

Master Thesis

Economics & Business

Marketing

Something needs to change

A research how online misconduct by football supporters impacts the perception of a football club.

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1. Thesis introduction

Sport influences the lives of millions of fans each day, and an increasing number of individuals are becoming interested in and involved in sports (Wann, 2001). As a result, over the last two decades, social scientists have become increasingly interested in learning more about the psychology of sports fans. A fan is described as someone who thinks about, talks about, and is interested in sports even when not watching, reading, or listening to an account of a specific sporting event (Norris & Wann, 2014). Furthermore, a *sports fan* is defined as someone consistent, dedicated, and loyal, with the devotion taking three forms (Stewart & Smith, 2003):

1. Cognitive as the consumer gains knowledge of the sport and team.
2. Attitudinal, as the consumer has a strong belief in the team and sport.
3. Behavioural, as the consumer demonstrates his/her devotion through tangible acts such as ticket or merchandise purchases.

In recent years, Business commentators, consultants, and academics have been paying more attention to sport, and particularly football. In analysing sports franchises, these stakeholders have primarily employed commercial terminology. Fans are referred to as customers, and football clubs are referred to as brands by these stakeholders (Tapp, 2003). Alan Tapp (2003) found that Football supporters have been recognized as having various loyalty behaviours and attitudes, which are highly comparable to loyalty patterns seen in the grocery products sector. However, the underlying explanatory factors are significantly different from those seen in the mainstream industry.

The rise in the use of the internet, mainly social media, has enabled to build online communities. Williams & Cothrel (2000) define online communities as groups of people with shared interests who engage in many-to-many online interactions. Due to the increasing popularity of online communities on social media, many football-related communities are now represented online.

Fans bring benefits to the sport, the club, and the players in many ways. However, there is also a downside to fans' commitment—namely, the fans' misconduct. *Misconduct* is defined as unacceptable

or improper behaviour by a person or a group. Physical (e.g., riots, violence, vandalism) and verbal (e.g., racism, hurtful slogan) misconduct of supporters is a timeless phenomenon in sport and mainly in football. The misbehaviour of fans causes football clubs to be negatively affected in terms of financial consequences and brand image. Therefore, football associations, football clubs, and governments are all working hard to punish these hooligans.

Since football fans are not allowed in stadiums worldwide due to the corona pandemic, the number of physical abuses by hooligans has naturally decreased. While less physical misconduct has occurred, more online misconduct by supporters has been noted. Recent news reports indicated that professional footballers Reece James (Chelsea F.C.), Anthony Martial (Manchester United), and Axel Tuanzebe (Manchester United) have all been racially harassed on Instagram recently after losing a football match. The comment section underneath Tuanzebe's Instagram post was flooded with monkey emojis and other racist symbols (ESPN, 2021). Chelsea's defender, Reece James, received multiple racist DM's (Direct Messages) in his Instagram inbox. In these DMs, he was racially insulted about his black complexion (Premier League, 2021). Chelsea FC directly responded with the statement 'Something needs to change' on their Instagram page, referring to the racist insults of football players online. People at the football club were disgusted with the racist abuse Reece James received on social media. Chelsea mentioned in the statement, 'In sport, as in wider society, we must create a social media environment where hateful and discriminatory actions are as unacceptable online as they would be on the streets' (Chelsea FC, 2021).

Figure 1: Reece James' Tweet after being racially harassed on social media



Reece James 
@reecejames_24

No room for RACISM!! 

11:37 PM · Jan 29, 2021

 182.1K  2.2K  Copy link to Tweet

According to the British newspaper, The Guardian, Instagram vows to shut Instagram accounts after the recent racist abuse that footballers received on their platform (The Guardian, 2021). Besides the permanent block of the account, Facebook, which is Instagram's parent company, will probably cooperate with the UK law enforcement authorities on hate speech. The cooperation with the UK law enforcement authorities will also include the sharing of personal information in order to punish the names of people who post this racist abuse.

In the 2013/2014 football season, 50% of all complaints about football-related hate crimes reported to Kick It Out concerned social media abuse (Brosnan, 2015). Kick It Out is a company that fights against all forms of discrimination. People can report through this website if they notice that someone is being discriminated. In addition, the organization is funded by several English football associations such as Premier League, The FA & EFL. The company has done research concerning football to understand discrimination incidents across the game better. This research has shown that 71% of the respondents mentioned that they had witnessed racist comments directed at a footballer on social media. Additionally, 51% of the participants have also witnessed racism directed at fans of a different team than theirs on social media (Kick It Out, 2020).

Corporate commentators, consultants, and academics are increasingly interested in football. These stakeholders note that there are multiple commercial opportunities at football clubs. Academics define fans as customers and refer to football clubs as brands (Tapp, 2003). In addition to stakeholders, football clubs also must deal with football fans affiliated with the club. Football fans play an essential role in the appearance of the football club (Beccarini & Ferrand, 2007). With reports of online misconduct by football fans towards professional players becoming increasingly negative in the news, and data showing that more than half of all reports of fan misconduct occur online, the question arises as to whether this online misbehaviour by supporters has any impact on a football club's image.

For this thesis, I designed a Qualtrics survey to examine the effect of online misconduct on the perception of a football club. To test this effect, I created survey questions that examine football fans'

attitudes toward online misconduct. In addition, I made survey questions to determine what perception participants have of the club and their fans. Respondents must meet the requirement of watching Dutch football at least once a week. Besides that, within this research the focus had been put on the two best-known and most popular football clubs (Ajax Amsterdam & Feyenoord Rotterdam) as an example, to ensure that respondents are at least familiar with the clubs and their fans and can share their honest perceptions about them. As a result, the main pillars of this research are:

- The attitude of respondents toward the fans of a specific football club (fan perception)
- The attitude of respondents toward a specific football club (club perception)
- The attitude of respondents toward online misconduct of football fans in general (online misconduct)

The findings of this thesis contribute to the understanding of football fans' attitudes towards online misconduct by football fans. Because this phenomenon of online misbehaviour of football fans has occurred in the last decade, little academic literature has shed light on this relevant topic. The study may be relevant to football clubs as it indicates whether a negative attitude towards online misconduct affects a football club's brand perception. If it turns out that this misconduct has a negative impact, this may be a reason for clubs to counter this behaviour to prevent the brand image from being damaged.

This research concludes that football supporters' attitudes regarding online misconduct have no significant impact on the brand perceptions of the football clubs Ajax Amsterdam and Feyenoord Rotterdam. However, the results have shown that negative perceptions toward the fans of Ajax & Feyenoord do significantly affect the attitude toward online misconduct of football fans. In addition to this study, future research could test the different types of online misconduct of fans and their impact on the brand image of football clubs. It may also be possible to examine the differences between offline and online misconduct of football fans.

2. Literature review

This chapter discusses previously published academic literature. The main subject for this thesis, 'online misconduct of football supporters' is related to several important topics like (online) word-of-mouth, sports marketing, brand perception, and brand misconduct.

Word-of-mouth

Arndt (1967) described word-of-mouth communication as oral person-to-person communication about a brand, a product, or a service between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial. Arndt (1967) noted that positive word of mouth enhanced the likelihood of purchase, while negative word-of-mouth decreased the likelihood. David Godes (2004) explained that there are at least three significant challenges associated with measuring word-of-mouth. The first challenge has to do with gathering data. Because information exchange is in private conversations, it is difficult to observe those conversations. Secondly, it is difficult to determine which aspect of these conversations should be measured, for instance, which of the transformations within a conversation are meaningful and managerially useful. The fact that word-of-mouth is not exogenous poses the third issue.

The online communication form of word-of-mouth is called electronic word-of-mouth. Litvin et al. (2007) defined electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) as all informal communications sent to customers using internet-based technologies about the use or qualities of certain goods and services or their sellers. A study by Huete-Alcocer (2017) described the difference between word-of-mouth and electronic word-of-mouth and what can be concluded from this. Results have shown that electronic word-of-mouth spreads much faster than word-of-mouth. Cheung and Lee (2012) described that Traditional word-of-mouth communications are less persistent and accessible than electronic word-of-mouth conversations. The majority of text-based content on the internet is archived and thus, in many cases, remains available indefinitely, at least in theory. According to Jalilvand & Samiei (2012), electronic word-of-mouth is one of the most potent factors influencing brand impression in consumer markets.

Electronic word-of-mouth communication can occur in a variety of situations. Consumers can publish their opinions, comments, and product reviews on weblogs, discussion forums, review websites, retail websites, newsgroups, and social media (Christy M.K. Cheung, 2012).

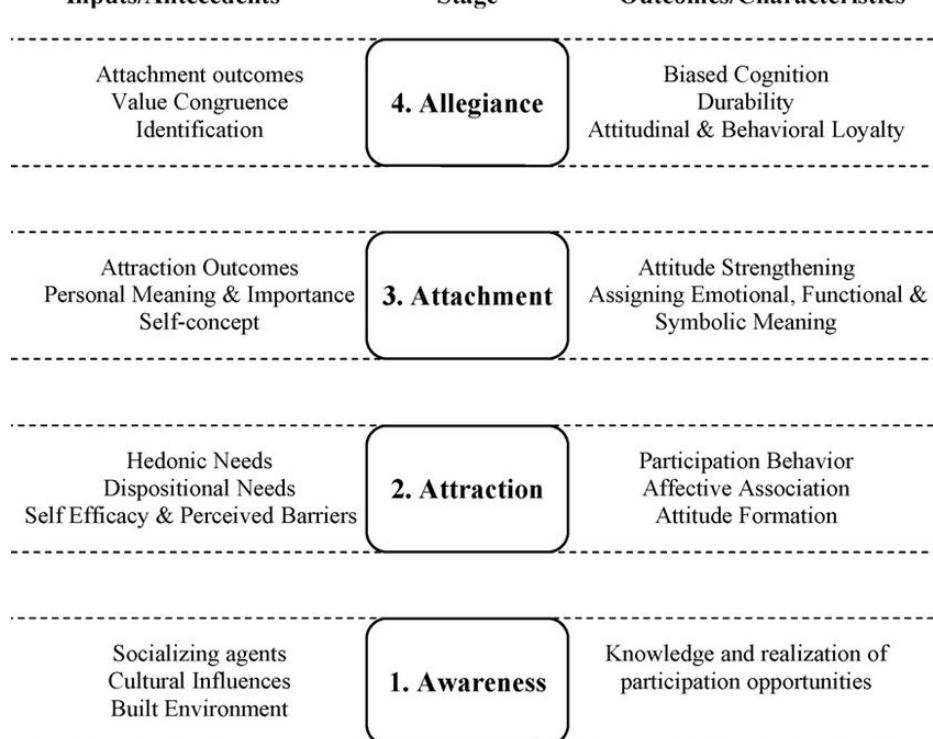
According to Bakker et al. (2016), word-of-mouth valence with purchase intentions is exacerbated when the conversation occurs offline, whereas offline tend to be more strongly associated with word-of-mouth retransmission intentions regardless of the conversation valence. Compared with the neutral brand sentiment, unfavourable, mixed, and positive sentiments increased intentions to retransmit the word-of-mouth message. Whereas positive word-of-mouth has the most significant absolute effect for retransmission intentions, negative word of mouth has the most significant absolute effect for purchase intentions. Mixed word-of-mouth is associated with lower purchase intentions, but greater retransmit the word-of-mouth conversations. In addition, the strength of the social tie in a word-of-mouth conversation appears to play a more prominent role in purchase intention than it does in retransmission intentions.

Consumers' electronic word-of-mouth intention is highly related to three antecedents, according to Cheung and Lee (2012): reputation, sense of belonging, and satisfaction of assisting. According to Lovett et al. (2013), three drivers (social, emotional, and functional) cause consumers to spread word-of-mouth on brands. The findings revealed that while social and functional drivers are most significant for online word-of-mouth, emotional drivers are critical for traditional word-of-mouth. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) explain that consumers' desire for social interaction, economic incentives, concern for other consumers, and the potential to enhance their self-worth are the main factors leading to electronic word-of-mouth. In addition, electronic word-of-mouth providers can be grouped based on what motivates their behaviour, suggesting that companies may need to develop different strategies to encourage electronic word-of-mouth among their users.

Sport marketing

It is essential to know why fans want to be connected to a club or sports team for this thesis. Funk and James (2001) developed the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM). The PCM (as shown in figure 2) specifies the general parameters in which a relationship between an individual, sport, team, or athlete is mediated. The model describes and differentiates four levels (Awareness, Attraction, Attachment, and allegiance) that sports spectators and fans may form with specific sports and teams. *Awareness* denotes the first time an individual learns that certain sports or teams exist but does not have a specific preference. The second level, *attraction*, indicates when an individual acknowledges preferring a specific sport or team-based upon various demographic-based and social-psychological motives. *Attachment*, a psychological connection, begins to arise on the third level, creating various degrees of association between the individual and the sports team. Attachment expresses the degree or strength of association based on the perceived importance of psychological and physical features associated with a sport or sports team. On the final level, *allegiance*, the individual has become a loyal fan to a sport, a team, or a specific athlete—allegiance results in influential attitudes that produce reliable, durable, and consistent behaviour.

Figure 2: The Psychological Continuum Model (Daniel Funk, 2001)



Mullin (1983) defined that sport is different from other types of marketing because of the personal identification sport has with individuals. Guttman (1986) stated that sports marketing receives a high degree of attention due to the close involvement of consumers. People are motivated to be involved in the sport for various reasons, including aesthetic, economic, social, collective, and community.

According to Ratten (2015), many organizations use sports marketing to link sport to a more business orientation and position themselves for competitive advantages. It can include sport being the tactical focus of marketing communications or part of the marketing mix, sport-related promotions, and sports sponsorship. The customer-driven planning approach used by sports marketers can realize sales to organizations by enabling a lifetime relationship.

Mulcahy (2019) declared more about the strength of social channels in building fanbases and capitalizing on brand opportunities. Social channels like Twitter and Instagram present spaces where fan communities can be cultivated and maintained. These channels allow followers (online fans) to build a behind-the-scenes style that brings the fans closer to their idols. Often these live sessions are brand-sponsored. These activities create proximity between the sports stars and their fans and an opportunity for relevant brands to sponsor the action authentically. Sports teams can also leverage the social accounts of their top talent to boost engagement with their brand. Using the example of FC Barcelona, their Instagram following at 94 million is dwarfed by the 186m followers of its biggest star, Lionel Messi. However, using their biggest footballing star in the role of authentic influencer, the club can promote the team and their work. The examples mentioned are significant developments in sports marketing that offer many opportunities for players, teams, and sponsors. Since companies have realized that sports marketing is engaging, more and more money is getting involved.

Brand perception

Romanik and Sharp (2002) examined the relationship between brand image and customer loyalty. A question that often returns and is accurate to this research is: do customers who hold different perceptions show different levels of loyalty to a brand.

Brand perceptions can come from various sources, including word-of-mouth, consumer experiences, and marketing communications. Benefits, descriptive information, consumption situations, and evaluations of specific brand components might all be included. Any information encountered with the brand name can become linked to the brand name in memory and therefore become part of that brand's image.

Romaniuk and Sharp (2002) stated that there are three theories about how brand perceptions can influence buyer behaviour. The first theory showed that it is possible to identify attributes that have a stronger relationship, but it is difficult to isolate a specific attribute for each brand that would be ultimately better than any other attribute for that brand. Therefore, it can be concluded that some attributes seem more associated with loyalty than others. The results of the second theory prove that it is possible to identify a position with the most significant difference in loyalty for each brand, yet the difference between that position and others looks minimal. The results of the third theory prove that the mean loyalty at each level of brand salience was calculated and revealed a positive relationship between the number of attributes the brand was associated with and loyalty.

Hudson et al. (2016) investigated how individual and national differences mediate brand relationships and social media. Results indicated that social media use was positively related to brand relationship quality, and the effect was more pronounced with high anthropomorphism perceptions (the extent to which consumers associate human characteristics with brands). Cultural differences moderate these results. Yu and Yuan (2019) described that hedonic and utilitarian values influence brand experience, and brand experience directly influences brand trust, brand attachment, and customer equity drivers. Additionally, there is a positive relationship between trust and brand attachment. As a customer equity driver, brand equity has a positive effect on Customer Lifetime Value.

Brand misconduct

Huber et al. (2010) defined *brand misconduct* as any firm's action that disappoints consumers' brand expectations. The authors developed a model that explains the consumer-brand relationship and its impact on consumers' repurchase intentions. According to this model, actual and ideal self-congruence, functional congruence, brand relationship quality, and partner quality represent repurchase intention factors.

King (2014) emphasizes that corporate misconduct can result in a loss of reputation. Karpoff (2014) stated that corporate misconduct ensures that it will also lead to adverse reactions and reputational damage to the company.

Hsiao et al. (2014) examined how brand misconduct and advertising affect the relationship between a brand and its customers. Satisfaction and service quality plays a crucial role in determining a consumer's loyal behaviour, including advocacy intention and brand commitment. To improve the relationship between brands and customers, firms should consider satisfaction first. Additionally, this study confirmed that brand misconduct diminishes the relationship quality among customers and brands. The research findings support the perspective that e-service quality positively impacts customer satisfaction and obtains wide variance. The result also shows that the quality of e-service has a significant impact on customer satisfaction, even after brand misconduct. Brand misconduct may lead to negative brand awareness and might negatively affect firms' profits.

In contrast, the effect of continuance commitment on advocacy intention could increase. Moreover, marketing activities such as advertising have a moderating effect on the relationship between advocacy intention and brand misconduct. Customers exposed to advertisements will have higher advocacy intention than the non-advertising group. This may prove that marketing efforts after brand misconduct are adequate to maintain customer and brand relationships. Many firms have shown that a good marketing campaign can rebuild the consumer-brand relationship and even grow their revenue after brand misconduct.

Davies & Olmedo-Cifuentes (2016) have investigated the relative ability of individual misconduct to reduce trust and explain the differences in how individuals respond to corporate crises. Results show 'not telling the truth and 'bending the law' as the most salient and' acting irresponsible' and 'acting unfair' as the least salient in damaging trust. Loss of trust in an organization can cause the potential loss of a significant intangible asset for an organization.

Brand Image

Aaker (1991) defined *brand image* as a "set of brand associations that are anything associated in memory to a brand, generally in some meaningful way." Campbell (1998) defined it as the sum of consumers' perceptions and beliefs about a brand. Brand image is the biased shared image that consumers have of certain products, companies, or brands. The shared perceptions of a group of consumers thus form the brand image. Brand image can also be subdivided into desired image (how brands want to be seen) and actual image (how brands are seen). Brands and companies strive to bring the actual image as close as possible to the desired image. Keller (1993) described the brand image as the perceptual beliefs about a brand's attribute, benefit, and attitude associations, which are frequently seen as the basis for an overall evaluation of, or attitude toward, the brand.

Brand and negative publicity

Brands must cope with negative brand information, as consumers access a wide variety of brand information through traditional and new media, including television, radio, webcast, online news forums, and smartphone apps. Since the advent of the internet and the development of social media, the speed with which information spreads has increased considerably, especially for negative brand information (Ward & Ostrom, 2006). As a result, people are being exposed to negative brand information more frequently than they were even a decade ago (Eisingerich, Rubera, Seifert, & Bhardwaj, 2011). Negative publicity, in general, has a more severe effect than poor rumours or negative word-of-mouth because it is frequently confirmed and recognized by authorities (Kim, Carvalho, & Cooksey, 2007).

According to Bond & Kirshenbaum (1998), negative publicity is often more credible than rumours and negative word-of-mouth since it is frequently spread through major media channels. Dean (2004)

stated that negative publicity can be divided into two categories (performance-related and value-related negative publicity). Negative brand information about functional aspects of a brand (e.g., product quality) is performance-related negative publicity, whereas negative brand information about business practices or ethical issues is value-related negative publicity (e.g., child labour). According to new research, consumers may have a higher unfavourable reaction to negative brand information related to value (Pullig, Netemeyer, & Biswas, 2006).

3. Theoretical framework

This chapter explains which prior academic studies underlie this research. The hypothesis, variables, and a conceptual model are also displayed in this chapter.

According to a study by Richins (1983), the nature of the dissatisfaction problem, consumers' attributions of responsibility for the dissatisfaction, and perceptions of the complaint scenario are all linked to dissatisfaction responses. However, the findings do have some implications. Consumer responses are often low when minor dissatisfaction is experienced. Therefore, consumers rarely spread negative information about the affected product. Consumers prefer to complain when their dissatisfaction is large enough, regardless of other elements in the situation.

Bodet and Chanavat's (2009) research is focused on the relationship between the perceptions participants have of football players and the perceptions they have of football clubs. They found that the respondents may have a negative impression of the football club because they have negative perceptions of one of the players of that team. Bridgewater (2010) indicated that a football player is part of the football club's overall brand.

Mizerski's (1982) research has shown that negative brand information appears to have a more significant impact on consumers than good brand information. Besides that, Maheswaran and Meyers-levy (1990) suggested that negative brand information seems to attract more attention than good brand information because it is more "diagnostic or informative.". Furthermore, Ahluwalia and Gürhan-Canli (2000) have shown that negative brand information directly, significantly, and negatively affects customers' overall perceptions of the affected brand. In this thesis, the focus will be put on a similar case whereby the effect of the attitude of online misconduct of football supporters will be tested on the perceptions of a football club.

Due to the ongoing issues related to supporters' online misconduct on professional footballers, the following research question will be examined:

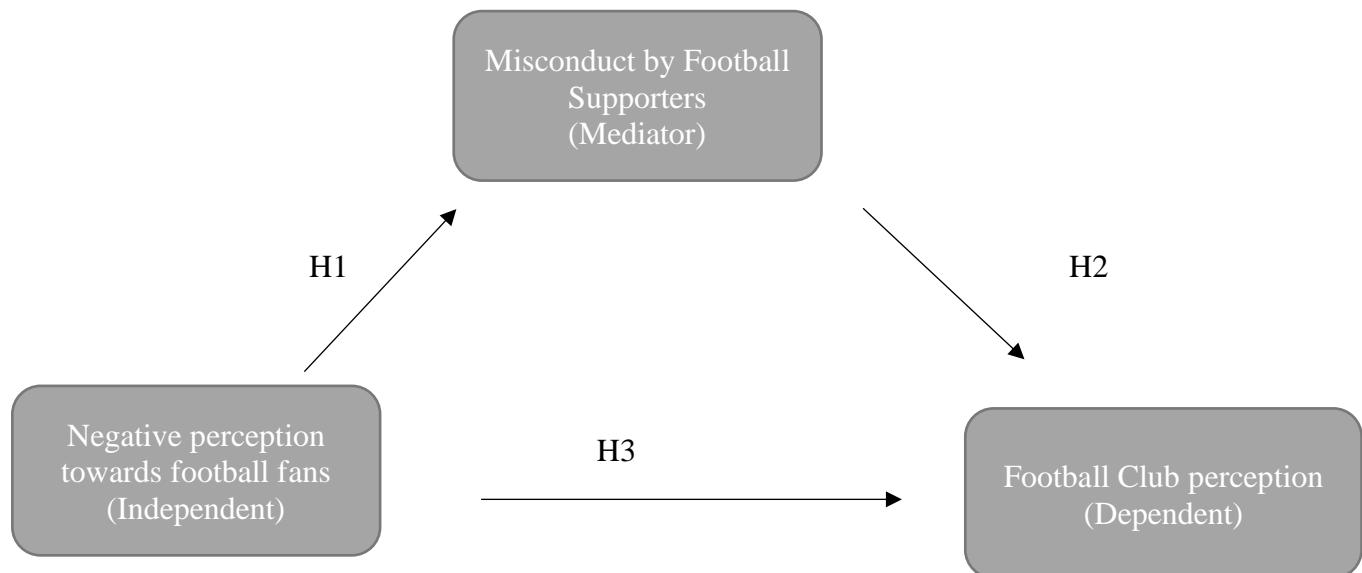
"What is the influence of online misconduct of football supporters on the associated brand perception of the football club?"

H1: There is a significant effect between the negative perceptions towards fans of a football club and the attitude towards supporter misconduct.

H2: There is a significant effect between the attitude towards the misconduct of football supporters and the perception of a football club.

H3: There is a significant effect on the negative perceptions towards fans of a particular club and the perceptions of a specific football club.

Figure 3: Conceptual Framework



4. Methodology

This chapter describes the research and measurement methods that were used to investigate the research question posed.

Research Objectives

This thesis had several research objectives, each supported by a specific hypothesis. The main goal of this thesis was to investigate the perception of online misconduct by football supporters on the perception of the football club. As mentioned earlier, online misconduct of football supporters is a new phenomenon that has been in the news more often lately.

The second objective was to examine the effect of fan perception on online misconduct by football supporters. The last objective was to examine the effect of fan perception on the perception of the football club. Negative fan perceptions can have negative consequences for the perception of the football club.

Research Method and Sampling

The Qualtrics program is used in preparing the survey. Qualtrics is suitable for building and administering both complex and straightforward questionnaires. There are also various options regarding the structure and type of questions. Moreover, the answers could easily be exported to statistical software programs where the data could be analysed. In order to be able to analyse and interpret the raw data, the statistical software program SPSS was used.

Several research methods could be used. Yin (1984) noted three different categories, namely: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory research. *Exploratory research* is defined as the initial research into a theoretical or hypothetical idea. This research method is used when a researcher observed something or has an idea and wants to understand more about it. *Descriptive research* is defined as attempts to explore and explain while providing additional information about the topic. In this research form, as much information as possible is gathered instead of working out models to

predict the outcome. Explanatory research examines the data closely both at a deep level and surface to explain the phenomena in the data (Yin, 1984).

The type of research I used to examine the effect of online misconduct of football supporters on the perception of the football club was quantitative research because this research examined the relationship between specific variables. Through a survey of 204 respondents, I conducted explanatory research. It is decided to employ a random sample procedure. Each responder had an equal chance of being chosen using this sampling method. Random respondents were contacted via LinkedIn, Facebook groups dedicated to football, and WhatsApp.

This research examines the influence of online misconduct of football supporters on the perception of certain Dutch football clubs. In order to gather relevant data, respondents needed to be familiar with Dutch football. According to a study by PwC (2021), more than 200,000 fans visit a stadium every week – at normal times. In addition, about 2 million people watch live Dutch football matches every week and are familiar with football.

Sampling Strategy

Collecting data from every single football fan in the population can be challenging. As a result, sampling can be highly beneficial. Sampling allows reducing the amount of data collected by narrowing down the entire population to sub-groups (Saunders, 2016). The group 'football fans who watch football at least once a week' has been chosen as the suitable sampling frame for this research. This group has been chosen since it has been the group with the most superior knowledge about Dutch football, the different Dutch clubs, and their fans. I have used the simple random sample technique. The term 'simple random sample' refers to the fact that every participant in the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample (Taherdoost, 2016).

Sample Size

As previously stated, the target audience for this study will be Dutch football fans who watch a football match at least once a week. According to a study by PwC, at least 2 million people watch

Dutch football every week. Therefore, an estimation has been made with the use of the online sample size calculator of Qualtrics. According to Saunders et al. (2016), most researchers work with a 95 percent confidence level. This confidence level will demonstrate how certain we can be about a given topic. After calculating the total population, 385 respondents will have to complete the survey.

Research Design

I gathered the information via an internet survey, which is a self-administered questionnaire. An internet survey has many advantages. One advantage of online survey research is that it takes advantage of the Internet's potential to connect people and groups that would be difficult, if not impossible, to reach through conventional means (Garton, 1999). A second benefit is that internet-based survey research may allow researchers to save time. As previously said, internet surveys enable a researcher to reach thousands of people with similar characteristics in a short period, even though they may be separated by large geographic distances (Yun, 2000).

There was a total of 20 questions in the survey. The entire survey is given in appendix 1. This study only includes surveys that have been entirely completed. Furthermore, the research was limited to respondents from the Netherlands, and another requirement was that respondents watch football at least once a week. These results would not be included in the analysis if this were not the case. The survey is conducted on the two Dutch football clubs Ajax Amsterdam and Feyenoord Rotterdam. According to multiple Dutch research (Soccernews, 2018), Ajax Amsterdam has the most fans and is the most famous club in the Netherlands. In both pieces of research, Feyenoord is the second club with the most fans and popularity. As a result, it was determined to focus on attitude to fan perception and club perception on these clubs. In addition, these two football clubs were explicitly chosen to prevent preference biases from arising. For example, the possibility could arise that Ajax fans regard the misbehaviour of their fellow supporter as less severe than when supporters of another club do it. In order to prevent the survey from becoming too long, which created the risk that respondents would not complete the survey completely, it was decided not to use the third club in the Netherlands, PSV Eindhoven.

The survey is broken down into four sections. The first part (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4) of the survey consisted of questions about the attitude towards online and offline misbehaviour of football fans in general. It was decided to take two foreign clubs as an example (Chelsea and Lazio Rome) to avoid influencing the response about Dutch football clubs, provided later in the survey. A 5-point Likert scale is used to ask these questions (Ankur Joshi, 2015).

The survey's second section (Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9) included Ajax's fan and club perceptions questions. It was decided to choose two of the most well-known football clubs in the Netherlands so that the majority of the respondents were familiar with the clubs and could give their opinions on the fans and the club. To characterize the general club perception of Ajax, question 7 is subdivided into sub-questions. In addition, the questions about the respondents' perception of Ajax fans (Q8) have also been subdivided into sub-questions to measure the different perceptions. A 5-point Likert scale is used to ask these questions (Ankur Joshi, 2015).

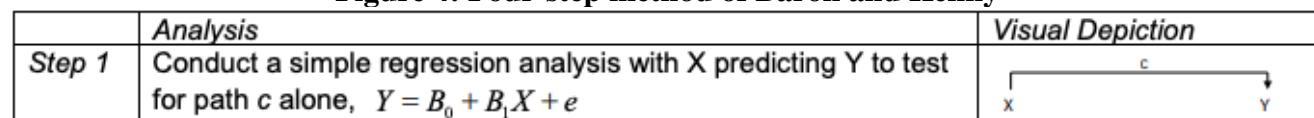
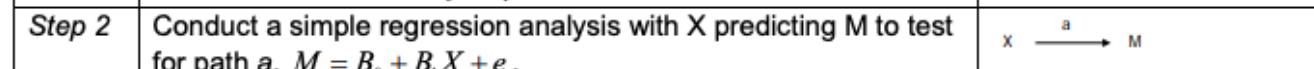
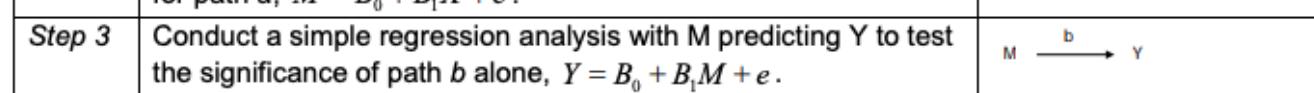
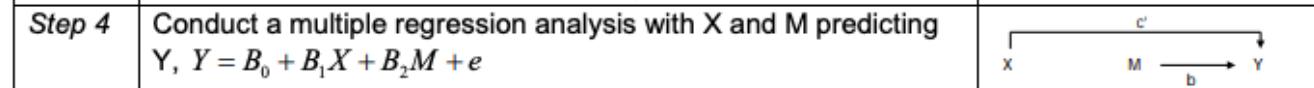
The survey's third section (Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q14) included questions about the fan and club perceptions of the Dutch football club Feyenoord. One of the most well-known clubs in the Netherlands was picked for this section to recognize the club and form a sincere opinion about it. To characterize the general club perception of Feyenoord, question 12 is subdivided into sub-questions. In addition, the questions about fan perception (Q13) have also been subdivided into sub-questions to measure the fan perception of the Feyenoord football club. A 5-point Likert scale is used to ask these questions (Ankur Joshi, 2015).

The survey's final section (Q15 – Q20) included demographic questions and a reliability question to ensure that the respondents were true football fans. These questions were moved to the end of the survey to ensure that respondents focused on the first three sections, following which they could quickly and swiftly move on to the demographic questions.

The results of the research have been examined in various ways. First, the control question related to the number of times respondents watched football per week was used. Responses from participants, who watched football less than once a week, were excluded from the analysis. The last part of the survey (Q15 – Q20) is mainly demographic questions. In order to acquire a better understanding of the background of the respondents, frequency tables were used to analyze these questions. The first part of the survey, which is about the attitude towards online and offline misconduct, was examined using factor analysis. The primary purpose of factor analysis is to summarize data to interpret and understand relationships and patterns easily. It is typically used to regroup variables into a small number of clusters based on shared variance. As a result, it helps to isolate constructs and concepts (Pearce & Yong, 2014). In addition, factor analysis was also used to examine the attitude of respondents towards the fans and football clubs. These factor scores were used in the regression analysis.

Since a mediation construct is used in the conceptual model, it is decided to use the technique of Baron and Kenny (1986) to test the hypotheses. Baron and Kenny (1986) presented a four-step method (as shown in figure 4) in which several regression analyses are conducted, and the significance of the coefficients is examined at each step. In the first three steps, a simple regression is used to test the hypotheses. The last step in the mediation model indicates whether the mediation effect has occurred. The process mediation test (Hayes, 2009) was chosen to test this effect.

Figure 4: Four-step method of Baron and Kenny

	<i>Analysis</i>	<i>Visual Depiction</i>
Step 1	Conduct a simple regression analysis with X predicting Y to test for path <i>c</i> alone, $Y = B_0 + B_1X + e$	
Step 2	Conduct a simple regression analysis with X predicting M to test for path <i>a</i> , $M = B_0 + B_1X + e$.	
Step 3	Conduct a simple regression analysis with M predicting Y to test the significance of path <i>b</i> alone, $Y = B_0 + B_1M + e$.	
Step 4	Conduct a multiple regression analysis with X and M predicting Y, $Y = B_0 + B_1X + B_2M + e$	

One of the most extensively utilized strategies for assessing multifactor data is regression analysis. *Regression analysis* is a modelling technique in which one or more independent variables

are used to predict the dependent variable (Montgomery, Peck, & Vining, 2021). The regression analysis is employed several times in this thesis. The factor scores of the attitudes towards fans (fan perception) and attitude towards online supporter misconduct (online misconduct) are critical, independent variables for this analysis.

Validity

The response rate cannot be calculated since the questionnaire is sent to random people via LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and several Facebook groups. Pilot tests were conducted to evaluate whether individuals unfamiliar with football could understand the questionnaire and whether the appropriate duration has been chosen. This showed that specific questions needed to be revised to make them more understandable. I also chose to include questions about more than one Dutch football club in the survey to avoid respondents not answering honest questions about the team they support.

5. Results

Respondents

The survey has a total of 311 respondents. Out of the total respondents, 75 did not fully complete the survey. In addition, 32 respondents were not qualified for this research because of not having enough affinity with football (see table 1). These participants were taken out of the total qualifying group. Therefore, the total amount of qualified respondents was 204.

However, the target amount of response has not been achieved. One of the main reasons the optimal survey response has not been achieved was due to time constraints. In addition, more value is attached to the quality of the respondents than to the quantity. For example, respondents who did not have enough affinity with Dutch football were left out of the survey to preserve the data quality. Moreover, incomplete surveys were not included.

Descriptive analyses

The first question has been included to screen the responses by asking about their football affinity. As mentioned in the methodology section, respondents who chose less than once a week were excluded from the data analysis. According to the findings (as shown in table 1), the majority of the respondents, 57.6 percent (136 respondents), watch Dutch football matches more than once a week. As a result, the vast majority of respondents have a strong affinity with Dutch football. The second biggest group is the respondents who watch football matches once a week (68 respondents). The smallest groupings are those who watch Dutch football matches monthly (16 respondents) and those who never watch Dutch football matches (14 respondents). These two small groups were not relevant for the study and, therefore, were left out of the analysis.

Table 1: Frequency table Affinity with Dutch Football

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Several times a week	136	57.6	57.6
Once a week	68	28.8	86.4
Once a month	16	6.8	93.2
Never	14	5.9	99.2
Otherwise	2	.8	100.0
Total	236	100.0	

The second question was concerning the gender of the respondents. More than 62 percent of football fans globally are male, according to a previous study by Statista (Lange, 2020). This metric shows that men, in general, have a stronger affinity with football than women. This observation that men have more affinity with football than women has been confirmed once again in the results, although there is a big difference in percentages. According to the findings, the majority of participants (193 respondents) in this study are men (as shown in table 2). Therefore, these findings show that it can be suggested that women are less interested in football than males. However, the results show that a great number of the respondents' gender is male. It can still not be concluded that women are less interested in football since only 11 relevant female respondents participated in this survey.

Table 2: frequency table gender

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Man	193	94.6	94.6
Woman	11	5.4	100.0
Total	204	100.0	

The respondent's age group is the subject of the third question. According to the results (as shown in table 3), respondents from every age group participated in the survey. The majority of the responders (123 people) are between the age of 18 and 25. The second-largest group (49 responders) is between the age of 26 and 35.

Table 3: Frequency table age

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Under 18	1	.5	.5
18-25 years old	123	60.3	60.8
26-35 years old	49	24.0	84.8
36-45 years old	13	6.4	91.2
46-55 years old	11	5.4	96.6
56-65 years old	6	2.9	99.5
65+ years old	1	.5	100.0
Total	204	100.0	

The fourth question is concerning the participants' highest completed school degree. The majority of respondents (105 respondents) have a bachelor's degree (as shown in table 4), followed by those with a MBO certificate (38 respondents). In addition, 33 participants obtained a master's degree.

Table 4: Frequency highest completed degree

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Primary school degree	1	.5	.5
High school degree	27	13.2	13.7
MBO certificate	38	18.6	32.4
Bachelor's degree	105	51.5	83.8
Master's degree	33	16.2	100.0
Total	204	100.0	

The fifth question is concerning the province in which the respondents live. The majority of the participants (148 respondents) live in the province Zuid-Holland (as shown in table 5). This result is most likely due to the fact that the research and the dissemination of the research took place in this province. Feyenoord is the most popular football club in Zuid-Holland. According to the crosstabs, there is a connection between the participant's home region and the team they support. For example, from the 148 respondents who live in Zuid-Holland, 89 respondents support the biggest club in the region, Feyenoord Rotterdam.

Table 5: Crosstab's region and supporting club

	Zuid-Holland	Noord-Holland	Noord-Brabant	Gelder-land	Ut-recht	Over-ijssel	Limburg	Fries-land	Gro-ningen	Dren-the	Flevoland	Zee-land	Total
Ajax	42	7	5	2	8	1	1	1	0	0	2	0	69
Feyenoord	89	1	3	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	98
PSV	5	0	4	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	11
Other	12	0	1	4	2	4	0	0	1	1	0	1	26
Total	148	8	13	8	13	5	2	1	2	1	2	1	204

Factor Analysis Supporter misconduct

The answers to the questions concerning the attitude towards online misconduct of football fans are reduced to a single, more decisive variable using factor analysis in this section. As mentioned in the methodology, there are three questions related to the attitude towards online misconduct of football supporters:

- Online misconduct by football supporters is unacceptable
- Online misconduct by football supporters is disturbing
- Online misconduct by football supporters is a big social problem

Factor analysis is used to determine the factor loadings and regroup variables to have additional insights. The KMO and Bartlett's test (as shown in appendix 2) is made before proceeding to the factor analyses. Moreover, KMO of .647 suggests that factor analyses would be useful (Hutcheson & Sofroniou, 1999); the Bartlett's test indicates a value of .000, implying that factor analysis may be useful.

Principal Component Analysis is selected to extract the factor loadings (Field, 2005). According to the eigenvalues-greater-than-one rule proposed by Kaiser (1960), all factors greater than one will be retained. Hence, one factor has been extracted. In addition, 68,59% of the total variance is explained by this factor. The loading of Factor 1 mostly comes from the variables *disturbing*, *unacceptable*, and *a big social problem*, suggesting that common ground exists among these three variables. The results are summarized in Table 6. Furthermore, compute variable method has been used to generate a new factor.

Table 6: Factor extraction and variance (attitude towards online misconduct)

Component	Represented variables	Eigenvalue (Extraction)	Initial Eigenvalues % of Variance
Factor 1	Disturbing, Unacceptable, A big social problem	2.058	68.598

Principal component analysis for extraction; Direct Oblique for rotation

Factor analyses Ajax Amsterdam

Eight statements were presented to determine the respondents' perception of the Ajax football club.

Factor analysis is used to determine the factor loadings and regroup variables to gain additional insights. Before the factor analysis, the KMO and Bartlett's test (as shown in appendix 3) is performed: KMO of .907 suggests that factor analyses would be good (Hutcheson & Sofroniou, 1999); the Bartlett's test indicates a value of .000, implying that factor analysis may be useful.

Principal Component Analysis is selected to extract the factor loadings (Field, 2005). According to the eigenvalues-greater-than-one rule proposed by Kaiser (1960), all factors greater than one will be retained. Hence, one factor has been extracted. In addition, 61,53% of the total variance is explained by this factor. The loading of Factor 1 mostly comes from the variables *Strong, Quality, Leader, Successful, Warm, Reliable, Organized, and wealthy*, suggesting that common ground exists among these eight variables. The results are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7: Factor extraction and variance (Club perception Ajax)

Component	Represented variables	Eigenvalue (Extraction)	Initial Eigenvalues % of Variance
Factor 1	Strong, Quality, Leader, Successful, Warm, Reliable, Organized, Wealthy	4.922	61.530

Principal component analysis for extraction; Direct Oblique for rotation

In addition to the club perception of Ajax, factor analysis was performed to determine whether there is an underlying relationship between the fan perception variables. The fan perception variables represent the nine statements (as shown in appendix 1) that describe the attitude respondents have towards the supporters of Ajax.

Before the factor analysis, the KMO and Bartlett's test (Appendix 4) is performed: KMO of .698 suggests that factor analyses would be useful (Hutcheson & Sofroniou, 1999); the Bartlett's test indicates a value of .000, implying that factor analysis may be useful. Because the factors are not

uncorrelated, rotation is done using the Direct Oblique Method. The absolute values less than 0.4 are suppressed from the matrices since it is not considered to be a significant factor loading (Field, 2005).

Principal Component Analysis is selected to extract the factor loadings (Field, 2005). According to the eigenvalues-greater-than-one rule proposed by Kaiser (1960), all factors greater than one will be retained. Hence, three factors have been extracted. The loading of Factor 1 mostly comes from the variables *unpleasant, aggressive, negative, and rude*, suggesting that common ground exists among these four variables. The loading of Factor 2 comes mainly from *dominating, exciting, emotional, and tense*. The loading of Factor 3 comes from the variable *Youthful*. The results are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8: Factor extraction, variance, and rotation (Fan perception Ajax)

Component	Represented variables	Eigenvalue (Extraction)	Initial Eigenvalues % of Variance	Eigenvalue (Rotation)
Factor 1	Unpleasant, Aggressive, Negative, Rude	2.256	25.056	2.208
Factor 2	Dominating, Exciting, Emotional, Tense	1.802	20.020	1.842
Factor 3	Youthful	1.047	11.634	1.098

Principal component analysis for extraction; Direct Oblique for rotation

Factor analyses Feyenoord Rotterdam

Eight statements were presented (as shown in Appendix 1) to determine the respondents' perception of the Feyenoord football club. Factor analysis is used to determine the factor loadings and regroup variables to gain additional insights. Before the factor analysis, the KMO and Bartlett's test (Appendix 5) is performed: KMO of .871 suggests that factor analyses would be good (Hutcheson & Sofroniou, 1999); the Bartlett's test indicates a value of .000, implying that factor analysis may be useful.

Principal Component Analysis is selected to extract the factor loadings (Field, 2005). According to the eigenvalues-greater-than-one rule proposed by Kaiser (1960), all factors greater than one will be retained. Hence, one factor has been extracted. In addition, 54,27% of the total variance is explained by this factor. The loading of Factor 1 mostly comes from the variables *Strong, Quality, Leader, Successful, Warm, Reliable, Organized, and wealthy*, suggesting that common ground exists among these eight variables. The results are summarized in Table 9. Furthermore, compute variable technique was used to create a new variable. This new variable represents the eight perceptions that respondents have toward the football club Feyenoord.

Table 9: Factor extraction and variance (Club perception Feyenoord)

Component	Represented variables	Eigenvalue (Extraction)	Initial Eigenvalues % of Variance
Factor 1	Strong, Quality, Leader, Successful, Warm, Reliable, Organized, Wealthy	4.341	54.266

Principal component analysis for extraction; Direct Oblique for rotation

In addition to the club perception of Feyenoord, factor analysis was performed to determine whether there is an underlying relationship between the fan perception variables. The fan perception variables represent the nine statements (as shown in Appendix 1) that describe the attitude respondents have towards the supporters of Feyenoord.

Before the factor analysis, the KMO and Bartlett's test (Appendix 6) is performed: KMO of .781 suggests that factor analyses would be good (Hutcheson & Sofroniou, 1999); the Bartlett's test indicates a value of .000, implying that factor analysis may be useful. Because the factors are not uncorrelated, rotation is done using the Direct Oblique Method. The absolute values less than 0.4 are suppressed from the matrices since it is not considered to be a significant factor loading (Field, 2005).

Principal Component Analysis is selected to extract the factor loadings (Field, 2005). According to the eigenvalues-greater-than-one rule proposed by Kaiser (1960), all factors greater than one will be retained. Hence, two factors have been extracted. The loading of Factor 1 mostly comes from the variables *unpleasant, aggressive, negative, and rude*, suggesting that common ground exists among these four variables. The loading of Factor 2 comes largely from the variables *dominating, exciting, emotional, and tense*. The factor loading of the variable *youthful* is suppressed from the matrices since the absolute value is smaller than 0.4 (see Appendix 6). The results are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10: Factor extraction, variance, and rotation (Fan perception Feyenoord)

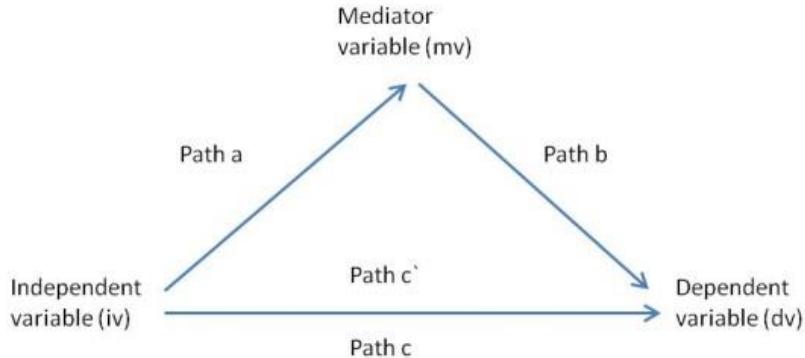
Component	Represented variables	Eigenvalue (Extraction)	Initial Eigenvalues % of Variance	Eigenvalue (Rotation)
Factor 1	Unpleasant, Aggressive, Negative, Rude	3.064	34.044	2.918
Factor 2	Dominating, Exciting, Emotional, Tense	2.020	22.442	2.300

Principal component analysis for extraction; Direct Oblique for rotation

Hypotheses testing Ajax

Baron and Kenny (1986) propose a four-step approach in which various regression analyses are performed, and the significance of the coefficients is examined at each stage. The model's c' path (as shown in figure 5) is also referred to as a direct effect.

Figure 5: Paths of mediation



Regression path A – Ajax

First, **path A** is analysed to see whether the independent variable (attitude towards the fans of Ajax) impacts the mediator variable (attitude towards online misconduct of football fans). Simple regression is conducted to test this effect. Besides that, some control variables are added to the linear regression analysis (as shown in table 11) to see whether these variables influence this relationship. These control variables include demographic variables (age & education) and the 'frequency' variable that shows how often participants watch Dutch football matches. Moreover, a dummy variable is created to include the categorical variable club preference into the regression. In the first regression, the club preference 'Ajax' was introduced as a dummy variable to see whether the results of the Ajax-supporters have a significant impact on the team they support.

Table 11: Regression output path A - Ajax

Model	Unst,	Stand.	Sig.
	coefficients	Coefficients	
	B	β	
(Constant)	4.167		.000
Fan perception Ajax Factor 1	-.102	-.165	.027
Fan perception Ajax Factor 2	.155	.202	.005
Ajax-supporter (dummy)	.047	.030	.688
Age	.074	.107	.129
Education	-.053	-.066	.350
Frequency watched football matches	.029	.019	.790
Model Summary		Sig.	R
			R-Square
N=204 *p<0.05		.018	.274
Dependent variable: Attitude towards online misconduct of football supporters			.075
			.046

With an R-square of 0.075, it can be concluded that the mediator and independent variables have a weak correlation. According to the adjusted R-Square, football supporters' attitude towards online misconduct accounts for 4,6% of the variance in the independent variables. With a significance level of .018, the ANOVA is statistically significant. The model performed is therefore significant.

The coefficients of the regression analysis concluded that there is no significant effect of β_3 , β_4 , β_5 , β_6 , and β_7 on the attitude towards football supporters' online misbehaviour. However, there was a significant effect on both fan perception factors. The first factor of the fan perception of Ajax has a significant effect ($p=.027$) on the online misconduct of football fans.

β_1 is negative with -.102. Thus, there is a significant negative effect of the attitude towards the fans of Ajax on the attitude towards online misconduct of football fans. Therefore, the null hypothesis could be rejected. The support for hypothesis 1 was found for the football club Ajax, which means that there is a significant negative relationship between the negative fan perceptions of Ajax and the attitude towards online misconduct of football supporters.

Regression path B – Ajax

Second, **path B** is analysed to test whether the mediator variable (attitude towards online misconduct of football fans) impacts the dependent variable (attitude towards the football club Ajax). Several control variables were included in the regression (as shown in table 12) to see whether they affect the attitude towards the football club Ajax. In order to find out whether Ajax-supporters have a substantial impact on the perceptions of the club they support, a dummy variable for Ajax-supporters was generated.

Table 12: Regression output path B - Ajax

Model	Unst,	Stand.	Sig.
	coefficients	Coefficients	
	B	β	
(Constant)	3.435		.000
Online misconduct Factor 1	.006	.007	.906
Ajax-supporter (dummy)	.900	.625	.000
Age	.016	.026	.651
Education	.035	.046	.413
Frequency watched football matches	-.083	-.058	.310
Model Summary		Sig.	R
			R-Square
			Adjusted R-Square

N=204 | *p<0.05 .000 .627 .393 .378

Dependent variable: Attitude towards the football club Ajax (Club perception Ajax)

The R-Square of .393 indicates that the dependent and the independent variables have a moderately strong positive correlation. According to the Adjusted R-Square, the attitude towards the football club Ajax accounts for 37.8% of the variance in the independent variables. The ANOVA has a .000 significance level. As a result, the model used is significant.

According to the regression analysis results, there is no significant effect of β_1 , β_2 , β_4 , β_5 , and β_6 on the attitude of the football club Ajax. However, there is a significant effect ($p=.000$) on the dummy variable Ajax-supporters. B_3 is positive with .900. Thus, there is a strong positive effect of Ajax supporters' attitude toward the football club ajax.

According to the results, there was no significant effect ($p=.903$) of the attitude towards online misconduct of football supporters on the perception of the football club Ajax. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted, and the support for hypothesis 2 was not found, which means that there is no significant relationship between the attitude towards online misconduct of football fans on the perception of the football club Ajax.

Regression path C – Ajax

Third, **path C** is analysed to test whether the independent variable (attitude towards the fans of Ajax) impacts the dependent variable (attitude towards the football club Ajax). In order to test if other variables have any effect on this regression, a few control variables (as shown in table 13) were added

to the test. In order to find out whether Ajax-supporters have a substantial impact on the perceptions of the club they support, a dummy variable for Ajax-supporters was generated.

Table 13: regression output path C – Ajax

Model	Unst,	Stand.	Sig.
	coefficients	Coefficients	
	B	β	
(Constant)	3.324		.000
Fan perception Ajax Factor 1	.045	.078	.191
Fan perception Ajax Factor 2	-.011	-.015	.700
Ajax-supporter (dummy)	.863	.599	.000
Age	.021	.032	.569
Education	.036	.047	.404
Frequency watched football matches	-.069	-.048	.401
Model Summary		Sig.	R
			R-Square
			Adjusted R-Square

N=204 | *p<0.05

.000 .631 .399 .380

Dependent variable: Attitude towards the football club Ajax (Club perception Ajax)

The R-Square of .399 concluded a moderately strong positive correlation between the dependent and independent variables. The adjusted R-Square indicated that the club perception of Ajax could explain 38% of the variance in the independent variables. The ANOVA has a .000 significance level. As a result, the model used is significant.

According to the coefficients table above, β_1 , β_2 , β_3 , β_5 , β_6 , and β_7 have no significant effect on Ajax's club perception. However, there is a significant ($p=.000$) effect on the dummy variable Ajax-supporters. β_2 is positive with .863. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a very strong positive effect of the Ajax-supporters on the attitude of the football club Ajax.

According to the results, there was no significant effect ($p=.191$ & $p=.700$) on both factor scores of the attitude towards the fans of Ajax on the attitude of the football club Ajax. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted, and the support for hypothesis 3 was not found, which means that there is no significant relationship between the negative attitudes of Ajax fans and the attitude of the football club Ajax.

Hayes mediation test – Ajax

As explained in the methodology, the Hayes (2009) mediation technique tests the mediation effect.

The indirect effect is tested using non-parametric bootstrapping. If the null of 0 falls between the lower and upper bound of the 95% confidence interval, then the inference is that the indirect population effect is 0. If the 0 falls outside the confidence interval, then the indirect effect is inferred to be non-zero (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Since the confidence rate incorporates a zero (as shown in table 14), it can be concluded that this relationship is not statistically significant. The indirect effect of the club perception of Ajax via online misconduct of football fans (IE=-.0031) is negative and statistically non-significant: 95%CI= (-.0204, .0094). This indicates that there is no mediation effect. Therefore, it can be concluded that the relationship between the attitude towards Ajax fans and the perceptions of the football club Ajax are not mediated by the attitude towards online misconduct of football supporters.

Table 14: Indirect effect(s) of Fan perception Ajax on Club perception Ajax

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Mediator	-.0031	.0071	-.0204	.0094

Hypotheses testing Feyenoord Rotterdam

Simple regression path A – Feyenoord

First, **path A** is analysed by making use of the simple linear regression method. This regression is performed to see whether the independent variables (attitude towards Feyenoord fans) impact the mediator variable (attitude towards online misconduct of football supporters). Several control variables (age, frequency, education) are added to the regression (as shown in table 15) to test whether they affect the dependent variable. Since most of the respondents are Feyenoord-fans, a dummy variable of Feyenoord-fans has been created to see whether the results of the Feyenoord-fans have a significant impact on the team they support.

Table 15: Regression output path A – Feyenoord

Model	Unst,	Stand.	Sig.
	coefficients	Coefficients	
	B	β	
(Constant)	3.143		.000
Fan perception Feyenoord	.173	.174	.022
Factor 1			
Fan perception Feyenoord	.127	.106	.152
Factor 2			
Feyenoord supporter (dummy)	.079	.054	.483
Age	.076	.110	.130
Education	-.053	-.066	.354
Frequency watched football	.109	.070	.321
matches			
Model Summary		Sig.	R
			R-Square
			Adjusted R-Square

N=204 | *p<0.05

.049 .251 .063 .034

Dependent variable: Attitude towards online misconduct of football supporters

The R-Square of .063 concludes a very weak correlation between the dependent and independent variables. The adjusted R-Square indicates that the online misconduct of football supporters could explain 3,4% of the variance in the independent variables. The ANOVA has a .049 significance level. As a result, the model used is significant.

The coefficients of the regression analysis concluded that there is no significant effect of β_2 , β_3 , β_4 , β_5 , and β_6 on the dependent variable (attitude towards online misconduct of football supporters). According to the results, the first factor (attitude towards the fans of Feyenoord) has a significant effect ($p=.022$). β_1 is positive with .173. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and support for H1

is found. This implies a significant relationship between the negative attitude towards the Feyenoord-fans and the attitude towards online misconduct of football supporters.

Regression path B – Feyenoord

Second, **path B** is analysed using the simple linear regression method. This linear regression is performed to test whether the mediator variable (attitude towards online misconduct of football fans) impacts the dependent variable (attitude towards the football club Feyenoord). A few control variables have been added to the regression (as shown in table 16) to test whether they affect the dependent variable. Moreover, the dummy variable, Feyenoord Fans, has been added to the regression to test whether the results of the Feyenoord fans have a significant impact on the team they support.

Table 16: Regression output path B – Feyenoord

Model	Unst,	Stand.	Sig.
	coefficients	Coefficients	
	B	β	
(Constant)	2.778		.000
Online misconduct Factor 1	.045	.050	.417
Feyenoord supporter (dummy)	.634	.471	.000
Age	-.099	-.158	.013
Education	.027	.037	.545
Frequency watched football matches	.034	.024	.700
Model Summary			
		Sig.	R
N=204 *p<0.05		.000	.532
Dependent variable: Attitude towards the football club Feyenoord (Club perception Feyenoord)			.283
			.264

The R-Square of 0.283 indicates a moderately strong positive correlation between the independent and dependent variables. The adjusted R-Square indicates that 26,4% of the variance in the independent variables can be explained by the attitude towards the football club Feyenoord. The ANOVA has a .000 significance level. Therefore, the model that is performed is significant.

The coefficients of the regression analysis concluded that there is no significant effect of β_1 , β_4 , β_5 on the attitude towards the football club Feyenoord. There is, however, a significant effect ($p=.013$) of the age on the attitude towards the football club Feyenoord. β_3 is negative with -.099. As a result, age has a negative effect on the perception of the football club Feyenoord. It can be concluded that the

older someone is, the more negative their attitude is towards football club Feyenoord. In addition, there is also a significant effect of the Feyenoord Fans on the club perception of Feyenoord. β_2 is positive with .634. Therefore, there is a significant positive effect of Feyenoord-supporters on the club's perception of Feyenoord. As a result, being a Feyenoord supporter positively affects the club's perception of Feyenoord.

Furthermore, the independent variable (attitude towards online misconduct of football supporters) has no significant effect ($p=.417$) on the dependent variable (attitude towards the football club Feyenoord). Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted, and the support for H2 was not found, which means that there is no significant relationship between the attitude towards online misconduct of football supporters and the club perception of Feyenoord.

Regression path C – Feyenoord

Third, **path C** is analysed to test whether the independent variable (attitude towards the fans of Feyenoord) impacts the dependent variable (attitude towards the football club Feyenoord). In order to test whether other variables affect this regression, a few control variables have been added to the test (as shown in table 17). Moreover, to find out whether Feyenoord-supporters have a substantial impact on the perceptions of the football club they support, a dummy variable for Feyenoord-supporters is generated

Table 17: Regression output path C - Feyenoord

Model	Unst,	Stand.	Sig.
	coefficients	Coefficients	
	B	β	
(Constant)	3.422		.000
Fan perception Feyenoord	-.156	-.172	.007
Factor 1			
Feyenoord supporter (dummy)	.580	.431	.000
Age	-.084	-.134	.031
Education	.040	.055	.370
Frequency watched football matches	.022	.015	.798
Model Summary			
		Sig.	R
			R-Square
			Adjusted R-Square

N=204 | * $p<0.05$

.000 .554 .307 .289

Dependent variable: Attitude towards the football club Feyenoord (Club perception Feyenoord)

The R-Square of .307 concludes a moderately strong positive correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The adjusted R-Square concludes that 28.9% of the variance in the independent variables could be explained by attitude towards the football club Feyenoord. The ANOVA has a .000 significance level. As a result, the model performed is significant.

The coefficients of the regression analysis concluded that there is no significant effect of β_4 & β_5 on the club perception of Feyenoord. However, there is a significant effect ($p=.000$) on the dummy variable Feyenoord fans. β_2 is positive with .580. As a result, the dummy variable Feyenoord-fans has a strong positive effect on club perception of Feyenoord. The conclusion is that whenever someone supports Feyenoord, it positively affects their perception of the football club Feyenoord. In addition, there is a significant effect ($p=.031$) of the age on the perception of the football club Feyenoord. β_3 is negative with -.084. Therefore, it can be concluded, the older someone is, the more negative their attitude is towards football club Feyenoord.

Furthermore, there is also a significant effect ($p=.007$) on the independent variable. β_1 is negative with -.156. Thus, there is a significant negative effect of attitude towards the fans of Feyenoord on the perception of the football club Feyenoord. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the supporter for H3 was found. This implies a significant relationship between the negative fan perceptions of Feyenoord and the club perception of Feyenoord.

Hayes mediation test

The Hayes (2009) mediation technique tests the mediation effect. The indirect effect is tested by making use of non-parametric bootstrapping. If the null of 0 falls between the lower and upper bound of the 95% confidence interval, then the inference is that the indirect population effect is 0. If the 0 falls outside the confidence interval, then the indirect effect is inferred to be non-zero (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Since the confidence rate incorporates a zero (as shown in table 18), it can be concluded that this relationship is not statistically significant. The indirect effect of the club perception of Feyenoord via online misconduct of football fans (IE=.0151) is positive but statistically non-significant: 95%CI= (-.0069, .0390). This indicates that there is no mediation effect. Therefore, it can be concluded that the relationship between the attitude towards Feyenoord fans and the perceptions of the football club Feyenoord are not mediated by the attitude towards online misconduct of football supporters.

Table 18: Indirect effect(s) of Fan perception Feyenoord on Club perception Feyenoord

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Mediator	.0151	.0114	-.0069	.0390

6. Discussion

In this discussion section, I interpret and discuss the results of this research. I also shed light on the limitations of this study in this section. Lastly, I give the managerial implications and explain them further.

Main findings

In table 19, you can find an overview of all hypotheses. Next to the hypothesis, I list whether the hypothesis is accepted or rejected. Since I tested the hypotheses on the two Dutch football clubs Ajax Amsterdam and Feyenoord Rotterdam, I split the findings into two columns.

Table 19: outcomes tested hypotheses

Hypotheses	Ajax	Feyenoord
1. There is a significant effect between the negative perceptions towards fans of a football club and the attitude toward supporter misconduct.	Accepted	Accepted
2. There is a significant effect between the attitude towards the misconduct of football supporters and the perception of a football club.	Rejected	Rejected
3. There is a significant effect on the negative perceptions towards fans of a particular club and the perceptions of a specific football club.	Rejected	Accepted

Ahluwalia and Gürhan-Canli (2000) have found that negative brand information has a direct, significant, and negative impact on customers' overall perception of the brand in question. In this research, I examine whether negative attitudes towards football fans influence football fans' attitudes towards online misconduct. According to the results, there is a significant effect of negative attitudes towards football fans and attitudes towards online misbehaviour of football fans. This effect is significant for both teams I use in this study.

Jalilvand & Samiei (2012) have noted that electronic word-of-mouth is one of the most influential factors influencing brand perception in consumer markets. In addition, Pullig et al. (2006) have noted that consumers might have a higher unfavourable reaction to negative brand information. In this

research, I conclude that the perception towards online misconduct of football fans does not significantly impact the perceptions of a football club. Therefore, I reject hypothesis 2 of this thesis.

Previous research has already shown that a footballer is part of the overall brand of a football club (Bridgewater, 2010). Bodet and Chanavat (2009) have found that football fans negatively perceive a football club because of hatred towards one team's football players. The football players are part of the internal aspects of the football club (Bodet & Chanavat, 2009). In this research, I focus on the football fans, which are part of the external aspects of the football club. According to the results, negative perceptions towards football fans of Feyenoord do significantly impact the perception of football club Feyenoord. In contrast to the football club Feyenoord, negative perceptions towards the fans of Ajax do not significantly impact the perception of the football club Ajax. Therefore, I accept hypothesis 3 of this thesis for the football club Feyenoord, but I reject the same hypothesis for the football club Ajax.

Managerial implications

Online abuse by football fans towards professional football players is an increasing phenomenon that has often been in the news negatively in recent years. Football clubs, football organizations, and governments are currently paying much attention to this problem. Football clubs would like to be in the news as little negative as possible to prevent their image from being damaged. This thesis shows the importance of the online misbehaviour of football fans on the perceptions of a football club. According to this thesis, the online misbehaviour of football fans has no significant impact on the perception of a football club. Nevertheless, negative attitudes towards football fans significantly affect the attitude towards online misbehaviour of football fans.

Limitations and bias

Each study, without exception, has its own set of limitations and biases. I limited this thesis by the number of football clubs that I have examined. With this research, I focussed on the two biggest clubs Ajax & Feyenoord (in terms of the fanbase). Ideally, I used more clubs in the survey to test differences between the different Dutch football clubs. The sample used for this study contains 204 respondents. I have decided to exclude people who watch football less than once a week from the

analyses. This has led to a limitation of the optimal sample size. Furthermore, I have performed the analyses for the two football clubs separately. By merging the results, it may be possible to arrive at a more general conclusion.

7. Conclusion

This research aimed to identify whether online misconduct of football supporters harms the perceptions towards a football club. Based on quantitative research that focused on two of the most influential clubs in the Netherlands, it can be concluded that football supporters' attitudes towards online misconduct did not significantly impact the perception of a football club.

A prior study of Ahluwalia and Gürhan-Canli (2000) found that negative brand information directly, significantly, and negatively affects the overall perceptions towards the affected brands. Due to the input from previous studies, it was expected that negative attitudes towards online misbehaviour of supporters would negatively influence the perception of a football club. However, the results did not show any significant effects, and therefore can be concluded that the results did not match the expectations. Although no significant effect has been shown in the main question, this study revealed a significant relationship between negative attitudes towards football fans and football supporters' online misbehaviour.

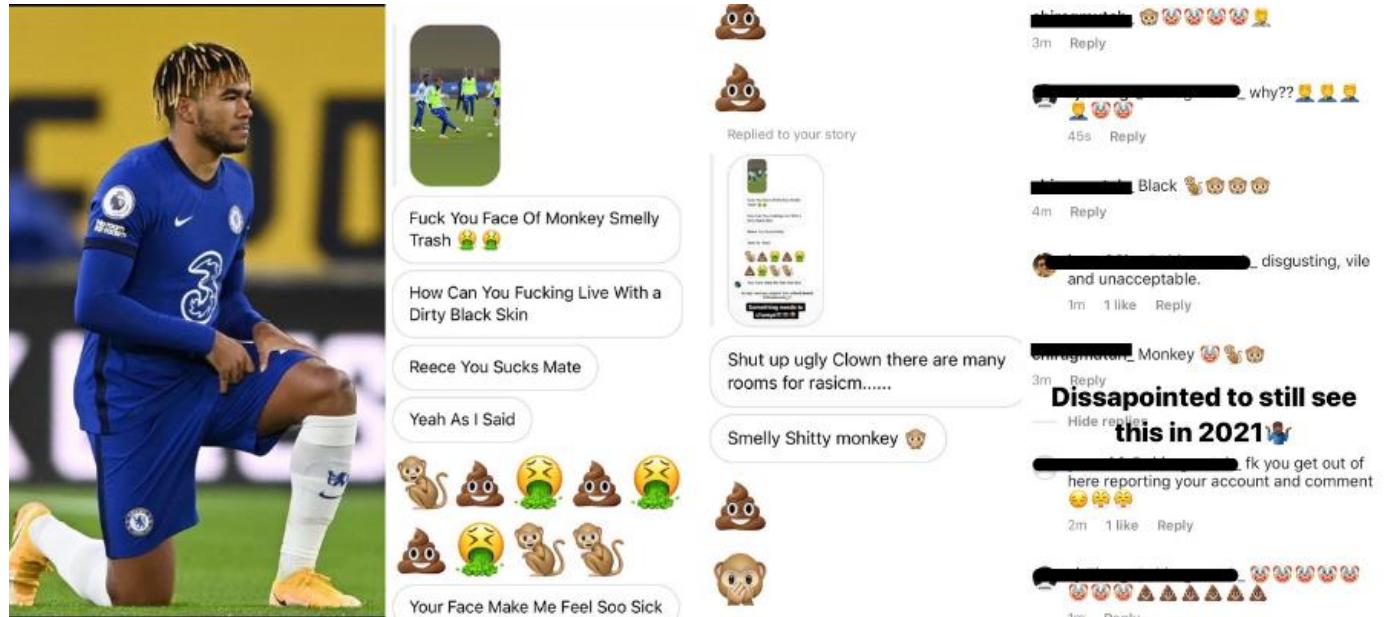
Future research

Future research can be done on the different types of online misconduct. This thesis has mainly focused on the online hatred of football fans towards black players. However, there are several forms of online hate. In addition, it is interesting for clubs to investigate how they can avoid brand damage caused by the online misbehaviour of their fans. Since this thesis only focussed on the online misconduct of football fans, it would be interesting to research the differences between online and offline misconduct of football fans. Furthermore, this research can be carried out in other countries and at other clubs. Every club and its fans have a different image, and therefore results could be very different.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Survey questions

Example of misconduct on social media: The following image shows an example of football supporters' online misconduct. Reece James, a Chelsea footballer, received multiple racist and abusive comments/messages from supporters via social media. Look at the examples below and answer the statements below.



Q1: 'I have experienced online misconduct of football supporters before'

- Right
- Wrong

Q2: I consider online misconduct of football supporters as...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I consider online misconduct of football supporters as unacceptable					
I consider online misconduct of football supporters as disturbing					
I consider online misconduct of football supporters as a social problem					

Offline Misconduct Example: The following image shows an example of offline misconduct by football supporters. Lazio Rome supporters are known for their anti-Semitic banners and racist slogans against black players. Look at the example below and answer the statements below.



Q3: 'I have experienced offline misconduct of football supporters before'

- Right
- Wrong

Q4: I consider offline misconduct of football supporters as...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I consider offline misconduct of football supporters as unacceptable					
I consider offline misconduct of football supporters as disturbing					
I consider offline misconduct of football supporters as a social problem					

In the next section, some questions and statements about Ajax football club are presented.

Q5: How familiar are you with the football club Ajax?

	Unfamiliar	Slightly familiar	Neutral	Familiar	Strongly familiar
How familiar are you with the football club Ajax?					

Q6: How negative/positive is your attitude towards the football club Ajax?

	Very negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very positive
How negative/positive is your attitude towards the football club Ajax?					

Q7: When I think of the image of the football club Ajax, I experience the club as...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Successful					
Leader					
Quality					
Wealthy					
Warm					
Organized					
Reliable					
Strong					

In the next section, some statements about the behaviour of Ajax-supporters are presented.

Q8: When I think of Ajax-supporters, I experience their behaviour as...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Exciting					
Dominating					
Tense					
Unpleasant					
Aggressive					
Emotional					
Negative					
Youthful					
Rude					

Q9: If Ajax-supporters misbehave on social media, I find that unacceptable.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
If Ajax-supporters misbehave on social media, I find that unacceptable.					

In the next section, some questions and statements about the football club Feyenoord are presented.

Q10: How familiar are you with the football club Feyenoord?

	Unfamiliar	Slightly familiar	Neutral	Familiar	Strongly familiar
How familiar are you with the football club Feyenoord?					

Q11: How negative/positive is your attitude towards the football club Feyenoord?

	Very negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very positive
How negative/positive is your attitude towards the football club Feyenoord?					

Q12: When I think of the image of the football club Feyenoord, I experience the club as...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Successful					
Leader					
Quality					
Wealthy					
Warm					
Organized					
Reliable					
Strong					

The following section presents some statements about the behaviour of Feyenoord-supporters.

Q13: When I think of Feyenoord-supporters, I experience their behaviour as...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Exciting					
Dominating					
Tense					
Unpleasant					
Aggressive					
Emotional					
Negative					
Youthful					
Rude					

Q14: If Feyenoord-supporters misbehave on social media, I find that unacceptable.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
If Feyenoord-supporters misbehave on social media, I find that unacceptable.					

Q15: What is your gender?

- Man
- Woman
- Other

Q16: What is your age?

Please fill in...

Q17: In which province do you live?

- Zuid-Holland
- Noord-Holland
- Noord-Brabant
- Gelderland
- Utrecht
- Overijssel
- Limburg
- Friesland
- Groningen
- Drenthe
- Flevoland

- Zeeland

Q18: What is your favourite Dutch Football club?

- Ajax
- Feyenoord
- PSV
- Other, namely...

Q19: How often do you watch Dutch football matches?

- Several times per week
- Once a week
- Once a month
- Never
- Other, namely...

Q20: What is your highest completed school level?

- Primary school
- High school
- MBO
- HBO (Bachelor)
- WO (Master)
- Other, namely...

Appendix 2 - KMO and Bartlett's test/ Component matrix – attitude toward online misconduct of football fans

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	.647
Barlett's Test of Sphericity	182.019
Approx. Chi-Square	
Df.	3
Sig.	.000

Component 1

I consider online misconduct by football supporters as... - Disturbing	.885
I consider online misconduct by football supporters as... - A big social problem	.858
I consider online misconduct by football supporters as... - Unacceptable	.734

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

a. 1 component extracted

Appendix 3 – KMO and Bartlett's test / Component matrix – Ajax

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	.906
Barlett's Test of Sphericity	969.970
Approx. Chi-Square	
Df.	28
Sig.	.000

Component
1

Club perception Ajax – Strong	.833
Club perception Ajax – Quality	.832
Club perception Ajax – Leader	.829
Club perception Ajax – Successful	.799
Club perception Ajax – Warm	.784
Club perception Ajax – Reliable	.777
Club perception Ajax – Organized	.730
Club perception Ajax – Wealthy	.680

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

1 component extracted

Appendix 4 - KMO and Bartlett's test / Structure matrix – Ajax

KMO and Bartlett's Test			
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy			.698
Barlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square		251.750
	Df.		36
	Sig.		.000
Components			
	1	2	3
Fan perception Ajax – Unpleasant	.782		
Fan perception Ajax – Aggressive	.745		
Fan perception Ajax – Negative	.684		
Fan perception Ajax – Rude	.617		.402
Fan perception Ajax – Dominating		.811	
Fan perception Ajax – Exciting		.761	
Fan perception Ajax – Emotional		.566	-.393
Fan perception Ajax – Tense		.486	
Fan perception Ajax – Youthful			.855

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis
 Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization

Appendix 5 - KMO and Bartlett's test / Structure matrix – Feyenoord

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.871
Barlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	725.960
	Df.	28
	Sig.	.000

Component
1

Club perception Feyenoord – Strong	.827
Club perception Feyenoord – Quality	.811
Club perception Feyenoord – Leader	.758
Club perception Feyenoord – Successful	.742
Club perception Feyenoord – Warm	.731
Club perception Feyenoord – Reliable	.729
Club perception Feyenoord – Organized	.692
Club perception Feyenoord – Wealthy	.575

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

1 component extracted

Appendix 6 - KMO and Bartlett's test/ Structure matrix – Feyenoord

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.781
Barlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	532.021
	Df.	36
	Sig.	.000

Component
1 2

Fan perception Feyenoord – Unpleasant	.852
Fan perception Feyenoord – Aggressive	.831
Fan perception Feyenoord – Negative	.788
Fan perception Feyenoord – Rude	.771
Fan perception Feyenoord – Dominating	.767
Fan perception Feyenoord – Exciting	.719

Fan perception Feyenoord –		.708
Emotional		
Fan perception Feyenoord –	.477	.688
Tense		
Fan perception Feyenoord –		
Youthful		

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