

# **Verbal and physical behaviors among football fans: A study of Malaysia football fans at the stadium**

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## **Abstract**

This study focused on behaviors which are combining of verbal and physical behaviors among football fans at the stadium. Football is one of the popular sports in the world. Fans now days, watching football not just because they want to fill their leisure time, but for them football is being a part of their life. There are many types of fans coming to the stadium and some of the fans are really fanatic with the team. Verbal and physical behaviors among football fans is not a new issue in Malaysia but lately, this phenomena keep repeating happen and it show that the fans never learn from the mistakes. A survey was done to obtain the data. Numbers of 600 football fans from state of Kelantan, Perak, Selangor and Johor were chosen to be respondents. These fourth teams known because they have huge fans and their fans always break the rules and the team also keep being punished and fined by Football Association of Malaysia (FAM). Respondents around age 18-50 years old were involved within this study (81% male & 19% women). The data showed that various attitudes and behaviour were occur while they were watching

live at the stadium. Talking to each other, screaming and singing are nature scenes at the stadium. 77.8% of respondents said they were also talking bad about the opponent team and their fans. While 38.2% of respondents admitted that they were involved in provocation with opponent fans. Throwing the objects (rocks and bottles) always happens at the stadium. And the reasons they done it are because their angry and feeling dissatisfied with the referee decisions. All the behaviours either verbal's or physicals were not happen if these fans have a spirit of sportsmanship.

**Keywords:** *football fans, verbal behaviors, physical behaviors, deviant behaviors, attitudes*

## **1. Introduction**

Sports are an essential and important aspect of Malaysian society and sport itself give an impact to the society. Sports coincide with community values and political agencies, as it attempts to define the morals and ethics attributed not only to athletes but the society as whole (Macri 2012). Football is number one sport in Malaysia although the Malaysia League is not famous as English Premier League (EPL), but still there are loyal and fanatic fans behind the club in Malaysia League. Being fans, they could reduce stress and get entertainment from sport event so it could relax body and mind (Huang 2011). The role as fans to the team is huge, they provide a supports and motivations to the players so that players can perform well at the match and win the game. According to Kao (2002), the players are motivated by the support given by the fans. The performance of the players and team are indirectly affected by the support from their fans.

Fans known that they play a big role to determine win or lose of their team that is why they are trying to show their support by buy a ticket and attending every game at the stadium. With that, fans also hoping that their supports and sacrifices (money, time and energy) will bring a victory to the team. But, if the result turn to opposite and the team lose, there are huge potential that the fans will get frustrating and some of them may get angry. According to Spaijj (2006), all the frustration, anger and dissatisfaction will turn to misbehavior among football fans.

Fans against the norms and laws is not a new issue in Malaysia, media keep write about the misbehavior among football fans and it shows that the fans never learn from the mistakes. The verbal and physical behavior still can be seen at the stadium. While Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) trying to control this issue, but it seen almost impossible to make sure all the fans obey the norms and rules provided by the authority. It is because, the numbers of the fans turn up at the stadium is huge comparing to the numbers of security officers at the stadium.

## **2. Research Methodology**

This study employed a survey using a questionnaire to obtain the data. The data presented in this paper is the data derived from a study conducted on 600 football fans from four different teams/states. The fourth teams are Kelantan, Johor, Selangor and Perak, the reason why these fans were chosen because of all fourth teams well known of their fans. They have huge fans, most of them were fanatic to the team and the team also has been punished by FAM because of failure to control the behavior of their fans.

Respondents of the study consisted of male and female football fans between aged 18 to 50 years old. Data from the survey was processed and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data was then presented via descriptive frequency to determine the frequency of occurrence. Besides that, non-participant observation was conducted to obtain further information especially in relation to the types of behavior commonly shown by supporters while in the stadium.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

#### 3.1 Verbal behavior at the stadium

Watching football especially at the stadium is really exciting. The environment at the stadium can bring up the spirit to watching the game. Being surrounding with thousands other fans, wearing the same clothes, shouting the same slogans, and singing the same theme song make the feeling as a fans is much higher than before (Kelly 1996). Besides these, the supporters also carry banners, flags, mufflers, etc. as an identity to support their favorite team. In fact, some supporters colour their bodies and faces with the flag of their favourite team. All these elements add on to the lively atmosphere which can only be felt in the stadium. At the moment, they just want to give the full supports to their team and wishing the victory of the team.

Before discuss more about the behavior occur at the stadium, it is essential to know what are the respondents think about the environment at the stadium (watching live at the stadium). Majority of the respondents (92 percents) said that the environment at the stadium is chaotic and noise. There a lot of fans with a full of support to their team, wanting the team to win and some of them not ready to lose. Because of the tenses, it will derive misbehavior to occur especially among fanatic fans. Some of the respondents said that, the chaotic and noise while watching at live at the stadium are normal because of the nature of watching football; full of shouting, yelling, screaming and all of that actually give more excitement and enjoyment. While other respondents added, there is no wrong if the fans want to have more fun while watching the game as long as they're not breaking the rules. This is because it is this kind of atmosphere which would potentially warm up another match. The duty as a supporter is to always support the team. Therefore, it would be impossible for a football match if there were no screaming and shouting words of encouragement.

Table 1.1: Verbal behavior at the stadium

Verbal behavior	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Talking / Conversing</i>	578	96.3
<i>Shouting</i>	567	94.5
<i>Shouting team slogans</i>	572	95.3
<i>Singing team songs</i>	571	95.2
<i>Mocking opposing team/player</i>	467	77.8
<i>Voicing dissatisfaction against match officials</i>	462	77.0
<i>Provoking supporters of opposing team</i>	371	61.8

Source: Field Study 2015 (N=600)

Table 1.1 shows the kinds of verbal behavior that were displayed by respondents in the stadium. Talking with other fans is the most verbal behavior occur (96.3%), the fans

tend to talking about the tactical, the player and the game while watching it. Surprisingly if the respondents came alone to the stadium, they also talking and commenting about the game with other fans sitting next to them. Just exactly what Wann, Brewer and Royalty (1999) said that while watching live at the stadium, fans develop the relationship within other fans which they never knew before. Other verbal behavior normally occurs are shouting team slogans (95.3%) and singing team songs (95.2%). These kinds of behaviors actually trying to motivate the players so that they more confident and will perform well. Actions such as mocking players and the opposing team (77.8%), provoking the opponent fans (61.8%) and voicing their discontent against match officials (77.0%) had also been committed by the respondents. Provocation such as mocking the opposing team, shouting vulgar and obscene words were among some of the actions committed. And for them, these behaviors were normal and did not contravene rules. However, for the rest of the respondents, even though they did not commit such acts, they claimed that they had personally witnessed situations of provocation and mocking of the opposing team while in the stadium. The same goes for voicing grievances against the decisions of match officials, especially the referee and the linesmen. Cursing is often made out against match officials if respondents were not satisfied with the decision of the match officials or considered a decision made by the match officials as being biased.

As a fans, they normally said the verbal behavior is a normal things to do at the stadium but what they do not know or realize is that this kind of verbal behavior is also considered as deviant behavior because it contravenes norms and rules which is prohibit fans from any form of provocation, mocking, insulting or even degrading other supporters (Spaaij 2006). When verbal behavior becomes more evident, the tendency for supporters to act increases physically. With the noisy and chaotic atmosphere in the stadium, the mocking between supporters, the provocation and the negative reception towards the provocations hurled would eventually become the cause of more serious misconduct which involves physical misconduct.

### ***3.2 Physical behavior at the stadium***

Some of the researcher said crowd violence related of direct or indirect acts of physical violence by sport spectators, at or away from sports arena, that result in injury to person or damage to property (Young 2000). Well known as 'hooliganism', especially at Europe country, this issue of violence among football spectators already been discuss from 1980s (Kerr 1994). Fighting with opponent fans, damage property and throwing objects are the physical behavior normally occurs within hooliganism. They also known as a fanatic fan to the team and have a sense of belonging within their team.

Although in Malaysia, physical behavior at the stadium also happens in every matches but this situation is not worse compare to the European country. But, if this issue does not tackle in early stage, Malaysia also will face of hooliganism phenomena in future. Football fans in Malaysia nowadays are more brave, bold and fanatic to their team. Compare too few years back (10 years ago), rarely heard about the misbehavior of football fans at the stadium.

Table 1.2 shows the kinds of physical behavior that are often displayed by respondents when they are in the stadium. A total of 304 respondents admitted that they had damaged public property such as chairs and even toilets in the stadium. Reason they doing that were because they got frustrated of loses the game. While 38.2 percent of

the respondents also involved in incidents of throwing objects (drink bottles, garbage, coins) into the field. According to the respondents, the behavior was driven by outrage against the decision of match officials which were deemed to be biased. These respondents tend to blame everyone especially the referee if their team loses the battle. They just can swallow the reality that in every game, they always have a winner and losing team.

FAM already listed a few forbidden objects such as drinking bottles, rocks, sticks, firecrackers and lasers and fans did not allow bringing all those items into the stadium. Security measures have been taken especially at the entrance to the stadium, but there are still supporters who successfully smuggled in forbidden items into the stadium. This was proven as there were respondents who stated that they had lit and thrown firecrackers (11.5% of respondents) while watching football matches. This situation showed that the security control does not working very well and perhaps the control not been done in holistic way.

Table 1.2: Physical behavior at the stadium

<b>Physical behavior</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>Damaging public property</i>	304	50.7
<i>Throwing objects into the middle of the field</i>	229	38.2
<i>Lighting up and throwing firecrackers</i>	69	11.5
<i>Lighting flares</i>	62	10.3
<i>Fighting</i>	220	36.7
<i>Showing obscene gestures</i>	408	68.0

Source: Field study 2015

Similarly, with the case of the flares, whereby there were respondents (62 of respondents) admitted that they lighted flares as an indication in celebrating the victory of their team. According to Spaij (2006), a celebratory violence is quite common within spectators especially when they want to celebrate something (goals, penalty kick and winning the game). A total of 220 of respondents were involved in fighting with supporters of opposing teams. Fighting occurred as a result of severe provocation that was not well-received by the supporters. It started with a mocking episode, followed by the throwing of objects and finally ends with a fight. Fights usually involved more than one supporter and the respondents were lucky as they were not detained by the authorities due to the factor of too many supporters which made it difficult to make an arrest. According to the respondents, there were indeed many cases of fighting which occurred between supporters in the stadium, especially involving fanatic supporters. However, not many could be arrested or broadcasted in the mass media.

Showing obscene gestures also one of the physical behavior displayed by the respondents. A number of 408 respondents showed lewd gestures to supporters of the opposing team and also to match officials. This occurred instigated by the factor of frustration due to the defeat of their favorite team and to show dissatisfaction towards the match officials. In addition, the sense of frustration and dissatisfaction were also directed towards the supporters of the opposing team especially when they celebrated their victory in a way which could trigger anger in the losing team. It is true that we are often fed with the fact that each game must have a winning team and a losing team. But, for a handful of supporters to accept the reality of a defeat is quite difficult let

alone if before this, they had high hopes of their favorite team winning (Coackley 2009).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Sports and audience cannot be separated, the role of audience such as spectators and fans is huge to the development of sport itself. Football is one of the most popular sports around the world. Watching football live at the stadium more excitement and more happiness rather than sitting in front of television. That is why many of football fans willing to invest some money to buy a ticket just to make sure they have an opportunity to watching a live game. Normally the number of fans turn up at the stadium is thousands of fans and it will be a challenging to the security official to make sure all the fans follow the norms and rules.

Issue of misbehavior among football fans never will solved if the fans itself doesn't want to change their attitudes. As fans, they should be more responsibility for their behavior. Tobe a fans of certain team, they actually need to control their attitudes so that it will not affect their team as well. Sportsmanship spirit supposes to be the main element in every fan so that they can accept the fact of winning or losing of their team. Sport should be enjoy to watch because it will decrease of the stress at work or home, not in other way which is to added more stress to us as fans.

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