Tweeting triumphs and tribulations: the experiences of women football fans on social media

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Increased visibility of women in sports fandom, but not a recent phenomenon (Gemar & Pope, 2022).

Pope (2017) theorizes a ‘feminization’ of sports fandom since the 1990s.

Number of women attending men’s games is steadily increasing (Kossakowski & Besta, 2023).

Social media has emerged as a powerful platform to connect and engage.

This research investigates the experiences of women football fans on X.
Women and sports fandom

Football remains male-orientated (Pitti, 2019; Pope, 2016), resulting in a dearth of research focusing on women sports fans (Pope, 2017; Toffoletti, 2017).

Women fans historically considered less authentic, outsiders (Pfister et al., 2013), and possess limited knowledge (Crawford & Gosling, 2004).

Women and social media in sport

Social media neither universally good, nor bad (Baccarella et al., 2018).

Marginalised and unwanted advances (Hynes & Cook, 2013), sexism and misogyny (Pfister et al., 2013).

High levels of abuse (Amnesty International, 2018).

Exclusion for women fans = not inclined to engage, or alterations in behaviours (Fenton et al., 2023).
The focus

RQ: What insights can be drawn from the experiences of women football fans engaging in discussion about men’s football on X?
Reseach Design

- Sought the views of women fans of men's UK based football teams
- Online survey disseminated through social media and networks
- 1,624 women completed the survey
- Diversity in age groups, cultural backgrounds, and team affiliations
- Open ended questions underwent thematic analysis
Findings – triumphs

Uses of social media
* Celebrate victories
* Share analysis
* Connect with other supporters
* Platform to showcase knowledge and passion

Thriving online community
* Challenging gender norms
* Promoting inclusivity
* Support beyond physical boundaries
Findings – triumphs

Chelsea fan, age 36-45
I like to tweet about my team as a way of enhancing the in-match experience. It's great to see what others are thinking about match selections, individual performances and so on.

Birmingham City fan, age 26-35
Not all my experiences have been positive but, for the most part, the people I actually follow are great. I've met up with quite a few at matches and made some friends that I wouldn't have if it weren't for Twitter!

Leeds United fan, age 36-45
I don't have many female friends who like football so having this device that allows me to connect with others sort of opens up my world.
Content warning

The following slide contains explicit language and descriptions of violence
I've been called misogynistic slurs such as whore for expressing a mild opinion. For example I once tweeted “I think we won but I couldn’t really see” with a photo of the view from my seat at West Ham and got a torrent of abuse over it.

Tottenham Hotspur fan, age 26-35

When we beat City earlier this year I tweeted about Rashford’s winner. The abuse I received from City fans was astonishing. Was called all sorted of names, threatened with violence, stalking and rape.

Manchester United fan, age 36-45

Been told I should stick to washing up or the kitchen. Told to fuck off and go and knit. Told I’d be raped to name a few.

Manchester City fan, age 46-55

I was once told ‘your analysis is as useless as your ovaries, stick to makeup tutorials’. I actually thought it was quite an amusing response, but others might have been really hurt or offended by it.

Watford fan, age 56+
I really question before I tweet now and ask myself if I can be bothered with the backlash. Which, when you think about it, is ridiculous. Should I really need to be worried about agreeing or disagreeing with a bloody yellow card?

West Ham United fan, age 46-55
I have now stopped using Twitter because it's so vicious. I used other platforms more, like Instagram. There seems to be less abuse there.

Middlesbrough fan, age 36-45
I changed my profile photo to something gender neutral. You wouldn't believe how little abuse I receive now compared to a couple of years ago.

Manchester City fan, age 18-25
Tweeting has become a mental chess game for me. I weigh every word, anticipating the response before hitting send.

Liverpool fan, age 36-45
Conclusion

This study sheds light on the coping mechanisms adopted by women football fans to navigate the challenges of online fandom.

Provides valuable insights into the diverse experiences of women football fans in the digital era.

Highlights an importance of fostering inclusive and respectful online communities for all.

The need for targeted interventions from clubs, social media platforms, regulators etc.
Thank You
For Your Attention
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References


