

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SITUATIONAL FACTORS AND DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR AMONG FOOTBALL SPECTATORS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

The roles played by fans have very large impacts to the players and football team. Players are motivated by the support shown by the fans. As the number of fans who turned up to watch a football match is very crowded, it is difficult to expect that they will comply with all norms or laws that have been set. Results from the pilot study showed that there is a relationship between the situational factors and deviant behaviour among football spectators in Malaysia. In-depth interviews and focus group discussion conducted with several key informants and football fans found that factors situation itself consists of various elements, such as the number of supporters and their position in the stadium, the meaning and importance of football matches to the fans, the history of the fans from the opposing team, security at the stadium, the importance of sport to the formation of the identity of the fans, the location of the match, as well as the influence of mob behaviours.

Keywords: fans, deviant behaviour, football spectators, situational factors

INTRODUCTION

¹“With so many people involved, there will always be people who break the rules, that is something you cannot prevent” (FIFA President, Joseph Sepp Blatter).

²“Violence in football is treated differently than it is in society, and you need to arrest those who take part in this type of violence, and that doesn't happen” (Leonardo Bertozzi, ESPN commentator).

When talking about sports, it is hard not to associate football in the discussion. Football has become the most popular sport in the world not only because it is watched by billions of people across the world at any one time, but it is also considered as one of the sports that has an enormous number of followers or

¹ The president of the World Football Association (FIFA), stated that out of the number of those involved in football, few of them will choose not to comply with the rules set, and it is very difficult to prevent such things from happening.

² A commentator from ESPN Brazil also asserted that anyone involved in violent activities must be arrested to ensure that it would not happen again.

supporters (Otto, 1999). Huang (2011) added that the role played by supporters is very important, and players are motivated by the supporters. The performance of players and teams are impacted indirectly from the support of their fans.

Due to a large number of supporters who come to watch a football match, it is difficult to ensure that all of them are being professional and well-mannered. This is because not all of the supporters who come to watch the match have the intention to enjoy the game and fill their leisure time (Kelly, 1996). On the other hand, it is also found that a group of supporters who come to watch the game with different intentions and purposes. They are known as football hooliganism (Spaaij, 2006; Dunning, 2000). Issues related to football hooliganism are not new, especially in the West. Since the 16th century, this phenomenon has been recorded, and mass media have also actively reported on the issues until 'moral panic' was created (Coakley, 2009).

In Malaysia, the issue related to violence among football supporters is not new. In fact, this issue is becoming more common in recent years. Although various fines and penalties have been imposed mainly by the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM), it is still inadequate to control the behaviour of the supporters. The act of throwing firecrackers, bottles, stones, light a flare, burning stadium's seat, provocation, fighting and disturbing public order are among deviant and aggressive behaviour performed by some football supporters in Malaysia.

No matter the reasons given by the supporters, whether interest, dissatisfaction, provocation, retaliation or others, they should not break any rules set. Not only the act of fighting, damaging public property and rioting are regarded as deviant behaviour, but scolding and shouting obscene words are also treated as deviant behaviour. In addition, there are also some football supporters who just follow the act committed by other supporters (mob behaviour) without thinking the causes and consequences from the act. They belong to the group that is easily influenced by the social environment and easily manipulated emotionally (Dunning, 2000).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paperwork is an initial finding of the study. A series of structured interviews were conducted with several informants who are directly involved with football in Malaysia. Among the informants involved were the Chairman of the Football Supporters Club of Selangor, Perak, Johor and Kelantan. These four football teams were selected because the teams are known to have a large number of fanatical supporters. Moreover, the teams are also often fined and punished by the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) as a result of the misconduct of their supporters. Interviews were conducted with several sports commentators and football coaches in the country. In addition, interviews with the purpose of obtaining information from FAM officers were also held.

Several series of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were also held with some football supporters for the four football teams (Kelantan, Johor, Perak, and Selangor). The purpose of conducting the FGD is to get more in-depth information from the supporters, which is primarily concerned with the factors that affect supporters who failed to control their emotions and engage in deviant behaviour while watching a football match at the stadium.

FACTORS INFLUENCING DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR AMONG FOOTBALL SUPPORTERS IN MALAYSIA

From the secondary data results of various studies by previous researchers and also results of the information obtained from interviews and FGD that were conducted, it can be stated that there are various factors influencing the misconduct of football supporters. Among them are the supporters' position (home/away), provocation by the opposing team, existing security system and also easily influenced by the behaviour of other supporters.

From various identified factors, it can be concluded that all factors mentioned are situational factors that exist and thrive particularly during the match.

Number of supporters and order of positions

Each stadium has a different total capacity of supporters. There are specific provisions on the number of tickets sold for every game. However, the decision to sell tickets to opposing supporters is the State Football Association's right. For example, the Football Association of Sarawak (FAS) had decided not to sell any ticket to Perak football supporters with a reason of avoiding undesirable events following the case of a fight between two supporters in Perak stadium.

In addition, the position of the supporters in the stadium also plays a role to deviant behaviour. The order of the supporters that are close to each other will cause discord (backbiting, insulting and condemning each other) and throwing objects (stones, firecrackers and bottles) between home and away supporters. Since too many cases lead to this problem, there are few researchers suggested that more security personnel should be stationed at the stadium, and they also suggested that some security personnel disguised as ordinary people and seat among the supporters in monitoring the misconduct by supporters more effectively (Spaiij, 2006; Falahi, 2009 & Otto, 1999).

Meaning and importance of the match to supporters

Each supporter states that every game that they attended has its own meaning and importance to them. Usually, hard-core supporters have very high expectations in every match of their favourite team. The supporters will always expect a victory of their team because for them, their team is the best team compared to the opposing team. When their team did not meet the expectation that has been set, frustration often occurs and finally supporters will feel depress. This is because each game is very important and has a meaning for them. It is not only about the money invested to buy tickets, but also the time allocated to watch the game. All these factors made the supporters always putting high expectation towards their team and next, feeling that every match they watch is very meaningful to them.

Composition/socio-demographic of supporters

A large number of supporters watch every match in the stadium, causing a mix of supporters from the aspect of socio-demographic. To some extent, the matter contributes to mishap involving supporters (Kleomanis, 2004). Many previous studies indicate that young people of 20-40 years old are often involved in violence and rudeness incidents while watching a football match (Kleomanis, 2004; Spaiij, 2006; Dunning, 2000 & Kelly, 1996). They are often associated with the element of 'bad-tempered or young blood' that they could not patiently accept the challenge or provocation. Consequently, any provocation will always be replied, either verbally or physically.

Men are also often involved with physical rudeness (fighting, throwing objects, lighting flares, throwing firecrackers and showing obscene gesture). This situation is often associated with masculinity trait inside men when the masculinity element is being shown regardless of where they are. The situation is almost similar in Malaysia, where young men are categorized as hard-core or extreme supporters that are more exposed to breaking the norms and laws that have been set.

History and relationship among supporters

In the Malaysian context, not all matches have the potential of becoming a 'hot' match, especially involving incidents of misconduct among supporters. Usually, historical factors and relationship among supporters of competing teams play a considerable role. This is also confirmed by the supporters of Perak football team, especially an incident involving a scene between Johor and Perak supporters at the previous 2014 Super League. They said that during the match in Johor, Perak supporters were blocked by Johor supports, and some vehicles of Perak supporters were being damaged by Johor supporters. Due to the incident, when the match was held in Perak in the following week, a few of Perak supporters who still bear a grudge with the incident in Johor had done something similar; damaging the bus of Johor football supporters.

Relationship and problem factors among supporters also took place between Johor and Pahang football supporters, as both teams were fined by FAM as a result of fighting and commotion involving their supporters. The history of fighting among supporters is not only limited at the stadium. Online argument, especially through social media, has also become a source of endless conflict among supporters. According to the informant of the study, it is difficult to deny the influence of social media at present that produced many fan pages of their favourite team. Usually, before the game officially begins, provocation precedes in social media where supporters start to curse the opposing team and expressing harsh words in social media. The incident is then continued to the stadium, which ultimately leads to a fight.

Security system

According to FAM, various prevention and control efforts have been made to curb widespread incidence of 'football hooligans' in Malaysia. Penalties and fines are often imposed to various state football associations for their failure to control the behaviour of their supporters. However, for supporters and state football associations, some have felt that the penalties and fines imposed are very high, which could affect the 'pocket' of the state football association.

Actually, according to FAM, they need to work closely with the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM) by applying additional number of security personnel at all stadiums, particularly those involving high-risk matches. Spaiij (2006) stated that not only the number of security personnel needs to be addressed, but the security personnel should be trained and are also competent. This is because it is not easy to control thousands or tens of thousands of supporters at a time.

The existence of closed circuit television (CCTV) systems in stadiums, which are placed at the correct position (main entrance, exit, access to toilets and changing rooms) should be expanded. This is to ensure that any unnecessary behaviour can be recorded, and the offender can finally be arrested and punished. The supporters will also be more careful in doing something because they realize that they are being watched.

Inspection at the entrance of the stadium will also need to be tightened to ensure the stadium is free from dangerous goods (stones, bottles, fireworks, flares and wood). Although the inspection on the

supporters is made before entering the stadium, but there are supporters who managed to escape into the stadium together with dangerous goods. This matter requires serious attention by relevant authorities. According to the informants, the inspection conducted on supporters is not thorough, as there are supporters who came to watch the match on the ticket of 'media', where certain individuals are given special clearance as media representatives to the teams. These individuals are excluded for the inspection, and some of them help other supporters by bringing in prohibited items into the stadium.

Dissatisfaction towards match officials

Football game does not only involve players or spectators. The involvement of match officials such as referees, assistant referees and linesman plays an important role in ensuring the smoothness of a football match. Supporters mentioned that violent behaviour typically occurs as a result of dissatisfaction and angry against decisions made by the match officials, which are regarded as unfair and biased towards the supported team. Therefore, the use of harsh words, insulting and throwing objects onto the field, or even towards the linesman by the supporters, is not surprising in a game due to their frustration and angry with the decision made. Ironically, if the referee's decision is in favour of their team, no question is asked on the decisions. In contrast, if a penalty is given by the referee to the opposing team, which allows the team to lead or win the matches, this can become a catalyst to evoke feelings of anger and consequently causing the supporters to behave violently.

Many cases involving hitting and injuring match officials have been reported in Malaysia. In a recent case, the riot occurred in the Sarawak State Stadium in October 2011 was caused by the dissatisfaction of the referee's decision. Consequently, six police patrol vehicles were burnt by the supporters. The police had to use tear gas to disperse rioting supporters.

The importance of the team towards developing supporters' identity

Spaij (2006) stated that hard-core or fanatical supporters are having a very close bond with their favourite team. In fact, football has formed a new identity for them. For the ultras, they have a very close bond with their team. They are formed in order to give full support to their team. They are willing to stand, cheer, and sing during the 90-minutes match as they felt that football is part of their lives.

Malaysian football is based on the state football team. Each state in Malaysia has their own football team representative regardless they play in Class 1 or 2 league. Consequently, Malaysian supporters see football as more towards a state-based identity. For example, if an individual is born as a citizen of the state of Johor, it is impossible for them to support other teams. Regardless of the ups and downs of the state football, as a citizen of the state, their commitment and love are always in the blood. In addition, the support given is not just because of interest, but they also show their loyalty towards their respective states. Upon the incident where Selangor football supporters burned the flag of Kelantan's team in 2013, it led to the feeling of angry and furious among Kelantan supporters. Fights involving both supporters continued even outside the stadium.

Match location

As mentioned before, match location plays an important role in influencing misconduct among football supporters (Guttmann, 1998). If supporters come to the opposition ground, their number is typically smaller because tickets sold for the opposing team are lesser compared to the home team. In the opponent area, the tendency to behave negatively is low because they are worried and feared of the reaction by the higher

number of home supporters. If the home supporters behave abruptly, damaging vehicles of the opposing team or throwing objects towards the away supporters, it is not surprising that the same thing will happen again when the match is played at their ground.

Provocation during match

The element of provocation from supporters is absolutely unavoidable in football. It is not a big issue if provocation among supporters can be handled well. However, the problem of Malaysian football supporters is the reaction and response towards the provocation. Provocative actions like condemning, lowering credibility, and insulting the opposing team and supporters rarely end with a positive environment. Teams that are vilified will surely react to the given provocation. Next, the provocative which started with war of words will continue until physical violence is involved. FAM themselves stated that supporters should be patient in any kind of provocation received to avoid the situation from becoming worse.

Mob behaviour

In 1985, Gustave LeBon introduced a theory related to 'group of mind'. The fundamentals of the theory are when an individual is in a group that has the same interest, desire and passion, there is a high probability for the individuals to be influenced by others. While watching a football match, not all supporters in the stadium know each other. However, all of them come with the same purpose and objective, which is to support their team and watch their team wins.

When supporters throw objects into the middle of the field when they are frustrated, other supporters witnessed their act. Other supporters who are also experiencing the same frustration will start to follow the behavior. Furthermore, they consider that in the situation with thousands of people, many people are doing the same thing, then they will feel that there is nothing wrong with what they do.

Through the observation at the stadium, the most obvious act by supporters as a result of following what others did was throwing abuses. For example, in a match involving Johor and Pahang football teams, the referee awarded an advantage to the Johor team by not giving a red card to their player who had committed foul in the penalty area of Pahang team. The situation triggered an anger situation among Pahang supporters, and there were few supporters who started shouting the word of 'stupid referees' repeatedly. The act was followed by other supporters, and the stadium was reverberated with the shouts of 'stupid referee' at that time.

CONCLUSION

In the modern era of football, no one can deny the importance of supporters towards the development of a football club. Support in terms of material and moral plays an important role. As a supporter who claimed that they admire and love the supported team, they should be more responsible and ethical. Although the impact of football in Malaysia is not great like the English Premier League (EPL), but it is enough to make the supporter becomes fanatical and a 'gangster'. If it is true that the supporters love their team, they should learn to be more patient, portray positive attitude and not to entertain any kind of provocation from the opposing team. If things go the other round, supporters and football team will suffer the loss. State football team will lose by being fined and punished by FAM. Arrested supporters will face legal action. Meanwhile, supporters who escape punishment will suffer the loss if FAM decides that their team has to play at a neutral stadium and without the presence of the supporters.

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