

Stars and Spikes: Analyzing Fan Attraction to Star Players in the Philippine Professional Volleyball League

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Abstract. The study sought to describe fan consumption patterns in volleyball, identify factors influencing fan engagement, pinpoint attractive attributes of volleyball players, and compare influences on fanhood across demographic groups. The research was conducted in Pasig City, focusing on a geographically delimited non-probability sample. Data was collected through in situ surveys using questionnaires to obtain participants' demographic profile and their motivations, preferences, and consumption patterns as league fans during match days, specifically during the last preliminary round of the league's conference in the third week of April, with particular emphasis on the timing of visits across different days of the week. Two hundred fifty respondents participated in the survey, comprising both genders ranging in age from 10 to 78 years. Results reveal that participants identify as avid league fans and consider having a favorite league player as "definitely important" in connection with their fanhood. As to the traits of star players that attract them, 11 attributes are figured highly: passionate, professional, respectful, fair, approachable, humble, exciting, entertaining, winnable, articulate, and humble. The results provide contemporary insights into sports consumption motivations and attitudes of league fans, which can be instrumental in developing effective marketing strategies, enhancing spectator experience, and deepening the understanding of sports fandom among the Filipino audience.

Keywords: Volleyball; Sports fans; Professional sports; Star players.

1.0 Introduction

Sports, in the context of entertainment, is a multi-billion dollar industry (Humphreys & Ruseski, 2009). The same observation could likely be made in the Philippines. Based on media coverage of various spectator sports ranging from basketball, boxing, volleyball, and football, the sports industry may contribute significantly to the Philippine economy through direct and related transactions. Volleyball, for instance, has been yielding related business transactions in the form of sports sponsorships that are part of Philippine economic activities (Blanco, 2016). Sports sponsorship has been proven to influence customer views and purchase intentions (Koronios et al., 2016; Seo, 2022). In the Philippine economic landscape, sports sponsorship has played a crucial role in driving revenue growth and expanding markets, not only in the sports business but also in the country's overall economic growth (Blanco, 2016). Spectator sports, as primary indicators of the sports sector's performance as a business industry, are susceptible to prevailing market conditions and employ more aggressive marketing strategies to engage the public (Grove et al., 2012). Hence, it is common for commercial brands to associate sports sponsorship with purchase intentions to team performance, stars, and the moderating role of team identification (Ngan et al., 2011). Further, the same point is highlighted by White and Ting (2024), wherein their findings emphasized that identification influences the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on sports supporters' loyalty and

specifically regulates the adverse effects of extrinsic motivation on loyalty and strengthens loyalty when levels of satisfaction decline.

The audience size and fanbase of volleyball have grown over the years (Ochosa, 2015). Currently, volleyball matches of the collegiate league University Athletic Association of the Philippines (UAAP) and games of the Premier Volleyball League (PVL) are both aired on One Sports channel, a cable television channel in the Philippines, streamed online simultaneously over Pilipinas Live app by subscription. The PVL is a professional volleyball league for women, the only professional volleyball league in the country. It began as a collegiate league for women in 2014, initially called Shakey's V-League (About PVL, 2024). Three years later (in 2017), it was renamed Premier Volleyball League to transition to professional status, allowing corporate clubs and non-collegiate teams to participate.

Sports fanhood primarily involves behavioral aspects (Keaton, 2013), making evaluating sports consumption motivations among fans complex. This was pointed out by Galily et al. (2024) when they cited the study of Giulianotti (2002), which mentioned that sports fans' behavior is a multifaceted phenomenon. It is worth considering what motivates audiences to like a particular sport, given that sports are often viewed as entertainment (Shank & Lynberger, 2015). The dimensions of the motivations of sports consumers are highly dynamic. Interestingly, it has been pointed out that attachment to specific players is one of the reasons why sports consumers patronize the sport (Robinson & Trail, 2005). This is apparent in sports leagues, where various teams compete to acquire star players. It is assumed that the popularity of these players will attract followers and fans and provide high traction with a broader audience (Bodet et al., 2019). Hoegele et al. (2014) asserted that superstars attract new fans and contribute to retaining existing fans. On the level of a sports fan, liking or identification with a player indirectly affects the intention to sustain patronage of the sport in consideration (Wu et al., 2012). In the Philippines, the presence of sports personalities may be an area of inquiry about audience attraction to a particular sport due to the country's predisposition to celebrities (Radiamoda et al., 2023). However, empirical data in the Philippine setting to support this view is scant. Few studies provide an understanding of sports fandom in the Philippines. The availability of empirical studies in this area could help frame or contextualize the prevailing practical knowledge about sports fans among sports administrators and managers, sports marketers, and even commercial sponsors in light of how a sports league other than basketball could gain traction among sports audiences.

This study aimed to reveal how fanhood and aspects or attributes of sports personalities intertwine, using the league fans' information and perceptions as a case in point. The findings may serve as a cross-section of the volleyball fan community and offer a preliminary examination of the influence of sports personalities on audience growth within a specific sport. Additionally, the study could provide insights into how a distinct group, such as respondents from the volleyball league, collectively perceives sports personalities, serving as a foundation for further investigations into the impact of sports figures in this context. The results presented here may offer a starting point for subsequent studies in sports management and the development of effective, pragmatic strategies for practitioners aiming to maintain a steady flow of sports consumers. Given the dynamic nature of the factors of sports consumption motivations, this study may serve as foundational work for future research on sports fandom and marketing, particularly in understanding the motivational drivers of sports fans. Moreover, this research may provide valuable insights to gauge ways to attract Filipino audiences to a specific sports league, mainly as influenced by star players, considering the Philippines' strong historical and cultural identification with basketball popularity (Antolihao, 2012). Subsequently, follow-up research is proposed as the findings of these recommended studies could provide a jump-off point for derivative studies that would be operative and practical in continually evolving the available literature and studies on sports marketing and sports management.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This descriptive research employed a cross-sectional quantitative approach focused on a daypart-limited probability sample. Data collection involved administering surveys using questionnaires at the game venue on three consecutive occasions from April 23 to 27, 2024. Specific emphasis has been placed on the timing of visits – considering days of the week and daypart – to increase the likelihood of capturing fan representatives from all twelve league teams.

2.2 Participants of the Study

Respondents to this research were randomly chosen in situ at the Philsports Arena, the venue of the matches, in Pasig City on the fourth week of April, the last week of the preliminary round of the league's conference, following a procedure that imposed the least disruption on the live viewing of the acceding subjects. The survey participants are all ticket holders. The study excluded non-paying spectators, members of the press, venue personnel, league staff, and their guests from participation.

The study utilized an intercept survey method with a convenience quota non-probability sampling approach. Respondents were recruited from among the game audience members during the specified time frame. Based on the highest number of spectators on record for a single game day (Agcaoili, 2024), the study aimed to recruit 250 respondents to participate in the survey, approximately 1% of that record number. The median age of respondents is 31, with the mean age at 33.76 ± 1.64 . Most survey participants are female, accounting for 63.20%, while 36.80% are male. At 72%, most respondents identified themselves as heterosexual, 48.40% of whom are female – almost a quarter (22.40%) of the respondents declared themselves members of the LGBTQI community. The respondents were also classified into eight (8) age categories from 15 years old and below to 70 years old and above. In line with ethical standards, aside from the assent of the participant deemed not yet of legal age, prior consent from the accompanying parent or adult was sought and obtained.

Further, the survey participants were classified into three (3) groups regarding work status as respondent type, with the majority working. Respondents who declared they are students (17.60%) are primarily under 20 years old (9.60%). Those in the age bracket 50-59 years are prevalently working (19 out of 21), while most respondents in the age range 20-49 years also work (183 out of 194).

2.3 Research Instrument

This study used a modified version of the Project Sports Questionnaire, a structured questionnaire developed in earlier research by Kho (2018). The questionnaire included 13 questions with pre-determined, close-ended response options, focusing on various aspects of the participants' sociodemographic characteristics and their motivations (reasons for following the league, essential traits of favorite league player), preferences (favorite league team, importance of favorite league player, level of fanhood), and consumption patterns (live audience frequency, league following in other platforms) as league fans. Each variable's respective Cronbach's alphas were 0.710, 0.719, and 0.719.

Importance of a Favorite League Player and Level of Fanhood

Preferences were measured by questions asking for a favorite league team, favorite league player, and self-assessment of the level of league fanhood. The first two items were multiple-choice questions. The third item used a Likert scale. Participants were asked to rate a single item, *"You mentioned that you have watched a league match at least once or follow sports news about the league in any media. Which of the following best describes you as a fan of any team in the league?"* to indicate their level of fanhood using a Likert scale of 5 to 1, with 5 as "definitely an avid fan" and 1 for "definitely not an avid fan." On the other hand, participants were asked to consider the importance of having a favorite league player for spectators to be attracted to or interested in the league on a scale of 5 (definitely important) to 1 (definitely not important).

Attributes of a Favorite League

Questions on motivations corresponded to reasons for following the league and essential traits of a favorite league player. The questions for this variable utilized a Likert scale. Its second item used the construct of psychological motives that relate to team and athlete identification cataloged by Funk and James (2002, 2006), as discussed in the study of Absten (2011). The variable of consumption patterns as league fans corresponded to questions on live audience frequency and league following on other platforms. Both were multiple-choice questions. A list of attributes of a favorite league player composed of seventeen (17) traits were rated by the respondents along a five-point Likert-type scale, from 1 (definitely not important) to 5 (definitely important). These traits were then factor analyzed and yielded three factors, namely "vicarious achievement" (for items exciting, entertaining, winnable, articulate, humble beginnings, and good looking), "nostalgia" (for items passionate, professional, respectful, fair, approachable, and humble), and "peer group acceptance" (for items townmate, schoolmate, having familial

connection, and influence of friend/family). The internal consistency of each of these factor traits was determined with Cronbach's alpha of 0.710 (factor 1 - vicarious achievement), 0.719 (factor 2 - nostalgia), and 0.719 (factor 3 - peer group acceptance).

In Kho (2018), the validity of the original version of the survey questionnaire was established. Expert validity was sought by consulting a statistician who evaluated the research instrument. Additionally, the over-time and across-items measures of consistency were used to assess the reliability of the questionnaire before conducting the previous research. The reliability was quantified using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, 0.77, while internal consistency yielded Cronbach's alpha level of 0.74.

2.4 Procedure

The study protocol was approved by the University of the Philippines College of Human Kinetics Research Ethics Committee (Protocol no. 2024-0001-F-CHKUPD). In conducting the survey, the main proponent and three research assistants approached potential respondents and extended a polite invitation to participate in the study. Six of all prospective respondents approached to participate in the survey declined. Respondents were asked if they were fans of any league team or player. Individuals who did not qualify were excluded from the survey and were not given the questionnaire. Further, the interview would be terminated once the respondent indicated he/she wished to discontinue. Questionnaires were given to 250 respondents selected by intercept sampling and agreed to participate in the survey. The researchers provided explanations for participants requiring clarification on specific questionnaire items. Show cards were also used as visual aids to help respondents clarify questions in the survey sheet.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis employed descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, alongside inferential statistics, such as Spearman's rho and Chi-square test where appropriate, to determine relationships between variables. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$. Data normality was determined using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Values were reported as Mean $\pm$ standard deviation. The SPSS software (IBM Statistical Package, Version 29) was used for data analysis. Specifically, the analysis explored possible correlations with other participant demographic factors. The study's variables were cross-tabulated to identify potential associations to achieve this objective.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Level of League Fanhood and the Importance of a Favorite League Player

As previously mentioned, utilizing Absten's (2011) concept of Sports Fandom, which classifies the extent of audience engagement in any sport across any platform along a continuum from low to high engagement, respondents were asked to rate their level of engagement. This rating was conducted using a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (definitely not an avid fan of the league) to 5 (definitely an avid fan of the league). Respondents were classified as 'avid league fans' based on the variable's computed mean value (4.34). Similarly, on a scale of 1 (definitely not important) to 5 (definitely important), respondents considered having a favorite league player as 'important' to be attracted to or interested in the league (Importance of a Favorite League Player) as indicated by the computed mean value (4.41) (Table 1). The computed Spearman's rho coefficient between "level of league manhood" and "the importance of a favorite league player" is $r(249) = 0.191$, $p = .002$, which indicates a weak significant positive correlation between the two variables.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics on the level of fanhood and importance of a favorite league player (level of significance $p < .05$)

Variables	Mean	SD	Spearman's rho	Sig.
Level of fanhood	4.34	0.808		
Importance of a favorite league player	4.41	0.718	.191*	0.002

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

3.2 Sports Consumption Pattern of a League Fan

Live Audience Frequency

Survey respondents were asked to recall how many times they have attended a live game during the league conference since the current season started. The league matches occur thrice a week – Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. First-time live game spectators outnumber those who have watched a live game more than once during the said period. Those who disclosed watching all games of their favorite league team have watched a live game

more than twice but less than five times, and as a second time live game audience account, aggregately, for almost the same number of respondents (Table 2).

The results reveal that most respondents are first-time attendees at live venue league events. This trend suggests that the league's fandom has not yet reached its peak, indicating that while the fan base is still in its nascent stage, it is experiencing rapid growth. This observation supports the potential for further expansion and engagement within the league's audience. However, most of the respondents are repeat live-game spectators, indicating a parallelism to the findings of Johnson et al. (2020) that emphasized that sports fans affirm their identity as fans by engaging in repetitive and supportive behaviors concerning the sport or team they are passionate about.

Table 2. Percentage ranking of live game attendance

Attendance	Frequency	Percentage
First-time spectator	114	45.60
All games of favorite league team	40	16.00
More than twice but less than five times	37	14.80
Second time to watch live game	32	12.80
All league games	12	4.80
Once a week	9	3.60
Twice a week	6	2.40
Total	250	100.00

Note. All-Filipino Conference, from Feb. 20, 2024, as the period of consideration

Favorite League Team

Among the twelve participating teams in the league's conference, "Team A" was identified by 39.60% of the respondents as their favorite team, whereas "Team B" was the choice team of 25.20% of respondents. "Team C" was identified by 10.80% of respondents as their favorite team. "Team D" and "Team E" have approximately the same number of fans among the respondents at 6% and 5.60%, respectively. The other league teams had fewer than ten mentions, except for "Team L," which did not obtain any mentions from the respondents.

Favorite League Player

Each respondent was allowed to identify their top three favorite league players. Seventy-four names came out in the fan mentions. Player 1 from "Team A," the league champion of the conference, obtained the most mentions at 19.22%. All the top 10 favorite league players mentioned by the fans are from the top 5 favorite league teams, particularly Player 2 (Team B) with 10%, Player 3 (Team A) with 9.22%, Player 4 (Team A) 6.41%, Player 5 (Team B) 6.09%, Player 6 (Team A) 3.91%, Player 7 (Team B) 3.44%, Player 8 (Team E) 2.97%, and Player 9 (Team D) and Player 10 (Team C) each with 2.66% of fan mentions.

3.3 Motives for League Fan Engagement

Two of the most frequently cited motivations for why respondents follow the league are "because of the excitement in every game" and "I want to see my favorite league player play." The second reason directly attributes their interest to the 'sports personality,' highlighting that the presence and performance of specific athletes significantly influence their engagement with league games (Table 3).

The findings highlight the central importance of a favorite league player—their quality of play and inherent personal attributes—in determining why fans follow the league. This is exemplified by respondents' choice of "Player 1" as the top favorite league player, who belongs to the league's conference champion team, "Team A." This supports the findings of Reyes et al. (2018), which revealed that fans watch the games primarily because of the players, mainly due to their skill and the excitement they bring. Furthermore, Brandes (2008) found that when the star player participates (or Player 1 in this research), it significantly influences fan interest and game attendance. The findings indicate that the primary motivation for fans following the league is the presence of a favorite player, highlighting the central importance of the player's quality of play and inherent personal attributes. This suggests that individual athletes' performances and characteristics drive fan engagement with the league. As discussed in "Sports, Narrative, and Nation in the Fiction of F. Scott Fitzgerald" (McDonald, 2007), fans are drawn to sports primarily due to the players' performance. McDonald references a study by Cady (1976), emphasizing that communication between fans and players fosters a social interaction sphere. Cady posited that "In connection with [the Big Game], several different games go on simultaneously, inside the stadium and out. Though all focus

on and take symbolic cues from the athletes' game, each plays to its own ends." This insight underscores the multifaceted nature of fan engagement, where the focal point remains the athletes' performance, yet each fan's experience and interaction are uniquely personalized.

Table 3. Percentage ranking of reasons for watching live the league matches (n=250)

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Because of the excitement in every game	91	36.40
I want to see my favorite league player play	71	28.40
Because the game inspires me	19	7.60
I want to see my favorite league team	18	7.20
To get tips or techniques about volleyball	17	6.80
Because of the unpredictability of the game	11	4.40
To be updated about the league/volleyball	11	4.40
Others	7	2.80
To have something to discuss with my close friends and relatives	5	2.00

3.4 Attributes of a Favorite League Player

The respondents rated the list of attributes of a favorite league player along a five-point Likert-type scale, from 1 (definitely not important) to 5 (definitely important). Ranked according to the importance given by the respondents, 11 attributes figured highly – passionate, professional, respectful, fair, approachable, humble, exciting, entertaining, winnable, articulate, and humble beginnings. The responses on the first seven identified traits appear clustered around the mean (4.78), indicating that respondents favor a “definitely important” ascription. The traits of entertaining, winnable, articulate, and humble beginnings, with a 4.32 composite mean, were considered “moderately important” by respondents. The respondents were ambivalent towards the traits popular, good looking, and influence of friends or family, receiving a composite mean of 3.53. Being a townmate, having familial connections, and being a schoolmate tend to be considered unimportant by respondents, obtaining a 2.59 cumulative mean.

Table 4. Factor analysis of the traits of a favorite league player

Attributes	Factor 1 Vicarious achievement	Factor 2 Nostalgia	Factor 3 Peer group acceptance
Goodlooking	0.808		
Popular	0.792		
Entertaining	0.714		
Humble beginnings	0.688		
Articulate	0.576		
Exciting	0.555		
Respectful		0.752	
Humble		0.701	
Approachable		0.658	
Passionate		0.633	
Professional		0.505	
Fair		0.453	
Schoolmate			0.827
Familial affinity			0.819
Townmate			0.817
Winnable	0.357		
Influence of friend or family			0.344

Three (3) factors were generated from the factor analysis (Table 4) based on the construct of Funk and James (2002, 2006). These attributes were clustered and named accordingly: vicarious achievement (the need for social prestige, self-esteem, and a sense of empowerment that individuals can receive from their association with a successful team or athlete), nostalgia (the need to experience pleasurable stress or stimulation gained from the drama of the event), and peer group acceptance (the need to interact and socialize with others of like interests to achieve feelings that one is part of a group). Six traits are accounted for by Factor 1 (vicarious achievement). These traits are good-looking, popular, entertaining, humble beginnings, articulate, exciting, and winnable. The traits of respect, humility, approachability, passion, professionalism, and fairness are detailed in Factor 2 (nostalgia). Factor 3 (peer group acceptance) is depicted by the traits of a schoolmate, familial affinity, townmate, and influence of family or friend. The findings underscore that passion, professionalism, respect, fairness, approachability, humility, and

excitement are the most critical attributes of a league player and indicate vicarious achievement and nostalgia as the essential factors that attract or interest them to the league.

3.5 Relationship Among Level of League Fanhood, Importance of a Favorite League Player, and Traits of a Favorite League Player

The components “level of league fanhood,” “importance of a favorite league player,” and “traits of a favorite league player,” including the average of all factors, were then cross-correlated with each other (Table 5). Except for factor 3 (peer group acceptance) in correspondence with the level of league fanhood and the importance of a favorite league player, the generated result revealed that all variables, as mentioned earlier, have significant values, as shown in the respective values from a 2-tailed test. Compared to the correlations across the three trait factors, the cross-correlations of league fanhood, importance of a favorite league player, and traits of a favorite league player registered at a relatively lower level. These variables, however, have a direct relationship with one another, which was established as significant according to the gathered data. The respondents’ responses indicated that factor 3 (peer group acceptance) has no significant relationship with either level of league fanhood or the importance of a favorite league player. Further, data results show that the traits under factor 3 are individually considered opposite the variables “level of league manhood” or “the importance of a favorite league player” and have no significant relationship with either.

Table 5. Cross-correlation of the level of league fanhood, importance of a favorite league player, and trait factors of a favorite league player

Variables		Ave. of All Factors	Factor 1 Vicarious achievement	Factor 2 Nostalgia	Factor 3 Peer group acceptance
Level of League Fanhood	Spearman’s rho Correlation	0.221**	0.284**	0.174**	0.036
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.006	0.574
Importance of Favorite League Player	Spearman’s rho Correlation	0.222**	0.220**	0.209**	0.056
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.379

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Factor 1 (F1), Factor 2 (F2), Factor 3 (F3)

A possible assumption on the apparent lack of significant relationship between factor 3 or its traits and the variables “level of league fanhood” or “the importance of a favorite league player” is that respondents likely have a strong inclination for intrinsic motivation to follow the league or their favorite league player (Wann et al., 2001). It appears that league fans’ autonomy and control orientations concerning sports consumption motivation highly influence their fanhood.

The findings on the identified attributes and factors about favorite league players resonate with Filipino traits that characterize, among others, deep respect, kinship, and camaraderie (Guerrero et al., 2011). This is pointed out by the results where a predominant majority of the responses indicate a high tendency for favorite league player attribute factor “nostalgia” (the need to experience pleasurable stress or stimulation gained from the drama of the event), which is comprised by the traits “respectful,” “humble,” “approachable,” “passionate,” “professional,” and “fair.” Similarly, the attribute factor “vicarious achievement” (the need for social prestige, self-esteem, and a sense of empowerment that individuals can receive from their association with a successful team or athlete) is accounted for by the traits “good looking,” “popular,” “entertaining,” “humble beginnings,” “articulate,” and “exciting” is signified by most respondents. This parallels the study findings of Kim et al. (2020), which showed vicarious achievement as one of the strongest motivations of fans for attending a football game. It may indicate that league fans highly regard shared values even only in the context of surrogate lived experience. The findings illustrate a close correspondence of these cultural qualities of Filipinos, which translates to sports fanhood as indicated by the attribute factors of favorite league players and their most desired traits.

3.6 Differences in Responses on the Traits of a Favorite League Player According to Occupation, Age Range, Gender, and Gender Identity

The demographic attributes—age range, occupation, gender, and gender identity—were cross-referenced with each trait of a favorite league player using the chi-square test of independence. The results revealed that of the 17 traits identified, only five showed a significant relationship with the specific demographic attributes of age, gender, and gender identity. Occupation, as a demographic characteristic, did not show a significant relationship with any of the traits.

The relationships between age range and the traits “schoolmate,” “professional,” and “entertaining” were significant χ^2 (df=28, N=250) =54.65, p =.008, χ^2 (df=7, N=250) =26.17, p <.001, and χ^2 (df=28, N=250) =49.36, p =.002, respectively. The trait “winnable” had a significant relationship with gender, χ^2 (df=4, N=250) =11.54, p =.021, while gender identity was significantly related to the trait “good-looking,” χ^2 (df=8, N=250) =15.64, p =.048. Younger respondents were more likely to prefer league players who exhibit the traits “schoolmate,” “professional,” and “entertaining.” Women tended to prefer league players who were perceived as “winnable.” Respondents who identified as members of the LGBTQI community were more inclined to follow league players because of their good looks.

The results reveal that the traits of league players that influence attracting fans to the league are influenced in varying degrees and extent by the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents – age, gender, and gender identity. This parallels the findings of Asada et al. (2020), which illustrated that the relative size and homogeneity of sports fan communities can impact potential fans’ support intentions. However, distinctions must be made as to which characteristics affect the valuation of the fans for the league players and their traits. Regarding gender, there is a significant difference in league fanhood or the level of engagement between male and female respondents. Female league fans will likely follow league players based on the winnability trait. This partly reflects the findings of Clarke et al. (2022), who highlighted that the most vital motives of sports fans, both male and female, were physical skill and achievement of the teams they support. Hall (2006) likewise explored the motivations behind game attendance among women, compared them to those of male attendees, and found that targeted management and promotional strategies could significantly influence female attendance. The top two favorite league teams, “Team A” and “Team B,” became champions and first runner-up in the recently concluded league conference. The two teams enjoyed the most media coverage leading to the championship, capitalizing on the regularities of their wins. Consequently, social media presence also further increased the market value of star players, enhancing their market value beyond what is solely determined by their sports performance (Dašić et al., 2021).

Regarding gender identity, data reveals that the league enjoys a significant fan base composed of members of the LGBTQI community. This may be interpreted as the league being an organization that can convey the message of gender inclusivity. Corollary to this, responses from this group indicate that LGBTQI fans, compared to those who declared they are heterosexual, tend to be more particular about physical attributes or looks in their valuation of their favorite league player.

The findings about the age of respondents having an influence on their consideration for the importance of a favorite league player, mainly as elicited by the traits “entertaining,” “professional,” and “schoolmate,” bear interesting parallelism with that of the finding of Tamir (2020). In that study, three variables significantly impact the degree to which young fans transition into serious fanhood. These are (a) social support or the extent to which their friends view their fandom positively; (b) availability of broadcasts or a fan’s access to game broadcasts and other team content; and (c) the team’s professional success, which is also related to the earlier two variables (Tamir, 2019). The trait “schoolmate” may be linked with “a,” “entertaining,” and “b,” while “professional” has a similarity with “c.” In the local setting, the results may also be an interesting avenue to test the hypothesis that younger generation Filipino fans, compared to older counterparts, tend to regard more the aspects of group identity, demeanor, and fun about sports personalities concerning their consumption patterns. The affinity of young fans to group identity may seem paradoxical to the findings in this study as peer group acceptance does not figure decisively as an essential factor. A probable interpretation for this is that younger fans do not necessarily feel threatened by being ostracized, even if they do not share with their group the same appreciation for a favorite league player, particularly of its traits. This partly matches what Appelbaum et al. (2012) mentioned: individuals who report higher levels of sports spectating, such as being a sports fan, tend to have higher levels of extraversion.

3.7 Implications

This study aimed to analyze the rising popularity of volleyball in the Philippines in the context of a local professional league. It explored the possible factors that contribute to the widespread appeal of the league (Torralba, 2020), as indicated by the extensive age range of its audience. A significant aspect identified is the role of star players in establishing an emotional connection between the fans and the league teams. The importance of these star players, as revealed by the high importance of player attributes that resonate with the Filipino psyche,

points to an essential aspect in understanding the case of sports fandom in the country. The study's results underscored the significant relationship between the level of fanhood and the importance of a favorite star player. With the assessment of the engagement of league fans, it has been presented that the star players' ability to connect with the attributes highly valued by fans may broadly impact the overall fan experience.

The implications of the study's findings for sports marketing may merit a measure of consideration. Although relevant studies on sports fanhood provide empirical evidence that star players are the critical drivers for fan engagement (Pifer et al., 2015), it has to be differentiated that fans across different social spheres are not impervious to local cultural influence. Volleyball teams and organizations should focus on developing and promoting star players who connect with the Filipino audience. By understanding the emotional and cultural factors that build fan loyalty, sports marketers can harness the influence of these star players to improve the fan experience, enhance engagement, and ultimately support the sport's growth and sustainability in the locale. This echoes the line of inquiry of Brown-Devlin and Devlin (2020) in their study, which sought to examine which type of people are drawn to sport and its underlying reasons. Furthermore, the emotional component of sports fan consumption motivation should be noticed. Paek et al. (2020) mentioned in their study that emotionally driven sports motivation plays a role in the quality of relationships between fans and teams.

3.8 Strengths and Limitations

The study focused on how fans perceive the league's volleyball players and the league itself. While this study provides added knowledge on the influence of star players in the league fandom, it is important to recognize certain limitations. The findings of this research may not be universally applicable to the entire professional sports landscape of the Philippines, as they will be explicitly based on fans' perceptions about the league and its players. Extrapolating the results to other leagues or different sports should be done cautiously. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce partiality, as there may be occasions where participants may underreport or overreport their behaviors due to social desirability or memory lapses. This study adopts a cross-sectional design, limiting its ability to establish a full representation of the league fandom and the role of league players in it. Longitudinal studies would provide more substantial evidence regarding the findings of the study. Despite these limitations, this research hopes to provide a valuable understanding of the dynamic interplay between sports personalities and fandom by employing fan information and perceptions about the league and its players.

4.0 Conclusion

The findings suggest that respondents' general perception of the importance of a favorite league player and their attribute factors serve as antecedents to their attraction to the league. Further, results indicate that the level of league fanhood and the importance of a favorite league player are mutually associated. The findings also suggest that the favorable valuation assigned by participants to the importance of a favorite league player and their attribute factors, influenced by specific demographic characteristics, plays a crucial role in attracting audiences to the league. The significance of a favorite league player, particularly star players, has a direct and reciprocal relationship with the level of league fanhood in drawing fans to the league.

While participants distinguish between the importance of a favorite league player and the traits that attract audiences to the league, these two aspects are interdependent. The highly rated traits, emphasizing emotions such as vicarious achievement and nostalgia, are necessary for fans to appreciate the players and follow the league. This suggests that star players exert a significant influence in attracting fans, and there exists a culturally driven proclivity toward emotional attachment among fans of the sports league under consideration. The researchers recommend a similar study with a broader scope of participants selected through more rigorous instrumentation. Similarly, a follow-up longitudinal study with a more robust population to obtain more illustrative conclusions on the same subject matter could be an addition to the available body of knowledge. The findings of these recommended studies provide a desirable jump-off point for derivative studies that would be operative and practical in continually evolving the available literature and studies on sports marketing and sports management.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

The authors collaborated in the conception and design of the study. The primary author led the in-situ data gathering and wrote the proposal manuscript for the research paper and the results presentation. The second author performed data analysis, manuscript proofreading, and editing and wrote the conclusion. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of this work.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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