie between the interviewer and the interviewee are extended in this case, by the emergence of potential power relations between each participant within the focus group. This can arise in any focus group setting, but can be potentially problematic when introducing participants that are aware of each other and may have already mitigated their own friendships and power plays outside of the focus group setting.

Reflexivity

An essential part of the process of research is reflecting upon a philosophical aspect of one's work. In a social environment, the researchers' process will always have impacts on both participants and the social environment because by its very nature, the social world cannot be controlled. Further, when conducting qualitative investigations, researchers will deal with participants very closely on a personal level and will encounter a plethora of differing necessities for each participant. When being reflexive upon research, the issues and "*experienced fears*" of being a researcher must also be evaluated, (Breuer & Mruck, 2003). In this sense, reflexivity turns to the 'inward' reflections of the researcher; essentially it is an "*interpretation of interpretations*" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009: 9) in which the researcher reflects upon findings and also on themselves within those findings.

Sampling

The target population for the study are those involved within FC United. Supporters and activists will be asked to be part of the eight participants in total. The types of sampling that can be used to frame the study consist of both probability and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling as a technique can offer differing forms of random sample, from stratified to simple techniques, (Babbie, 2010:192) which aims to achieve a more representative sample and minimises sampling bias. Non-probability samples are based on snowball and convenience sampling, which support researchers when there is a theoretical underpinning for selecting certain members of a population to study. This form of sampling however, is subject to being viewed as inferior as it does not have the same representative

sample that would be seen in probability sampling, (Lund research Ltd, 2012).

In terms of the selection process for the semi-structured interviews, the supporting motives for this were employed to ensure that participants could be probed for more answers when giving their responses. Further, by having a semi-structured interviewing frame it would allow for a more relaxed approach to the interviews and encouragement of further discussion on issues. This was particularly advantageous when considering that as a researcher, there was a personal awareness of the participants. An email interview was also chosen as part of the research framing. The email interview offers a practical way of collecting participant responses without having to organise a convenient time for both the participant and researcher to meet. Further, due to having personal knowledge of the participants, the email interview offered an alternative format for participant responses. Therefore, it was hoped that the email interview may offer a different response than the face to face interviews.

The purpose of the focus group was to allow for the participants to interact with each other and to promote debate and conversation between them. The participants range in age from 21-56 and may be aware of each other through the club. This format was hoped to allow for the participants to feel comfortable enough with each other to allow for debate and discussion and to compliment the sampling methods chosen for the study.

Participants that had founded the club were part of the study, allowing the research to have background knowledge of some of the people involved in fan activism. These participants may have been part of the original protests surrounding the Glazer takeover in 2005 and could offer valuable insight into the reasons behind fan activism from both a supporter and an activist perspective. The final participant in the interviews was asked to take part in the study

due to them being a player for the club. As a player who returned to the club after having played for another team, this participant can offer an insight into their thoughts and opinions on their role as a returning football player and further their levels of activism at FC United.

Ethics

Whenever research is completed it is crucial that any potential ethical issues within the study are considered. The British Sociological Association (BSA) statement of ethical practice was put in place to ensure that researchers take on their own ethical responsibility. The research that is taken out by Sociologists is recognised by the BSA as being diverse and applicable to a wide variety of settings, (British Sociological Association, 2002). When completing this study, a range of ethical issues were taken into consideration and any ethical conflicts would have to be resolved before any research could take place. The research involved participants in a range of interviewing settings, each with their own ethical considerations. What the BSA offers within their statement ethical practice, are the rules and guidelines for good ethical practice.

Anonymity and confidentiality

The anonymity and confidentiality of those involved within the study must be central to ensuring that good ethical practice takes place. Appropriate measures should be taken to ensure that all those within the study remain protected and anonymous throughout. What differs within this study is that there will be pre-existing knowledge of the participants whom have agreed to take part. When considering that the researcher will be classed as an insider within the study, the ethical issue of differing forms of bias must be resolved. Data protection legislation safeguards the participant is as much as possible: unidentifiable by others. (Smith,

Todd & Waldman, 2009: 93).

Informed consent

Informed consent should be considered before beginning any research, as it allows for participants to have a full understanding of the aims of the study. The most effective means to gain informed consent is to devise a consent form, which all participants will read before agreeing to be part of the study. The consent form should show what the aims and objectives of the study are, what is expected of them as the participant and what they can expect from the researcher. By having written informed consent the participant is fully informed of any and all risks involved in the research and therefore, the researcher can maintain good ethical practice. (McKinney cited in Babbie: 70).

Right to Withdraw

All participants within a study should be made aware of their rights to withdraw. The BSA states that all participants should be able to withdraw from the study at any time without any form of repercussion, (Grinnell & Unrau, 2010: 3). Further to this, stating that the researcher must have professional integrity and that if participants choose to withdraw it should be done so, “*without penalty*”. This not only provides the study with integrity but also, does not negatively impact upon the participants at any stage of the study.

Risks

Prior to research, any potential risks to the participants must be evaluated and resolved. The researcher must understand the different requirements and needs of each participant in order to protect the rights of those a researcher studies. (BSA, 2002: 2). Social research often presents social issues and so, participants may divulge personal or sensitive information to

the researcher. The researcher must therefore, ensure that the rights of the participant are protected, and that any “*physical, psychological or legal harm*” will not come to any participant involved in the research process, (Hall, 2008: 69).

Research Process

What I did

When undertaking the research, participants were approached through social networking sites, in person or through mobile phone to be asked to take part in the study. Three individual interviews were undertaken. The first interview was completed within the agreed setting; at the football ground FC United play at. The second interview was completed in the same setting however, the participant was asked to be part of the study through a snowballing technique of sampling as opposed to the non-probability method proposed. The third of the interviews was completed online, with all questions sent over a social media network. It was felt that this was the most appropriate way to contact the participant as we converse on this website. The focus group participants consisted of some snowball, and some non-probability sampling. It consisted of six participants, all male, between the ages of 21 and 56. The interview was carried out in an alternative setting to agreed original setting, as the interview space was unavailable.

How it went

The participants within the study on the whole, were the ones within the proposed structure. However, some of the participants were asked to be part of the study with the ‘snowballing’ sampling method. The second participant was asked to be part of the study this way and upon reflection, it was clear that as the interviewer, I felt unprepared for the participant and so

stuck to asking the set questions without probing. This situation however, was to underpin the alternative approach that was to be taken with the focus group. The focus group lasted around two hours, with all participants actively contributing to the discussion. Having had previously felt unprepared for the second participant interview, it facilitated an alternative approach with this group, one in which I felt more confident probing for more questions.

It is important to discuss the gender relations within the research process. With one participant out of eight being female, it is essential to note any differences found between these participants. Further, the gender relations between the participants and myself as the researcher must also be evaluated. During the interview with Participant 1, it was felt that as a researcher, the gender difference created a slight difference to my approach necessary. Reflecting upon this, it was felt that due to this participant's involvement in the club, they have been aware of what questions I was asking and the responses I expected from them. Further, this participant may also have been aware as my position as a researcher instead of my typical role as a supporter and so may have felt differently about how they answered the questions.

This brings forward the issue of objectivity and impartiality within the study. Critics of positivistic social science, state that "*impartiality is unavoidable*" (Gray, 2007:86), as a by-product of constructing scientific knowledge. More so in the social sciences, where researchers may influence research to "*distort findings*" (Grey, 2007:86) or halt investigation when the researcher's hypothesis outcomes have been confirmed. This is particularly prominent when having 'insider' knowledge of the participants within the research, as both participants and researcher are aware of the preconceived outcomes of the research, making

responses from participants particularly difficult to keep impartial.

Reflecting upon the research process itself, it was clear that the participants knew what my outcomes were for the study, and may have been prone to giving me the answers they believed I wanted. However, from the range of answers provided, and the debates within the focus group, it is hoped that impartiality was maintained throughout to get valid and reliable results. Interestingly, the focus group did not agree on every subject and had quite varied opinions, but the debate was reasoned and rational. Indicating that the participants felt comfortable enough to provide their own opinions without animosity from anyone else

Positives and Negatives

One of the disadvantages of the research process was that I felt unprepared and uncertain how one of the interviews would develop, as the participant was not one that had been organised to interview. The result was that it was felt as though there was not enough preparation in this interview to allow probing for more answers. A further negative of the research process was that some of the participants asked to be part of the study could not make it to interviews and so some information had been missed they may have contributed to the study.

One of the strongest advantages of the focus group was evidently the change in circumstance surrounding the environment for the focus group. The group was originally intended to be held at the home ground of FC United, one hour before a match. However, due to the bad weather, the match was called off. This change in circumstance allowed for the participants to take as much time needed discussing the issues within the study. The focus group not only debated issues within each other's answers, but the structure of the questions asked. As a

researcher, this provided valuable insight to their strong ownership of the study and where they placed themselves within it.

Another positive of the research process was the 'email interview' structure used with one of the participants. Out of the individual interviews I undertook, this format provided the lengthily and comprehensive answers.

Chapter 4: Findings

Political Opinions

All participants within the case study formed opinions surrounding political agendas within football. Split evenly between the politics involved within Manchester United and within FC United, participants overall generally had a consensus that football has political systems, whether these were ones that were deliberately made by the clubs, or not. Concerning political opinion surrounding Manchester United, three of the participants stated that they purposefully acted against the Glazers, Participants 5 and 6 stated that they were shareholders at Manchester United.

Participant 5 stating: *“I was a shareholder, and I still am just to spite the Glazers, so he can't say he's got the lot.”*

For these participants, Brian McClair's statement that the fans at Manchester United needed to ensure that the club *“remains the property of genuine fans”*, (BBC, 1998) is entirely applicable. In relation to the politics surrounding FC United, all of the participants centred their responses on the fact that they *“get a say”* in the club. Participant 6 elaborates on this point with:

“The one member one vote system to me is the idea that every person will get a say in how the club is run, and how it goes. It is every my club, it is your club and that's integral to it.”

Participants 1,3 and 4 paralleled this view, noting the incorporation of its' democratic structure of *“One Member. One Vote”*, (FC-utd.co.uk, 2013) being integral to the true democratic organisation of the club. This system reflects not only the democratic structure of the club but also:

participant 3: the *“honest morals of the club”*.

Social Activism

All the participants in the study showed obvious signs of being activists in football. The focus group discussed at length their activist roles within protesting against both the Glazers and Rupert Murdoch. Many of the participants within the focus group discussed how they had never been back to a home game at Manchester United and that they have stuck to, what Participant 4 refers to as the *“not one penny to Glazer”*. Therefore, although the participant may still attend away games at Manchester United, they do not pay for any of the commercialised aspects of the club anymore or attend home games. Participant 6, stated that FC United was *“doing something about it”*.

Participant 3 supported this in their individual interview, stating that those at FC United have:

“The hard work and also the pride which is put in by so many different people to fight for the same goal”.

They are what the Guardian referred to in an article, *“United by name, United by nature,”* (Kingsley, 2012). The article reflects this collective nature within FC United that the club

“*want to make a difference,*” (Walsh cited in Kingsley, 2012). These shared goals reflect the importance of ownership of the clubs as an activist role.

One of the participants discussed the idea that ‘political activism’ is the way to stand for what you believe in. Activism in this sense was widely agreed with, with the exception of two participants who stated that having set rules and being overly politicised as well as, 'Idealist' and this can

Participant 5: “*lead you down certain alleyways that can be alienating*”.

Further, the participants widely agreed on promoting the ethos of FC United, and actively involving other communities within this ethical structure. Participant 7 referred to this promotion of social activism to other football clubs and fans to “*Evangelise*”. This was supported by Participant 8 who stated they would “*happily preach*” to say that what FC United is doing is fantastic. What should be reflected on here is “*the belief, or having faith*” (Nye, 2004: 2) in something other than one’s self. Settling themselves into this culture is also a reflection upon their placement into a form of community, one in which people share this same 'faith' and 'belief'.

Community

With FC United being formed as a community club, the participants reflected on its benefits. The discussion on community by participants offered both factual and emotive language. Many of the participants discussed the practicalities of the community work FC United have created, such as helping those within the community they feel are not fully integrated. Some of the most prominent discussion on this came from:

Participant 2 regarding: “*disenfranchised*” members of society such as “*school children*”.

Participant 7 who added: “*We go to the disenfranchised older people and people who are stuck in their houses and get them out*”.

More prominently, the participants discussed the emotional benefits of community work. What participant 1 refers to as “*the feeling of togetherness*”, is heavily reflected upon several times throughout both interviews and the focus group. Participant 5 stated that FC United, is a community and “*that’s a good feeling*”. What is most striking about the participant’s reflections on the community within FC United itself is that they relate FC United to a family. Discussion on how the morals of the club will be passed onto through generations, and that the club is like their child, Participant 6, or like their family, (Participant 5 and 8). The SIRC reflect upon this in their research, stating that football fans refer to their social bonds with each other in ‘kinship terms’. Something special is shared by these fans, and the social bonds between the fans as, “*so strong that many describe them as familial,*” (SIRC.org, 2008).

These bonds spill beyond to boundaries of family and football supporters. Becoming, in its “*barest*” form, tribes (Childs & Storry, 1999: 143). Supporters of the same team, in this case FC United, are tied together by being grouped by their personal and political identities. Contemporary western football would typically parallel the postmodern tribes according to James (2006:32), where global capitalism shapes the “*Postmodern tribe*” of football. FC United have undoubtedly reformed this representation of the capitalist tribe, becoming a tribe against capitalism rather than for it.

Feelings and Relationship with the club/s

Relating back to the work by The Social Issues Research Centre. Research on football fans has shown them to have emotional links to their clubs. Feelings of, “*Passion, emotion, excitement and dedication,*” (SIRC.org, 2008:1) that the SIRC have researched can be reflected upon within the participants feedback. Participant 3 stated that having played for the club they feel lucky to have found life-long friends in the fans, staff and players. Participant 7 stated that by having everyone, stand and sing together FC United was about “*camaraderie*”.

There was a divide in opinion concerning their emotions towards Manchester United. Some of the participants felt bitter about the Glazer takeover, whereas others feel that the Glazers were doing what any businessman would do. Participant 8 stated that they felt that as a ‘United’ fan, both Manchester United and FC United was “*the same thing*” to them. The participants also discussed another aspect of Manchester United and FC United. The linguistics surrounding their feelings towards football often shifted around emotive language. This was particularly prominent within the focus group, where participants reflected on what United ‘is’. For the participants in the focus group, it consisted of language such as, “*Love*” “*Intangible*” “*soul*” “*in our hearts*” and the “*love of the history*” of their club/s. These feelings appear to be very much the driving force behind the existence of FC United.

Critique of the football industry

When asked questions on football, the majority of the participants within the study often went above criticising Manchester United’s structure, by critiquing the footballing industry itself, in what Giulianotti described as a “*market-centred relationship*” in modern football,

(Giulianotti, 2002, cited in Crawford, G. 2004:31). Participants reflected on the structure of the industry and how it is destructive to the game. Participant 2 discussed how the system within football can advocate the world's richest club getting into £400 million of debt is "totally abhorrent". Many of the participants coincide with each other on the belief that the footballing industry has become a business, rather than a football club. Also focusing on the role of Sky within the footballing industry, one reflecting on their opinion that

Participant 4: "*Sky is responsible for football being the way we don't want it to be*".

This echoes the feelings towards Murdoch after he signed a multimillion agreement with Maxwell Cable TV in May 1989. Then claiming the distributing rights of Satellite channels within the UK and obtained a monopoly of television ownership. Murdoch's global media empire was fraught by opposition when he tried to obtain power at Manchester United and this is readily evident throughout several of the participant's responses to questions.

Critique of wider Structural and Global Issues

The participants, particularly those within the focus group, discussed a range of global structural issues affecting football. The wider issues that enable football to be run the way it is today were touched upon by several of the participants. Participant 3 noted that difficulties are put in place, which hinders the chances of more fan owned clubs being able to exist, such as money for a pitch.

Within the focus group, the participants discussed the notion of people living in Britain as being 'passive'. Participant 4 touched upon the ethos within other countries, stating that within France for example, if any of the wider social and political structures were threatened opposed, people would protest vehemently. Whereas, protesting within this country may be

acted out, but people would not be prepared to do anything significant about it. This opinion was largely agreed upon, with Participant 5 agreeing that the capitalist system within this country would have to break down in order for things to change.

Participant 8 also discussed the issue that people may “*not be happy about what happens but wouldn't do anything about it*”.

This apathy was challenged with the notion that FC United were, according to:

participant 6 “*Doing something about it*”.

This relates back to football fans and the responsiveness from working class males, resisting the ‘bourgeoisification’ of association football, (Crawford, 2004:30). These wider social and political issues are ones that participants felt were manipulated by the businessman within football. Participant 6 exemplified this, noting the impact of the Glazers, as businessmen and not fans during the takeover of Manchester United. Further to that, the very structure of the capitalist system was prevalent throughout the discussion and in the participant’s responses. Thus, reflecting not only a critique on the structures of Manchester United football club, but of a wider structural critique of capitalist influences within football.

What was also touched upon by several of the participants was the alternative model that they perceive to be working so well in other European football leagues. The structure of football in Germany was seen as a model to take example from, showing that football could offer a viable alternative to the structure seen within Britain. Football governance within German football clubs works,

Participant 4 states: “*since it became a rule in Germany it's worked so I think that is the way to do it.*”

For this to work, the same structure must be implemented here in Britain and would have to be implemented through legislation to work correctly. This brings forward German clubs previously discussed such as St Pauli and Bayern Munich, who are largely or entirely fan owned.

~~This club is my club, this club is your club~~

Some of the most striking evidence gathered during the research process was the relationship between football fans and the club they support. Using an example of an FC United song, ‘*This club is your club, this club is my club,*’ (fcunited.ru, 2013). The notion that the supporters at FC United see themselves as a collective will be assessed. Delving deeper, past the clubs ambition of FC United being a family club the research displayed the notion that the fans within the study perceive those who go to FC United as a collective, ‘family’ unit.

Drawing from both the research process and literature, the following quotes exemplify this:

Participant 6: “*This has become my club; it's almost like a family.*”

“*This is how it feels to be FC. This is how it feels to be home,*” fcunited.ru (2013).

The definition of family can be characterised as a setting that is inclusive of not just those who are genealogically related, but also as “*people from a community*” (Corbett, 2004:3). This parallels the opinions of the participants, in that although they may not be ‘blood’ related, FC United is a ‘family’ to them. This relation to a family structure reflects the necessity to create a sense of belonging. These shared memories and beliefs, “*connect people across disphoric space,*” (Blunt & Dowling, 2006:214). This infers that those within the study perceive themselves as part of something shared.

This brings forth the discussion of family as a social process in which its members are subject

to hegemonic control. The community and notion of FC United as a form of family would typically reflect members of a group with an acceptance of rules and “*actively participate*” in the formulation of these rules (Miller, 2009:107). These rules serve as a way to exert control over the group and consent to the regulations set out by its members. Where FC United differ however, is the repudiation of these rules. For example, those at FC United would not consent to the rules set out within the most modernised version of their club Manchester United. Instead, opting to create their own football club, a ‘broad church’ in where any person can support the club.

Discussion within the focus group also focused upon the changing nature of family. Some of the participants discussed the idea that FC United will progress and move on and this was something that cannot be helped. Similarly to what would happen with a family, the child would be encouraged and nurtured, but will choose its’ own path.

Participant 5: “*It's like having a child isn't it. United is the family history and the kid will grow up. I mean you nurture a child but it will go where it wants.*”

Within the study, the participants developed their ideas on that family structure. Turner supports this, stating that there is a recognition that “*Our own families change with time,* (Turner, cited in Wilson: 1985: 3). This change in the structure of FC United was debated during the focus group. With questions arising around what should be the direction that the club should go in. There was recognition within the group that at some point in the future, those who are fans at FC United will have had no prior connection to Manchester United. Relating this back to the family structure, the participants also discussed the notion that this was okay, as long as those fans,

Participant 8 “*remember where they came from*”.

These create notions of family as a metaphor within football. Post Darwinism, the typical family structure was to be a metaphor projected into state nationalism. It represented the natural hierarchy of men and the subordination of women within the family structure. This “*indispensable metaphor*” (MacClintock, et al, 1997:91) maintained the continuum of the ‘family of man’. However, FC United challenges this format, striking a new family ‘institution’ where everyone is still classified as family, but regarded with the same status. This use of the dialect of ‘family’ within FC United reflects the creation of norms within the culture at the club. Born out of disenfranchisement, the club has created ‘norms’ in an ‘abnormal’ situation.

Pride and Soul

Throughout every interview within the study, every participant presented forms of emotive language to describe how they feel about football, ‘Pride, Love, heart, soul’. All of these intangible expressions are a form of manifestation of emotion for the participants within their football lives. The restriction of emotion in traditional male identity confines men to keeping within their masculine characteristics. What is intriguing about this was the acceptance of emotion into football. These emotional norms may be dissolving in an emotionalised Western culture, meaning that men display their emotions “*in public more frequently than used to be the case.*” (Feldman & Philippot, 2008:200). What was most striking about observing this within the interviews was that especially within the all-male focus group, the participants were comfortable to discuss these emotions freely with each other.

One of the participants also discussed that being part of FC United gave them a sense of pride as a direct result of people fighting for the same goal. Defined as an emotion that Fischer describes to be responsible for someone feeling they are a “*socially valued person*,” (Fischer, cited in Leary & Tangney, 2003:395). FC United, to this participant, is something to be proud of and from literature used previously by Coman as the ‘revolution’ of FC United is something that supporters have been proud of.

Soul is something that frequently came up in both interviews and in the literature surrounding FC United. Aristotle explained the soul as abstract, or “*empsychon*”, or “*ensouled*” meaning that living beings are not a soul, but have a soul. (Johansen, 2012:64). The soul encapsulates a person’s capability and capacity, with a distinct need to progress. The FC United flag and song, “*Two United’s but the Soul is one*,” (fcunited.ru, 2013) expresses this view, mirroring the participants reflections on the notion of ‘soul’ within football. Participant 4 discussed the idea that the soul of a football club is something that, “*scientifically doesn’t exist*,” but is something that participants often referred to when talking about their club. This notion of ‘soul’ is integral to the political and social activist role of FC United, as in the world of premier league football, football has become beyond the reach of ordinary fans, (Clark & Kelly, 2011) and FC United, to these participants has not.

In order to fully contextualise this view, it is essential to contrast it to the Max Weber’s concept of disenchantment. In a world where rationalization has overtaken myth and magic, the everyday has shifted into a bureaucratic state of merit, rule and regulation, (Smith, 1998:273). Modernisation and capitalism have pushed back the myth and poetic bearing of an uncertain world. What is prominent about the evidence found within the interviews in this study was the re-emergence of enchantment through the creation of FC United. Whilst the

participants refer to soul and pride, they bring forth the myth and magic capsulated within the uncertain, and placed it within FC United. To the participants, the soul of football is something that cannot be defined as scientific, but more parallel to a philosophy of poetic myth.

Ritzer furthers this argument, discussing the factors of life that could once be seen as magical and mysterious, as now systematically rooted out as “*inefficient*” (Ritzer, 2010:89) in a consumer society. This rationalisation of disenchantment means that the objects that are consumed in these new, ‘efficient’ systems become difficult to value, not economically, but sentimentally. The designers and implementers of a disenchanted, capitalist world will do “*whatever necessary*” (Ritzer, 2010: 89) to eliminate the enchanted domain to the consumers. Just as the modernised Premier League football has eliminated any ‘enchanted’ aspects of the game for its supporters. These rationalised systems of modern football have therefore, taken away the very aspects that football fans regard with such high importance: pride and soul.

The political route of FC United

It was clear through the findings that there is a distinct political stance at play within FC United. The political nature of FC United gave rise to a broad spectrum of responses within the group. Some of the participants, felt that as an activist club, its political nature goes hand in hand.

Participant 2 stated that: “*To a certain extent because of the way we were formed we are political and we always will be.*”

Participant 7: *“I'm a left wing idealist so when FC was born it was like a match made in heaven.”*

What needs to be evaluated therefore, is whether the political nature of FC United is the correct path for the club or whether FC United is too exclusive, at the risk of isolating those who do not fit into the political route. In general, the focus group agreed that FC United is ‘left wing’. Being member owned and democratic, it is typical of a left wing, working class movement. Some of the participants felt that this was the best path for FC United to stick to, as it promotes equality and inclusion. However, sparking some debate it was discussed that FC United was ‘too far left’. If FC United exclude those who don’t consider themselves to be left wing, it puts the whole entity of the club being what one participant states a ‘broad church’ at risk.

Participant 5: *“The idea I thought was that FC was going to be a broad church. I think it's sort of a left wing ethos now, but at the exclusion of others.”*

On reflection, it could be a result of FC United’s left wing stance that some of the fans may feel excluded from the club. Should FC United be a broad church and include any type of supporter, no matter what their political beliefs? Or is it possible that this will it negate the current fans from supporting the club?

When taking the example of FC United being a ‘broad church’ it is protuberant to bring forth the comparisons between the club and religion. The following quote reflect images of religion, preaching and faith within the interviews.

Participant 8: “*FC is brilliant so I would happily preach to say what we are doing is fantastic because to me personally I’ve had so much fun in the whole time I’ve done it. But you know, there’s got to be a reason for doing it and people have to commit to it*”.

These impressions indicate the placing of football within a religious domain and further, that there is a purpose behind the necessity of ‘preaching’ what FC United does to others. Using the previous examples of evangelism and preaching, it is essential to build an understanding of the framework of the relationship between these two subjects. Peter Evans, Education officer at the National Football Museum, states that football could be seen as the “*religion of the masses,*” it is the thing that they hold most sacred. The stadium is like the church: an arena for fans and a place for worship. The hymns in church mirror the songs from the fans. The choir are the fans. You pray for your team to win. If you are all here to do the same thing, you feel part of it, (BBC.co.uk, 2013). This is echoed within the findings with the supporters within the study that are part of a football club that is part of this ‘shared faith’ in football. An FC United flag furthers this argument: “*FC United of Manchester, True Faith*” (fcunited.ru, 2013: 6).

Revolution

Within the research, the most prominent theme was that of FC United and its’ links to activism. Every participant was actively involved in the process that has shaped FC United. Further, the large majority of the participants had a role to play in its embryonic stages. For the participants, FC United is summed up in the following quotes:

Participant 3: “*with fan owned clubs you get to see and feel the care, hard work and also the pride which is put it by so many people to fight for the same goal.*”

Participant 4 “*We should always stand up for your beliefs and political activism is the way to go for it*”.

Participant 6: “*It's us getting out there and saying 'you know what fuck this shit system' you know what I mean. We're going to get out there and show them we'll do it our way, that to me that is what FC is.*”

FC United's social activism is portrayed impeccably through the participant's statements. It is a collection of all of these aspects that ensures that FC United is a socially active club. FC United stands for everything they believe to be wrong with the way football has become, or more poignantly what has been done to their club, Manchester United. Political and Social activism for these participants is very much the direction that FC United should be taking. But, not only that, the participants explained that they are so confident in the activism that FC United is involved in, that they would form more of an activist role, by 'preaching' what FC United do to other football clubs.

Part and parcel of the FC United 'revolution' is the promotion of inclusion and development of their communities. Its manifesto states that one of the aims of the club is to be beneficial to its local community. This, by far is one of the most integral forms of activism that FC United have developed. It is 'passing on' good practice to the next generation and outside influences of football fans.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation was to set out an account of the activism that is conveyed by a fan owned football club, FC United. It is clear that the wider socio-economic and political

environment is integral to the reasons for the development of activism within such football clubs. Drawing from the literature, authors such as King depict the new model of premiership football as 'profit making' and that this has taken away the public influence within football. The literature demonstrated the need for football fans to have the physical ownership of the club and further to this, that football supporters feel that once they have that physical ownership, they can also create the morals and values that the club represent within the wider communities they belong to.

The interviews and focus group demonstrated a spectrum of opinions, all with the most solid and grounded awareness of the wider implications of the social order of modern football. What was particularly poignant was that whilst not all of the participants agreed with what they perceived to be the political direction that FC United has taken since they started, they reflected upon each-others views and constructively critiqued and complimented others views with respect. The language used by the participants to describe the club was emotive: pride, passion and even love were used to describe how the participants feel about football. Their responses about love were uninhibited, reflecting a distancing from the accepted typical masculine male identity. More prominently it reflects the acceptance and advocacy of having a deep rooted love for their football club, intangible and intrinsically linked to their lives and soul.

This passion and pride that the supporters in the study have in regards to FC United, promotes this clubs stance of being its own entity within the footballing domain. Social and political activism is the backbone of this club. Not only through protesting the ways in which modern football has changed, but by promoting core values and beliefs such as community development and the sustainability of FC United. FC United have transcended their

disenfranchisement with their original club Manchester United and delivered a socially active club that reveres its political and historical background. It notes the importance of the wider social and global impacts of an ever encroaching capitalist system on football, and the supporters at FC United use this to underpin their outlook on the need for social movements such as theirs.

Without a shadow of a doubt, the apex of the findings from the research leads back to the concept of the soul, and more precisely the soul of football. It is the very reasoning for social activism; standing against the capitalist powers of disenchantment and against the acceptance of the model of Premier League football. Manchester United's disenfranchised fans at FC United, state that there are two United's, but the soul is one, that they don't have to sell their soul in order to have their own club, and that football itself – is their heart and soul.

The supporters at FC United have intertwined the attributes and characteristics from their original club Manchester United with the qualities and principles they desire at FC United. By and large this club is a perfect depiction of social activism, but what the research has brought forward, is an entirely different issue, that fan owned football clubs offer much more than social activism to their supporters. FC United will undoubtedly always have an activist underpinning. But for the supporters, FC United is somewhere for fans to network; a place for families to bring up their children and pass on the traditions of their original club, whilst forming new practices within a new domain. FC United is a place where fans can preach, sing and stand. But above all, demonstrate a revolutionary kind of football:

One that remembers the game and not the business.

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