

Exploring How Fan Emotions Towards Teams and Athletes Drive Merchandise Purchases

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Abstract: The objective of this research is to examine the degree to which the emotional connections between fans and sports teams or athletes influence merchandise sales. Fans often form strong emotional ties to the players or teams they enjoy, and these ties can greatly influence how they decide what to buy. The study examines the impact of emotions such as loyalty, pride, and enthusiasm on fans' inclination to purchase merchandise associated with their favourite teams by exploring the psychological factors that drive these emotional attachments. It looks at several things, such as how well the team performs, how much fans relate to the players, and how fan culture shapes people's behaviour. The results show that developing an emotional connection not only boosts sales but also helps supporters feel they belong and identify with the team. Sports marketers may improve their strategy, get fans more involved, and make their products better by learning more about the emotional side of fandom. Ultimately, this study's results underscore the significant role that emotional connections play in shaping economic success in the sports industry.

Keywords: Fan Emotions; Sports Merchandise Purchases; Strong Emotional Bonds; Emotional Connections; Driving Economic Outcomes; Team Success; Personal Identification; Emotional Dynamics.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the sports industry has experienced remarkable growth, propelled by an intense fan culture and a heightened connection between fans and their favourite teams or athletes. This connection often transcends mere viewership, evolving into deep emotional attachments that influence various aspects of fans' lives. Fans' emotional bonds to teams or individual athletes play a crucial role in shaping their engagement levels, influencing their behaviours, and driving merchandise purchases. Understanding the psychological drivers of these emotional connections can provide valuable insights into how fans' attachment to sports entities influences their purchasing behaviour. Consequently, the sports merchandise market benefits from these emotions, turning fandom into tangible economic outcomes. In light of these trends, this study investigates how fan emotions towards teams and athletes influence their purchasing behaviour, particularly in the context of merchandise sales. The purchase of sports merchandise extends beyond a simple transaction. For many fans, it represents their loyalty, pride, and identification

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with a team or an athlete. Wearing a team's jersey, displaying its colours, or supporting a particular athlete through merchandise can symbolise a fan's commitment and serve as an extension of their personal identity.

This study examines the various psychological and behavioural drivers that lead fans to invest in team-related merchandise. By understanding these drivers, sports marketers can effectively design strategies that align with fans' emotional inclinations, fostering a deeper engagement with their audience. Despite the growing importance of fan emotions in shaping consumer behaviour in sports, a gap exists in understanding the precise mechanisms through which emotions influence merchandise purchases. The emotional dynamics of fandom are complex, involving factors such as team success, personal identification with athletes, cultural identity, and community engagement. These dynamics go beyond the traditional factors influencing consumer behaviour, demanding a more nuanced understanding of sports-specific motivations. Existing research on consumer behaviour in sports often focuses on fan loyalty and engagement but lacks a detailed exploration of the psychological processes underlying fans' purchasing decisions. This study addresses this research gap by focusing specifically on the emotional aspects of fandom and how they translate into economic outcomes within the sports industry. The connection between sports fans and their favourite teams or athletes is more than just a casual interest; it is a deep emotional bond that often transcends typical consumer behaviour. This emotional attachment has become a powerful force in shaping purchasing decisions, particularly for merchandise.

Fans often view merchandise as a symbol of loyalty, identity, and pride, representing not just a transaction but a deeper commitment to the teams and athletes they support. Understanding how these emotions influence merchandise purchases is crucial for sports marketers looking to enhance fan engagement and optimise merchandise sales. The role of emotions in consumer behaviour has been well documented across various fields, but the intersection of fan emotions and sports merchandise purchases has received less attention. Sports fandom is unique because it combines a personal identity with a collective social experience, creating a distinct set of motivations for purchasing team-related products. As the sports industry continues to grow and expand globally, there is an increasing need to understand how these emotional dynamics influence purchasing decisions. This research explores the psychological and emotional drivers behind fans' decisions to purchase merchandise, aiming to provide insights into how sports organisations can leverage these emotions to enhance fan engagement and drive sales. Existing research on fan behaviour has largely focused on broad themes of loyalty, identification, and engagement, but has not sufficiently addressed how these emotional factors specifically drive merchandise purchases. While studies such as those by Chun and Sagas [2], Yellowbrick [6] examine fan identification and engagement, there is a lack of empirical evidence on how these emotional bonds translate into tangible consumer behaviour, particularly in the context of merchandise purchases.

Furthermore, studies examining the sense of community within fan groups have primarily focused on the social and emotional benefits of group affiliation [5]. Yet, there is limited research on how this sense of belonging influences consumer decisions, such as merchandise purchases. The emotional connection fostered within fan communities is a key variable in this research, and more work is needed to explore how fan interactions, both online and offline, affect purchasing behaviour. In addition, although team success has been shown to influence fan pride and attachment, there is a lack of studies examining how this success, when coupled with emotional attachment, can directly influence merchandise purchasing [3]. Most studies have examined team success and fan loyalty independently, but the dynamics between these elements and their joint effects on purchasing decisions remain unexplored. Moreover, the role of external factors, such as marketing campaigns, demographic influences, and socio-cultural factors, has not been adequately addressed. Understanding how these factors moderate the relationship between fan emotions and purchasing behaviour will be crucial for creating targeted marketing strategies [1].

Previous studies have largely focused on fan loyalty and the impact of brand attachment in other contexts. Still, the role of emotional attachment in driving actual consumer behaviour, particularly in sports merchandise, needs further investigation [4]. Another critical issue is understanding how fan identity and community influence purchasing behaviour. While previous research has highlighted the importance of fan identity, the impact of collective emotional experiences within fan communities on merchandise purchases has received limited attention [2]. This gap in the literature makes it difficult for sports marketers to tailor their merchandise strategies effectively. Furthermore, the influence of team success and performance on fan emotions and subsequent purchasing behaviour has not been fully addressed in contemporary studies, despite its significant potential to shape consumer behaviour [3]. The research problem lies in the lack of a comprehensive understanding of how emotional connections between fans and sports teams or athletes drive merchandise sales. While there is significant research on fan loyalty, fan behaviour, and sports marketing strategies, the specific mechanisms by which emotions like loyalty, pride, and excitement influence merchandise purchases remain underexplored.

The key research questions guiding this study are:

- How do emotional attachments to teams and athletes influence fans' decisions to purchase merchandise?
- What are the psychological factors (e.g., pride, loyalty, excitement) that drive fans to buy merchandise?

- To what extent does fan identification with a team or athlete contribute to merchandise purchase intention?
- How do fan communities and team success shape the emotional connection to the team, and how does this impact merchandise purchasing behaviour?
- What role do external factors, such as promotional efforts or demographic characteristics, play in moderating the relationship between fan emotions and merchandise purchases?

The primary objective of this study is to explore how fans' emotions towards their favourite teams and athletes influence their intention and behaviour to purchase team-related merchandise. Specifically, the research will investigate the emotional factors, such as loyalty, pride, excitement, and identification, that drive these purchasing decisions. Additionally, the study aims to examine how fan communities and team success impact fan emotions and, subsequently, their merchandise purchases. By understanding these emotional drivers, sports marketers can design strategies that foster deeper emotional connections with fans and boost merchandise sales.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Emotional Attachment and Merchandise Purchase Intention

Emotional attachment is a significant driver of consumer behaviour, particularly in the sports industry, where fans form deep, enduring connections with teams and athletes. This attachment often goes beyond mere admiration, encompassing emotions such as loyalty, pride, and excitement. According to Lintumaki and Koll [3], these emotions are powerful motivators that significantly influence purchasing decisions, including the purchase of merchandise. Emotional attachment creates a psychological bond between the fan and the team or athlete, which translates into a desire to express that bond through tangible items such as apparel, memorabilia, and other merchandise. Merchandise becomes a way for fans to showcase their allegiance and pride. Azouz et al. [4] further elaborate on how emotions such as loyalty and passion influence consumer behaviour, indicating that emotional attachment is not only a motivator for single purchases but also a foundation for ongoing fan loyalty.

Fans who are emotionally connected to their favourite teams or athletes are more likely to remain loyal in the long term. This ongoing loyalty is critical for sports organisations, as it translates into sustained revenue through repeated merchandise purchases. Moreover, emotionally attached fans may also influence others' behaviour by encouraging them to show similar loyalty, thereby expanding the fan base and further driving merchandise sales. Given the strong emotional underpinnings of fan behaviour, sports organisations can benefit by fostering these attachments by emphasising personal connections, team history, and iconic players who resonate with fans on a deeper level. When fans see merchandise as a way to reinforce their connection to the team, they are more inclined to make purchases. Thus, emotional attachment plays a vital role in driving purchase intention for merchandise:

- **(H1):** Emotional attachment to a team or athlete positively influences merchandise purchase intention.

2.2. Fan Identification and Merchandise Purchase Intention

Fan identification, which refers to the extent to which fans see themselves as part of the team, is a powerful determinant of consumer behaviour in sports. Fans with strong identification tend to perceive the team's successes and failures as their own, which intensifies their support and loyalty. Yellowbrick [6] explains that fan identification can lead to behaviours that reflect this deep sense of belonging, such as purchasing team merchandise to publicly display their support. For these fans, merchandise serves as a form of self-expression, allowing them to visibly align with the team's identity and values. This behaviour aligns with the Social Identity Theory proposed by Tajfel and Turner [12], which suggests that individuals derive self-esteem and a sense of belonging from their group affiliations. In the context of sports, fans often view their relationship with a team as part of their social identity, leading them to invest in team merchandise to reinforce that identity.

When fans wear team apparel, they feel a sense of pride and unity with fellow fans, strengthening their identification with the team. This phenomenon not only enhances their personal satisfaction but also encourages others to adopt similar behaviours, as they witness the visible expressions of support within the fan community. According to Kwon et al. [7], fan identification directly impacts consumer spending. Fans who identify strongly with a team are more likely to invest in merchandise, as it reflects their commitment to the team. Merchandise allows fans to symbolise their relationship with the team, making the act of purchasing meaningful. Consequently, fan identification is closely linked to merchandise purchase intention, as fans seek ways to reinforce their loyalty and connect with the team on a personal level:

- **(H2):** Fan identification with a team or athlete positively influences merchandise purchase intention.

2.3. Team Success and Merchandise Purchase Intention

Team success is another influential factor in shaping purchase intention for merchandise. When a team performs well, it often evokes pride and excitement among fans, leading to increased purchase intentions. Lintumaki and Koll [3] argue that team success acts as a powerful emotional trigger, inspiring fans to celebrate victories by purchasing team-related products. Fans are more likely to buy merchandise after a successful season or a significant victory, as it serves as a memento of the team's achievements and a way to celebrate their own association with that success. Sharma et al. [1] introduce the concept of the "halo effect," wherein a winning season enhances fans' perceptions of the team, creating a positive aura that encourages supportive behaviours, including merchandise purchases. When fans feel proud of their team's accomplishments, they are more inclined to express that pride tangibly by buying products that showcase their loyalty. Team success not only strengthens existing fans' loyalty but also attracts new fans who may have been less involved previously, thereby broadening the potential customer base for merchandise sales. This connection between team success and merchandise purchase intention underscores the importance of performance in driving fan engagement. A successful season can boost fans' emotional investment in the team, leading to greater support and a stronger inclination to purchase merchandise. Thus, team success catalyses fan behaviour, transforming positive emotions into concrete actions that benefit both the team and the organisation:

- **(H3):** Team success positively influences merchandise purchase intention.

2.4. Sense of Community and Merchandise Purchase Intention

A fan's sense of community is a critical element that shapes their behaviour and reinforces loyalty. For many fans, being part of a fan community offers a sense of belonging and social connection. Kim and Kim [5] suggest that fans who feel connected to a community of supporters are more likely to participate in activities that reinforce their connection, such as purchasing team merchandise. Merchandise allows fans to publicly display their community membership, affirming their status as dedicated supporters and enabling them to bond with other fans who share their passion. Research on fan culture by Widita [11] highlights the role of community in enhancing emotional attachment. Fans who identify strongly with a team community often feel compelled to express their support by purchasing team-related products, as it symbolises their connection to the larger fan base. This behaviour strengthens the emotional bonds between fans and the team, creating a positive feedback loop in which community involvement leads to increased merchandise purchases, which, in turn, reinforce fans' sense of belonging. The sense of community also has a social influence aspect. Fans who see others buying merchandise are more likely to follow suit, as they wish to affirm their place within the community. For sports organisations, fostering a strong sense of community can be an effective strategy for driving merchandise sales, as fans who feel connected are more likely to express that connection through purchases. Thus, the sense of community is a powerful motivator for fans, turning their emotional attachment into tangible actions that benefit both the fan base and the organisation:

- **(H4):** Sense of community within the fan base positively influences merchandise purchase intention.

2.5. Fan Loyalty Between Emotional Attachment and Merchandise Purchase Intention

Fan loyalty plays a critical role as a mediator between emotional attachment and purchase intention for merchandise. Loyal fans develop a commitment to the team that extends beyond mere support, reflecting a deeper sense of identification and dedication. Ghorbanzadeh and Rahehagh [8] argue that fans who form strong emotional attachments are more likely to exhibit loyalty, which directly influences their purchasing behaviours. Loyal fans not only support the team through game attendance and viewership but also demonstrate their commitment through merchandise purchases, often making repeat purchases to reaffirm their loyalty. Loyalty is closely associated with a fan's identity, in which purchasing merchandise becomes a commitment to the team. Keller [10] suggests that loyal fans derive emotional satisfaction from merchandise ownership, as it reinforces their identity as devoted supporters.

This emotional benefit amplifies their likelihood of making future purchases, as each purchase becomes a meaningful reminder of their connection to the team. Loyalty acts as a bridge between emotional attachment and purchasing behaviour, transforming abstract feelings of attachment into concrete actions that reflect fans' dedication. Goh et al. [9] also support this view, indicating that loyal fans experience greater emotional benefits from merchandise ownership, which increases the likelihood of repeat purchases. As fans continue to buy merchandise, their loyalty deepens, creating a cycle where loyalty and purchase behaviour reinforce each other. This cyclical relationship suggests that loyalty is not only a consequence of emotional attachment but also a driver of sustained purchasing behaviour. Sports organisations can leverage fan loyalty by offering exclusive merchandise, loyalty rewards, and other incentives that encourage fans to continue supporting the team through purchases:

- **(H5):** Fan Loyalty Mediates the Relationship Between Emotional Attachment and Merchandise Purchase Intention (Figure 1).

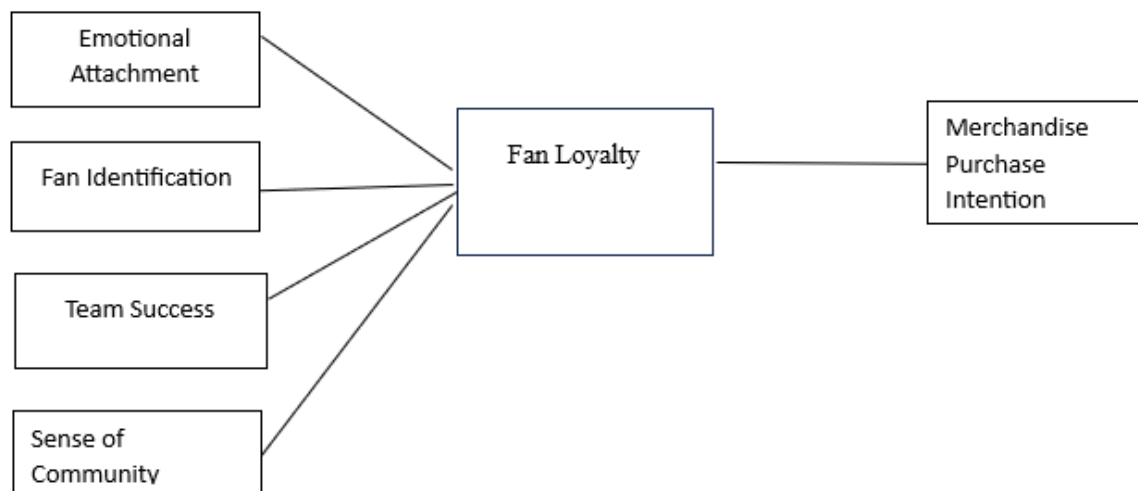


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of factors influencing fan loyalty and merchandise purchase intention

3. Research Methodology

To investigate the impact of emotional factors on merchandise purchase intention among sports fans, this study focuses on key constructs including emotional attachment, fan identification, team success, sense of community, and fan loyalty. These constructs are considered essential for understanding the motivations behind fans' purchasing behaviours, particularly for merchandise associated with teams or athletes. The research aims to examine how these emotional and community-based elements influence fans' purchasing intentions. This study uses a quantitative survey to examine the influence of emotional and community-related factors on sports fans' intentions to purchase merchandise. Quantitative methods were chosen for their ability to generate statistically significant and generalizable results, enabling a clear understanding of relationships among variables. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data, containing measures specifically designed to capture respondents' emotional attachment, fan identification, perceptions of team success, sense of community, and loyalty toward a chosen sports team or athlete. For this study, a well-recognised sports brand was chosen as a stimulus to encourage respondents to relate their experiences and attitudes in an authentic and meaningful way. Using a known brand in sports helps standardise responses across participants, as it reduces the variability that might arise if respondents focus on teams or athletes with whom they have vastly different levels of familiarity. Respondents were asked to select a team or athlete with whom they felt a strong emotional connection and were guided to complete the questionnaire based on their attachment to that choice.

A nonprobability sampling approach was employed in the current study, specifically a purposive sampling method. Non-probability sampling allows the researcher to make practical decisions about respondent selection based on judgment rather than random sampling, which is particularly useful when targeting specific population groups. Here, the targeted group consists of sports fans from diverse socio-demographic backgrounds who are interested in and purchase merchandise related to their favourite teams or athletes. The study gathered responses from 350 participants who met the criteria of being 18 years of age or older and self-identified as sports fans. This purposive approach ensured that participants had relevant experiences and perspectives on the constructs being studied. By selecting individuals who are actively engaged in sports fandom, the study could directly target those most likely to participate in merchandise purchasing behaviours. This sample included a balanced mix of college students, corporate professionals, government employees, self-employed individuals, and homemakers. A diverse sample provides broader insights into the impact of emotional and communal factors on merchandise purchasing decisions across various demographic groups. Data were collected through an online survey platform to increase accessibility and reach a geographically diverse audience.

The online distribution method also improved response efficiency and enabled greater control over data management. Following survey distribution, incomplete responses were excluded from analysis, leaving 350 fully completed surveys for the final study. For the data analysis phase, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using SMART-PLS software was selected. SEM was deemed suitable for this study due to its capability to handle complex variable relationships and assess latent constructs that are not directly observable, such as emotional attachment and fan loyalty. This technique allows for testing both direct and indirect relationships among variables, which is critical for understanding the nuanced ways in which these emotional factors might influence purchasing behaviours. The analysis process began by testing discriminant validity using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. This initial step was critical to ensure that each construct was distinct and measured unique aspects of the phenomenon.

under investigation. Discriminant validity also confirms that the constructs are not overly correlated, thereby enhancing the reliability of the findings and ensuring that each factor contributes independently to understanding merchandise purchasing intentions. Once discriminant validity was established, the structural model was assessed to test the relationships between the constructs. The model aimed to evaluate the impact of emotional attachment, fan identification, team success, sense of community, and fan loyalty on merchandise purchase intention. The SEM approach provided insights into both the strength and significance of these relationships, allowing the study to pinpoint which factors were most influential in driving merchandise purchases.

4. Results

This study seeks to determine how emotional attachment, fan identification, team success, sense of community, and fan loyalty affect sports fans' intentions to purchase merchandise. The sample included 350 sports fans from diverse socio-demographic backgrounds, comprising students, professionals, homemakers, and sports enthusiasts aged 18 or older. An overview of the demographic characteristics revealed that 58% of respondents were male, and 42% were female. The majority of respondents, approximately 70%, were aged 18 to 35, and 64% had attained a university degree. Additionally, most respondents (around 45%) reported middle-income levels. Table 1 presents the examination of construct validity and reliability for the study and provides an overview of the assessment approach's effectiveness. Composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha were employed to assess the dependability of each construct. Scores are generated on a scale of 0 to 1, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.7 considered to indicate strong internal consistency, while values in the range of 0.5 to 0.7 are considered intermediate. Factor analysis was used to assess convergent validity, confirming that questionnaire responses reliably support the research findings. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) index was utilised in a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to assess convergent validity, with inter-item correlations measured on a Likert scale.

Table 1: Construct validity and reliability

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Emotional Attachment	0.890	0.780	0.570
Fan Identification	0.835	0.850	0.545
Team Success	0.870	0.900	0.562
Sense of Community	0.812	0.760	0.730
Fan Loyalty	0.848	0.870	0.702
Merchandise Purchase Intention	0.860	0.800	0.560

Cronbach's alpha values across constructs exceed 0.5, indicating that the evaluated items are sufficiently dependable to support the study. This degree of reliability is deemed appropriate for validating the constructs within the acceptable range, which includes Emotional Attachment (CA = 0.890, CR = 0.780, AVE = 0.570), Fan Identification (CA = 0.835, CR = 0.850, AVE = 0.545), Team Success (CA = 0.870, CR = 0.900, AVE = 0.562), Sense of Community (CA = 0.812, CR = 0.760, AVE = 0.730), Fan Loyalty (CA = 0.848, CR = 0.870, AVE = 0.702), and Merchandise Purchase Intention (CA = 0.860, CR = 0.800, AVE = 0.560). While the Sense of Community construct had reliability values slightly below 0.7, these indicators are considered valid for making inferences, as they are not excessively low. For convergent validity, each item loading on a latent construct must exceed 0.5 and be statistically significant (p-value < 0.05), demonstrating satisfactory convergent validity for the study.

Table 2: Discriminant validity - Fornell-Larcker criterion

Construct	EA	FI	TS	SC	FL	MPI
Emotional Attachment	0.876					
Fan Identification	0.471	0.814				
Team Success	0.464	0.794	0.745			
Sense of Community	0.557	0.741	0.712	0.789		
Fan Loyalty	0.512	0.654	0.678	0.630	0.732	
Merchandise Purchase Intention	0.423	0.512	0.541	0.514	0.592	0.764

Among the six latent constructs, discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. According to this criterion, the off-diagonal coefficients should be less than the square roots of the Average Variance Extracted (AVEs). The highest square root of AVE in this study is 0.876. Furthermore, the correlation ratios should be less than 0.90. As shown in Table 2, each construct meets the requirements for discriminant validity.

Table 3: Path coefficient

Predictor Variable	Path Coefficient (β)
Emotional Attachment -> Fan Loyalty	0.221
Emotional Attachment -> Fan Identification	0.215
Emotional Attachment -> Merchandise Purchase Intention	0.462
Fan Identification -> Fan Loyalty	0.410
Team Success -> Fan Loyalty	0.494
Sense of Community -> Fan Loyalty	0.235
Fan Loyalty -> Merchandise Purchase Intention	0.424

The study examines the statistically significant associations between emotional attachment, fan identification, team success, sense of community, fan loyalty, and merchandise purchase intention using path coefficients (Table 3). The results indicate that a positive emotional attachment to a team or athlete increases the likelihood of fan loyalty and merchandise purchases. The path coefficients indicate that emotional attachment, team success, and sense of community have a statistically significant impact on fan loyalty, with coefficients exceeding 0.25. Additionally, the findings highlight that emotional attachment outcomes are essential when fan loyalty is present. Emotional attachment, fan identification, and team success are shown to significantly impact fan loyalty, and fan loyalty itself has a direct, statistically significant effect on merchandise purchase intention, with a path coefficient of 0.424. Thus, hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6, and H7 are supported. Each path coefficient (β) is positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

5. Discussion

This study contributes significantly to understanding how emotional attachment and fan loyalty affect sports fans' purchase intentions for merchandise. The findings reveal that the psychological factors driving fan loyalty, such as emotional attachment, team success, and sense of community, are instrumental in motivating fans to purchase merchandise. The research also emphasises the impact of these emotional bonds on consumer behaviour, aligning with previous studies that underscore the importance of fan identification and loyalty in fostering deeper engagement with sports brands and teams. By empirically validating the proposed hypotheses, this study provides meaningful insights into sports marketing, particularly in the Indian market context, where emotional attachment and loyalty play crucial roles in consumer behaviour. Furthermore, this study is unique in integrating an empirical model that examines how emotional attachment and fan loyalty interact to influence merchandise purchases. This integrated model, which combines constructs such as fan identification, brand experience, and loyalty, offers a robust framework for examining how fan loyalty influences purchasing behaviours.

The model incorporates both established and new constructs, providing a comprehensive platform for examining how emotional attachment drives fan behaviour in a sports marketing context. This approach aligns with previous research, such as Sharma et al. [1] study, which highlighted the significance of these variables in forming brand loyalty among fans. By testing these constructs in the Indian sports market, this study presents a well-rounded framework for understanding the impact of fan emotions on purchase intentions. Testing the hypothesised relationships in this specific sports marketing context supports a broader understanding of the effects of emotional attachment and loyalty. This study's findings underscore the importance of emotional attachment as an achievable outcome of fan-brand interaction. The marketing literature widely recognises that fan identification strengthens the bond between fans and brands, making it an essential focus for sports marketers. Given the limited research on the interrelationships among fan emotions, brand loyalty, and purchasing behaviour in sports marketing, this model provides a valuable foundation for future research and advanced studies.

6. Conclusion

Emotional attachment to sports teams is a powerful factor influencing fan loyalty, and this study sheds light on its significance within the sports marketing context. This study highlights how fan loyalty can be nurtured through consistent engagement, positive team image, and a strong sense of community. Emotional attachment to a team or athlete often leads to greater loyalty, increasing fans' purchase intentions for merchandise. The constructs of fan identification, loyalty, and emotional attachment are extensively discussed across consumer behaviour and sports marketing literature. Yet, few studies have specifically examined how these factors interact within the context of purchase intentions for merchandise. This study is among the first to examine the influence of emotional attachment on fan loyalty and purchasing behaviour in the Indian sports industry. The study's findings hold valuable implications for both academia and industry practitioners. It contributes to the existing body of knowledge by examining less-explored constructs, thereby providing deeper insights into how emotional attachment drives fan loyalty and purchasing behaviour. By empirically validating the relationships among emotional attachment, loyalty, and merchandise purchases, this study suggests that enhancing fan identification can yield substantial loyalty gains in sports marketing.

For sports marketers, the study's results indicate the importance of fostering emotional connections between fans and teams to improve loyalty and boost merchandise sales. Marketers should prioritise engaging fans through initiatives that foster emotional attachment, such as community-building activities, loyalty programs, and memorable fan experiences. A strong focus on emotional attachment, team identification, and a sense of community can give sports teams a competitive edge, especially within highly competitive markets like India. This study shows that emotional attachment influences fan loyalty and purchase intentions for merchandise, offering sports marketers actionable insights to effectively harness fan loyalty. As sports teams face increasing competition for fans' attention, implementing strategies that foster emotional bonds can significantly enhance fan loyalty and purchasing behaviour. Additionally, this research opens new avenues for exploration, as current studies focus primarily on emotional attachment and fan loyalty in sports marketing. Future research could replicate this model across different cultural contexts, with larger sample sizes and alternative methodologies, to further validate the findings.

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Ethics and Consent Statement: This research was conducted in compliance with ethical standards and established guidelines. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, and their confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained.

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