

# The Association between Saudi Football Clubs and the Loyalty of Their Fanbase, a Cross-Sectional Study.

Hassan Othman H. AlAbdullah

Master of Business Administration

## Abstract

This cross-sectional study analyzes the association between Saudi football clubs and the loyalty of their fanbase and evaluates how the fans are acting as consumers toward their football clubs. Data was collected through a questionnaire. The research was carried out on a sample of 2,317 participants. The findings show that more than half of participants have attended a football match in the Saudi football league whereas 23.7% preferred to watch their favorite team in the stadium. Furthermore, the loyalty of the fans can also be evaluated by the purchases of the club related products as the participants majority own their favorite club shirts where almost half of them have purchased another club's products. The limitations of the study that it is focused on limited behaviors of the fans and further investigations can be achieved to include what are the factors preventing the fans from being loyal to their football clubs or why they are not attending to the stadiums although they have showed the intention to.

## Introduction

### 1.1. General Introduction

football is the most popular sport in the world and each year millions of people attend the matches in the stadiums (Worldfootball,2019) and billions watch the games through the television or online (FIFA,2018). Nowadays, football has become a large industry for countries like England (Szymanski,1997), Spain (Ascari,2006) and Italy (Baroncelli,2006), providing an extra income for these countries' economy (Conejo,2007). Saudi Arabia's popular sport is also football (Saudi embassy) and considered as one of the top countries in Asia in that field (Gemmi,2019). Nevertheless, the football industry in Saudi Arabia is not efficient enough to be called an industry because of many factors including the lack of privatization of the teams in the league which prevents the clubs from running as companies which have their own incomes and expenses. Although, the plans for this movement have been discussed by the Saudi decision makers (Bainbridge,2018).

The history of football in Saudi Arabia started even before the 1930s as the first football club Al-Ittihad was founded in 1927 (Ministry of Sports) and the official Saudi football federation was founded in 1956 (FIFA.com). The league in Saudi Arabia is the highest-level competition in the country which started to be played on regional basis in the 1970s and in 1976–77 it started to be played on a national basis as it started with only 8 clubs (Jones, 2013) and in 2008 under the name of the (Saudi Professional League) the football league became professional in the country (SPL). Globally, football became a large industry even before 1992 when the English Premier League broadcasting rights were sold for 191 million GBP which in 2016 sold for 5.13 billion GBP showing the great amount of the investments in this industry (Butler, 2015). In Saudi Arabia the league's broadcasting rights were sold to STC (Saudi telecom company) for 1.8 billion US dollar in 2018 for a 10 years' deal (Rashad, 2018) which was terminated a year after in 2019 (Argaam, 2019). Broadcasting rights alongside other investments such as stadium and facilities development and marketing could generate huge revenues to the football clubs. As in 2013 a deal between the Saudi Pro League and Abdul Latif Jameel was set to name the football league after the company and be called as Abdul Latif Jameel League for six years for 120 million Saudi riyals annually (\$32 million USD) which shows how can marketing and football could merge in this industry (Fareed, 2013).

### 1.2. Research Objectives

- To analyze the association between Saudi football clubs and the loyalty of their fanbase.

- To evaluate how the fans are acting as a customers or consumers toward their football clubs. **Review of Literature**

## 2.1. General Introduction

A Professional football is a large industry and the biggest sport in the world generating an estimate of \$33 billion per year as Andrews and Harrington (2016) published in their study, and each club could use their incomes to help the society in fields they interested in.

As mentioned, many studies showed that football is a large industry which they did cover the development of the industry over the years on the financial development of the corporation on the stock markets of football. (Akdogan et al. 1998) (Andreff,2007) (Ashton et al. 2003). Some other studies evaluated the financial performances of football clubs using ratios to analyze them as Kourkoglu (2005) study which evaluate and analyze three top Turkish football teams (Galatasaray, Fenerbahce and Besiktas) financial statement from 2005 and found that each football club is different from the other financially. Another study by Yildiz (2008) evaluated the financial statements of English football club Manchester United and the Turkish side Fenerbahce by examine the two clubs statement of income for 2004/2005 season and found that the English side Manchester United is financially better and has a good financial structure compared to Fenerbahce that indicate that the success in sport is parallel to the financial status of the club.

Although the privatization was planned to be in 2020 as the Saudi vision 2030 (Vision2030,2017) there are some issues facing the government and causing delays. Previous research was done by Tlemsani et al. (2019) to help the government of Saudi Arabia by providing a roadmap to the privatization of football teams by select four European football clubs (Arsenal, Manchester city, Juventus and Barcelona) which they classified as financially independent and analyzed their business models and found the Juventus business model was the best to follow in order to facilitate the process of privatization of football clubs. Nevertheless, they did not mention the challenges that could face the Saudi football clubs as each country has its own football culture.

Football competitions have a massive financial incomes for the clubs participated in, especially in Europe as they have UEFA champions league which considered as the biggest competition in the world of football held each year, Bullough (2018) publish a paper to analyze the UEFA champions league revenue distribution for thirteen years started from season 2003-2004 to 2016-2017 and found that the revenues keep growing as it reached 1.3 billion Euros in 2016–2017 season only, whereas there were sixteen clubs allocated 52% of the revenues over the 13 years (5.6 billion Euros), showing the large amount of money flow going in this industry. Although another previous study by Plumley and Flint (2015) addressed the imbalance distribution of the clubs in the competition of UEFA champions league and the effect of placing the teams in the groups reflect on the performance in the competition and therefore on their revenues as each team allocate more money prize as they proceed in the competition, in the same paper advised that the fair grouping of the clubs is a must in order to make a fair distribution.

Fans are the soul of the football and the factors that influence them to attend the football matches in Saudi Arabia have been investigated in a quantitative study done by Binjwaied et al. (2015) as the results showed that the most factors were related to the infrastructure of football facilities and the services at them as their study showed that 55.4% of the participants would never attend a football match in the stadium.

Marketing is the key to increase the income of any firm including football clubs and associations as many European countries try their best to market their own football leagues either by attracting the sponsors or by going overseas and playing their competitions in others' countries.

Marketing generate a significant income to football teams, Louzada et al. (2014) conducted a study to analyze and determine the effectiveness of marketing on the football teams, the study was on the Brazilian national football team and shows that in 2009 there was 79.12% of revenues were generated by marketing (R\$ 118,300,000), where in 2010 marketing generated R\$145,800,000 (68.57%). The previous numbers show how marketing is important to generate significant incomes to the football teams.

Nowadays, many new marketing approaches have been developed in the world of football including the social media marketing (Tenorio,2017), Twitter for example is a perfect social media platform to let the

football clubs engaging with the fans, Zanini et al. (2019) studied the engagement of the football clubs and the community in twitter using a python script (programming language) to analyze more than 7000 tweets about Sao Paulo FC (Brazilian football club) which results in a slight adaptation of the framework from another previous study done by Hollebeek et al. (2017). This study was considered as exploratory and further studies could be built upon the presented ideas.

Kriemadis et al. (2010) published a paper which was a comparison between English football clubs and the Greek clubs in the internet marketing, the study included 12 football clubs websites (six from each country) and they found that the Greek football clubs' websites were too much behind the English football clubs' websites as the Greek websites developed poorly and does not have marketing strong link which the modern internet can offer, the English clubs' websites more advanced than the Greek ones and more developed and offer a great marketing links.

To understand what can motivate the fans to engage with the football club they support on the social media, Ferreira et al. (2019) publish a study for this purpose as they used an online survey to collect the data from FC Porto (Portuguese football club) fans and they found that the entertainment content and searching for information were the two main things people do to engage with their favorite football club on the social media. Similar results showed in the study done by Machado et al. (2020) which included more sample size and covered many Portuguese football clubs' fans and social media accounts.

## **2.2. Football in Saudi Arabia**

The Saudi Football Federation was founded in 1956, and it joined the International Football Association and the Asian Football Confederation the following year. To begin arranging his local championships in addition to his international participation and support, which yielded the highest percentage of outstanding results. The Saudi Federation oversees 153 clubs competing in football competitions and arranges local football competitions in addition to arranging the participation of Saudi national teams and clubs in international competitions.) - Champion of the Championship of the Two Holy Mosques - Championship for Under-23s (for the Premier and First Division) - Championship of the Youth League (Premier League and First Division Clubs) - Premier and First Division Clubs compete in the Junior League Championship (Hamad.M, 2019)

It has won the Football Federation Cup three times in its history, and it was the first national football team in the world to do so. In 2004, despite the absence of the tournament's final, which was held in China, the Japanese team won the trophy for the first time since 1984 AD. The Saudi national team has reached the Asian final five times in a row, winning the trophy each time. The first time was in 1984, followed by 1988 and 1996. After the three World Cup finals in 1992 and 2000, the squad faced Japan, with the identical outcome of 1 - 0. Since 1994, when the Saudi squad qualified for the World Cup finals for the first time, the Saudi team has reached the World Cup finals four times in a row, qualifying again for the World Cup France, 1998, South Korea's World Cup in 2002, and Germany's World Cup in 2006 (Arab News. 2019). Followed by qualifying for 2018 world cup and 2022.

The Saudi national junior team won the World Junior Championships in 1989, which were hosted in Scotland, as evidenced by the Saudis defeating the home team in the final match. It was the World Cup for Clubs that was won in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the first Gulf team was the Saudi championship in 2000 AD, followed by the Saudi Al Ittihad squad in 2005 AD. They exercise, all age levels have club teams (Muhammad Y., 2002).

On the 1st of May, the May Football Federation adopted the new logo. above the members of the Federation, in the presence of the President of the Football Association, Adel Ezzat. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's 2030 vision, the sporting history of Saudi football provides an important foundation for advancing towards economic and commercial benefits from the sport. Using that football legacy in e-marketing and linking a wide range of products and services through the Saudi fans' affection and connection to the local clubs they support (Vision2030.gov.sa. 2019).

### **2.2.1. How do Saudi football clubs get financial profits with crazy numbers?**

In the world of football, hearing the words "millions" of dollars or euros and hearing about club purchase deals for players and their salary is commonplace, but the question remains: where does all this money for clubs come from?

Deals worth hundreds of millions of euros are no longer uncommon in European leagues. There's Philippe Coutinho of Brazil, Antoine Griezmann of France, Osman Dembele of Belgium, Gareth Bale of Wales, Cristiano Ronaldo of Portugal, and Eden Hazard of Belgium, but the most expensive ones are still registered in the name of Neymar da Silva of Brazil, for whom Paris Saint-Germain paid 222 million euros. In 2017, he joined us from Barcelona. (Russia Today, RT, 2019).

Lionel Messi, the Argentine superstar, is from Catalonia. At 8.3 million euros a month, club has the biggest monthly income of any football player in the world. What are the sources of club profits for finalizing these deals? The large sums circulated by the media on sports news pages are similar to the economies of some third-world nations, so what are the sources of club profits for concluding these deals? Manchester United earned a profit of 737 million US dollars in 2018, according to Forbes magazine, which specializes in financial figures, and topped the list until that year, followed by Real Madrid with 735 million dollars and Barcelona with 706 million, and these clubs are classified as the most spenders (Financial Football News, 2019).

As for the sources of income or profits for clubs, especially the big ones, there are many sources, including:

#### **2.2.1.1. Tickets for the match:**

The process of selling match tickets is one of the most important sources of financial money for the club, and it is a direct material income for the club as well as a percentage that contributes to the Kingdom's national income, with tickets ranging in price from 35 to 70 euros. Alternatively, depending on the importance of the matches, fans must be encouraged to attend and sell as many tickets as possible, and fans' love for their favorite club must be invested and benefited from in order to increase profits and increase them as much as possible, while ticket prices double in major tournaments such as the Champions League final between Liverpool and Tottenham, for example. The ticket is more expensive at overseas clubs. The price ranged from 70 to 600 euros depending on the category, and each club only had a limited quantity of tickets available. An English club like Liverpool has fans from all over the world, and its supporters travel from all over the world to watch it play. It is thought to be a good example that can be applied) Daniel Maderer ,2019)

#### **2.2.1.2. TV broadcasting rights:**

Many football fans pay annual and monthly "subscriptions" to watch matches on television, and broadcast television is one of the most important sources of revenue for football associations before distribution to clubs. Broadcasting rights are one of the income sources that help teams, the media, and the government regulate broadcasting rights for those games that are terrible in the local league. in its many organizations, or continental championships The Premier League Clubs Association has announced the financial profits made by English clubs through television broadcasting, with Liverpool earning 149 million euros in the 2018-2019 season and Manchester City earning 148 million euros (Juventus.com. 2019).

#### **2.2.1.3. Financial prizes:**

Clubs receive substantial sums of money from local, continental, and international federations when they reach the Champions League final, for example. And tournaments of all kinds, such as the League Cup or any football competition, bring in a lot of money for the winners. For example, the European Football Association "UEFA" allocated 585 million euros to the clubs that competed in the competition based on their stage of participation (Fortunato A., 2017).

#### **2.2.1.4. Marketing and Trade:**

Many football clubs operate online storefronts for marketing and trade. They offer their sports products or the shirts of famous and beloved athletes, including apparel and supplies, on social networking sites, the Internet, their own applications, and storefronts in their traditional form or through e-commerce. Which greatly contributes to the increase in material profits and the filling of the club's treasury with money, as well as the spread of the club's fans, supporters, and fans, not only of sports clothing, but also of valuable

gifts such as watches, pens, handbags, or sports bags, as well as products from cups and food dishes, and expanding the use of the club's sports brand to promote and market these products and reap profits and benefit from the club and the treasury and(Issam Tlemsan,2019).

#### **2.2.1.5. Sponsorship rights and joint stock companies:**

International and local corporations promote for them, whether they specialize in sponsoring or marketing themselves by placing their name on stadiums and stands, which aids their spread and appearance in direct television broadcasts as well as on the jerseys of players (Al Ganideh, S.F,2016).

Players sign formal contracts with those corporations or the Saudi Football Association with those companies for a set amount of time, which helps to boost financial profits. Manchester United, for example, receives 191 million euros in sponsorship rights per year, while Real Madrid receives 120 million euros. To encourage them to continue and obtain those contracts to advertise themselves, it is vital to make the most of these companies and provide promotional and marketing offerings (Kittikun Boonkate ,2013).

#### **2.2.1.6. Selling players:**

During the winter and summer transfers of players, clubs try to get rid of unwanted players in order to fund deals to buy new players and improve the technical level of the club in order to increase fandom and the number of viewers and supporters, and take advantage of those deals by exchanging players between clubs, some of them with a note. Some players command exorbitant fees because they are celebrities who hold a particular place in the hearts of their fans. They are one of the factors that have contributed to the increase in financial return (Statista, 2019)

### **2.3. What motivates the wealthy to own football clubs?**

Finally, the privatization of Saudi clubs and their transformation into enterprises was approved by the Council of Ministers. That is, a businessman or a wealthy individual can now own any club. But what motivates the wealthy to own football clubs? Why do we see investors bidding for a specific club? Linda Yue, a BBC economics writer, attempted to answer this topic in an article years ago. We'll put the most important points of view that I've offered in the ball's treasury and put them at your disposal, with Saudi characterization of some cases if feasible. Initially, the author discussed the double. Since the Premier League's inception in 1992, the money earned by English Premier League clubs has increased. Until the million pounds became a minor and insignificant sum. Despite significant trade and sponsorship revenues, English Premier League clubs are still trying to keep their costs under control and attain breakeven. This is true for clubs in the Saudi League. Saudi clubs' income has increased dramatically in recent years(BBC.com,2021).

For example, the TV transmission contract increased from 9.9 million riyals annually in the 2003-2004 season to 300 million riyals annually by the 2023-2024 season in the present decade. The same can be said for league sponsorship. There was no sponsorship for the league before to 2009. After in addition to other participating sponsorships, sponsorship of the league name has grown to 100 million riyals every year. As of present, it is the cheapest club that guarantees at least 10 million riyals in central income (Coelho.M.,2019)

Six of the world's top 20 highest-paid football clubs have big sponsorship deals with Gulf airlines. Despite their modest size, the affluent Gulf countries such as the UAE and Qatar, according to the author, have boundless global ambitions, and football is a means of spreading the country's name, albeit in competition with one another( Daniel Maderer ,2019).

Football has become a geopolitical tool, according to observers, because governments back investors and investment funds that buy football clubs. For example, Qatar is a small country with little footballing history, but it will host the 2022 World Cup, and the country plans to invest a significant amount of money to ensure the tournament's success. It is the nation. Its residents benefit from the greatest rates of income due to the country's energy reserves, despite the fact that it is located in a politically and security volatile location. By investing in football, a small country can put itself on the map of the world, giving it a sense of security (Biscaia.R,2017)

The aggressive investment movements by Chinese individuals, groups, and partnerships to purchase a number of European clubs with the help of the Chinese government are a good example of this. Individual investors are no different; Roman Abramovich invested a lot of money on Chelsea FC, but in exchange he became a globally recognized figure. When compared to Russia's wealthy, Abramovich's experience demonstrates a crucial point: it is not enough to be wealthy (Anon. ,2019).

Buying a football club makes you renowned and connects you with significant individuals all around the world, even if you are a successful businessman. And, if we apply this concept to our local reality in the Kingdom, we will find that in recent years, a number of wealthy people have entered the football arena, providing support to their club without expecting a financial return, but instead gaining fame that was reflected on them by reaching a large segment or ascending to influential positions. It is therefore not excluded that we will see more of these affluent people who will own the club as a means of establishing themselves and attaining personal ambitions by using football to achieve business goals. as well as hobbies and interests The Saudi League clubs have not yet reached economic maturity, as many revenue resources, like as public attendance, merchandise, memberships, and club sponsorship contracts, are still weak and underdeveloped. This opens up the field for investors to enter this sector, which has the potential to boom in gold. As a result, it's not uncommon to see businesspeople come in and turn a failing medium or small club into a lucrative one, then leave with a large profit (Financial Football News. 2019).

#### **2.4. What value do sports fans have in terms of revenue for Saudi clubs?**

The most essential focus in the sports area for spectators is. And it will continue to be any club's most valuable asset, serving as the club's strongest point and the most significant component in bolstering the club's financial resources, particularly during difficult times and financial crises.

Fans' views toward their clubs have been documented throughout history, and the fans of the German team Borussia Dortmund are an excellent example of fan attitudes influencing the club's success. In 2003, the club was hit by a terrible financial crisis, and it came dangerously near to declaring bankruptcy. The club was saved and its treasury was supported by the club's faithful followers, who donated money and pledged to support the club in the future. Every season, you must purchase the club's uniforms. Fans also purchased 50,000 season tickets to attend the team's games in the club's stadium, which has a capacity of 80,000 spectators. Only the fans' support saved the club; after that, the club resumed its normal course and continued to succeed and generate large revenues, allowing it to join the list of Europe's wealthiest clubs (Binu Sundas,2020).

Locally, and for the time being at least, the clubs are not worried about a crisis akin to that of Borussia Dortmund, where the country's sports authorities bear the brunt of the financial burden, and the clubs also have a variety of financing options available, such as sponsorships, match ticket revenues, and marketing. the club's products and services as well as coming up with innovative marketing concepts. Despite this, clubs face a variety of financial issues, with some drowning in debt, others navigating the seas of financial woes, and yet others waiting for a lifeline on the shores of sporting events (Al Saud.A, 2019).

If the previous stages have been exceeded, the current stage necessitates managing the clubs solely on a commercial basis, and viewing the club as a commercial business unit that, in order to continue, requires sufficient financial resources to cover all of its expenses and obligations, as well as the highest possible profit margin. Because the sources of financial resources for businesses of various sizes are entirely dependent on what customers pay for products or services, it is vital for club administrations to provide its fans with the care and attention they deserve, similar to what successful businesses provide to their clients (Richelieu.A,2006)

The loyalty of sports fans, as well as the depth of their emotional attachment, is a one-of-a-kind and free case, for which all professional commercial firms pay vast sums of money in order to connect, even if only partially, to their customers' devotion and attachment to them. Clubs rely on their most devoted supporters for financial support. Donations and financial assistance in cash or through sponsorships from honorary members and club fans may be the best proof of the fans' importance and commitment to the clubs (Veth.K.M, 2014)

Donations While grants and financial support are significant and readily available financial resources for clubs, they should not be the primary and most important resource on which clubs base their budgets and plans for the upcoming sports season. The importance of building and developing fan loyalty will become clear to everyone in the near future, and the distinguished club of our Saudi clubs will be the club that is managed with a professional commercial mentality, which places maintaining its fans at the top of its priority list and strives to acquire more fans and develop their loyalty (Bian.Q,2012)

Due to the club's failure to pay the dues of one of its former professionals, the FIFA Dispute Resolution Chamber decided to prevent the club from registering new players for two transfer periods in 2017. At the time, the club issued an official statement, demanding that during which the club's fans supported financially through official channels Famous European clubs preceded him, and the method of Cologne, a German team, has turned to its fans to help fund the signing of Lukas Podolski (Amorim.J.G.,2015)

Colin, on the other hand, built a website where he collects money from his fans using a marketing strategy. renting space on a large painting by Podolski, which is divided into various squares, each of which is rented by the unit, and on which the tenant of the masses can post an advertisement, whether for himself or for the firm he owns or works for (Duke.V. 2002).

## **The Methodology**

### **3.1. Research Approach**

#### **3.1.1. Target Population (Sampling Technique and Sample Size)**

The population framework consists of Saudi Arabia football fans and supporters. As the population of Saudi Arabia is 31,787,580 million in 2016 according to Saudi General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT, 2016) in 13 regions around the kingdom, as descriptive research, a questionnaire used to address the football fans and supporters because of the large size of the sample, and the selected participants must be from different parts all over the country including both males and females from all ages. The snowball sampling technique decided to be the most applicable because of numbers.

#### **3.1.2. Data Collection Approach**

For the questionnaire sampling, data collected from the Saudi football fans in multiple ways as links been sent via social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook and WhatsApp). A pilot tested online questionnaire been provided to the study participants at the beginning of study to obtain baseline data and finalized version been provided. Google Forms was selected as a tool to collect data online.

## **Analysis And Results**

To justify your statements with the most widely used methodologies and technologies is important. For a short number of years, this has been the key element of research (Easton & Jarrell, 1998). We follow the concepts by employing SPSS technology to substantiate our assertions. The findings are thus generated by SPSS software in this chapter. These discoveries are discussed and fully presented in order to encourage viewers and research contributors.

The questionnaire included a variety of participants' data. The best results can be obtained by maximizing information. It also enables viewers to easily understand our results.

The researcher informed the participants of the purpose of this study before handing in the questionnaire and how to fill out the questionnaire to ensure that the questionnaire was filled out correctly.

Total of 3509 samples collected, 2317 responses were accepted for this study based on the sample size formula to include the fans of Saudi football clubs who answered the question " Do you consider yourself a fan of a Saudi club? " with the answer "yes".

### **4.1. Demographic Data Analysis**

The study sample 2317 (two thousand three hundred seventeen). Their efforts to work with us have been very beneficial.

The first part of the questionnaire included three questions related to the demographic statistical description of the study sample in terms of their: gender, age, and region.

#### 4.1.1. Gender

By analyzing the answers to the first question in the first axis of the questionnaire, the results shown in this figure:

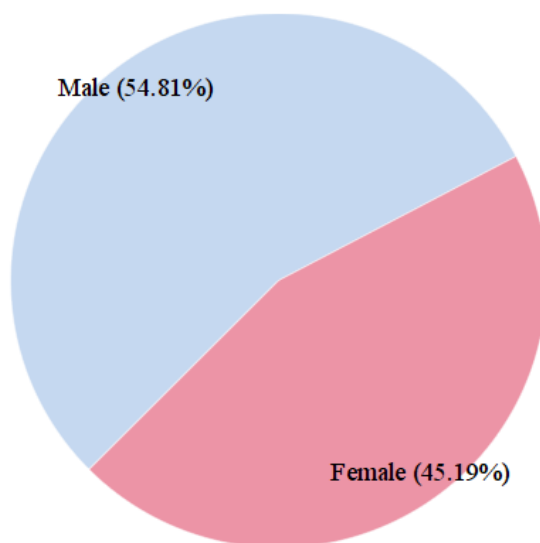


Figure (1): Gender Distribution

This figure shows that out of 2317 respondents who participated in this study 54.8% were males and the number is 1270, while the response rate among females is 45.2% and the number is 1047. With almost close percentage among males and females participated in the study.

#### 4.1.2. Age:

By analyzing the answers to the second question in the first part of the questionnaire, the results shown in this table were reached:

Age	respondents	Percent
18 years or younger	1689	72.9
19 to 25 years old	484	20.9
From 26 to 35 years old	79	3.4
From 36 to 50 years	56	2.4
over 50 years old	9	0.4
Total	2317	100.0

Table (1): Age Distribution

This table shows that the respondents under the age of 18 years is 1,689, an average of 72.9%, While those aged between 19 to 25 numbered 484, or 20.9%, While those aged between 26 to 35 number 79, a percentage of 3.4%, While those aged between 36 to 50, their number was 56, with a rate of 2.4%, Finally, the number of those over 50 years old reached 9 people, with a percentage of 0.40%.

#### 4.1.3. Location.

##### Living Location

	Numbers	Percent
Riyadh region	735	31.7
Makkah Region	513	22.1
Eastern Region	312	13.5
Medina Region	181	7.8
Tabuk region	75	3.2
Qassim region	107	4.6
Hail region	34	1.5



Asir region	162	7.0
Northern borders	39	1.7
Jizan region	76	3.3
Najran Province	31	1.3
Al Baha area	25	1.1
Al-Jawf region	27	1.2
Total	2317	100.0

Table (2): Location Distribution

In this table it is clear that most of the respondents participated to the study live in the Riyadh region, where their number reached 735, with a rate of 31.7%, then come those who live in the Makkah region, where their number reached 513, with a rate of 22.1%, and then come those who live in the Eastern Region, where their number is 312, with a percentage of 13.5%, the table shows us the diversity of respondents from the rest of the regions, and finally it is the Al Bahah Area, where the number reached 25 and a percentage of 1.1%.

#### 4.2. Analysis of the remaining questions in the questionnaire.

What would describe you best as a fan		
	Numbers	Percent
fan	1470	63.5
fanatical fan	494	21.3
not interested	353	15.2
Total	2317	100.0

Table (3): Fans Descriptions

In question what would describe you best as a fan?

Out of 2317 participants in the study, 1470 answered with a score of 63.5% that were describe themselves a fan, 494 answered with a rate of 21.3% that were a fanatical fan, 353, with a rate of 15.2%, answered that they were not interested.

Which Saudi Football club do you support?		
	Numbers	Percent
Al Hilal	1393	60.1
Al Nasser	293	12.6
Al Ittihad	339	14.6
Al Ahli	229	9.9
Others	63	2.7
Total	2317	100.0

Table (4): Supported Teams Distribution

In question which Saudi Football club do you support?

In the front are the fans of Al Hilal Club 1393 with a percentage of 60.1%, then fans of Al Ittihad Club (339 respondents) with a percentage of 14.6%, then fans of Al Nasr Club (293 respondents) with a percentage of 12.6%, then Al Ahli with 229 respondents and 9.9%, last one were the fans of other clubs not mentioned in the questionnaire with a percentage of 2.7% and total number of 63 respondents (including clubs such as; Al-Shabab, Ettifaq FC and others).

which social media platform you use to follow your favorite club?

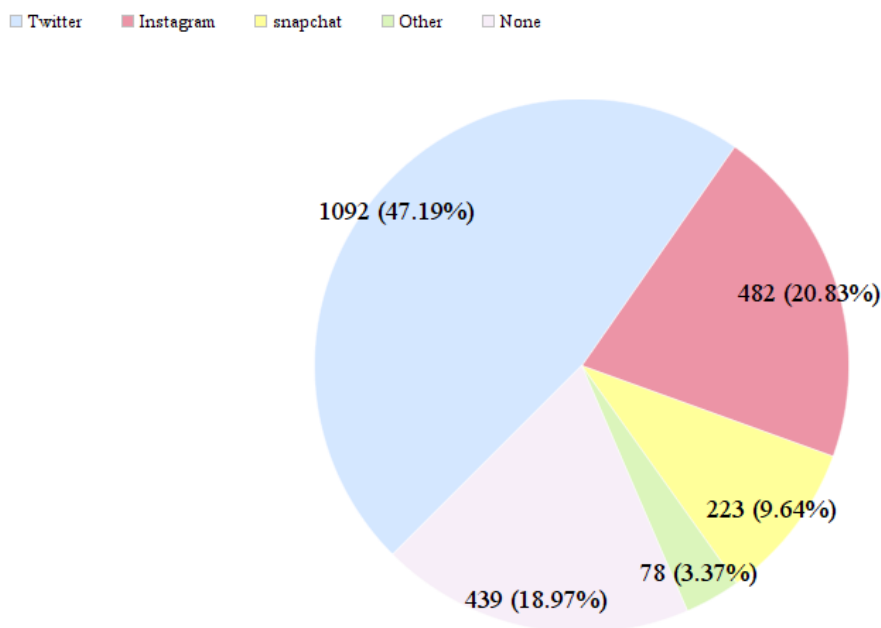


Figure (2): Preferred Social Media Platforms for the Fans

In question which social media platform you use to follow your favorite club?

Out of 2317 participants in the study, the number of Saudi football clubs' fans not following their clubs on social media platforms reached 439, or 18.97%, while Twitter came as the preferred social media platforms for the supporters to follow their clubs' accounts as the number reached 1092, or 47.19%, followed by Instagram, where the number reached 482, by 20.83%, and then Snapchat, where The number reached 223 with a rate of 9.64%, then the rest of the social media platforms that were not mentioned in the survey 78 and 3.37%, and Facebook option in the survey was not selected by any of the participants.

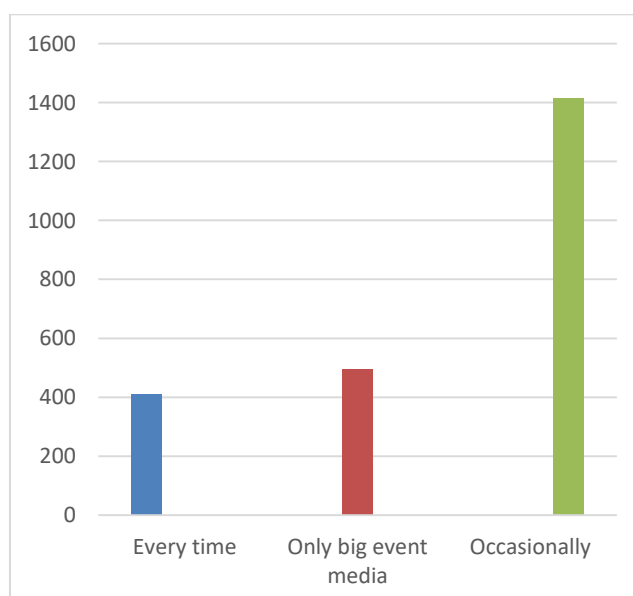


Figure (3): Sharing of Media Related to Their Clubs

In question how often you share media related to your favorite club through your social media account?

The number of respondents chose the option Occasionally 1414 was 61%, while the number of responses to Only big event media was 494 with a rate of 21.3%, and finally, the number of respondents who sharing the media related to their club every time is 409 by 17.7%.

**Do you own the shirt or any other item of your Saudi club that you support?**

	Numbers	Percent
No	1137	49.1
Yes, this is my duty as a fan of my team	383	16.5
Yes	797	34.4
Total	2317	100.0

*Table (5): Supporters Bought Club's Shirt*

In question do you own the shirt or any other item of your Saudi club that you support?

The number of no respondents was 1137, at a rate of 49.1%, while the number of those who answered yes was 797, at a rate of 34.4%, and finally, the number of respondents to Yes, this is my duty as a fan of my team was 383, at a rate of 16.5%.

**Have you purchased any product related to your Saudi club?**

	Numbers	Percent
No	1081	46.7
Yes, this is my duty as a fan of my team	283	12.2
Yes	953	41.1
Total	2317	100.0

*Table (6): Supporters Bought Products Related to Their Club*

In question have you purchased any product related to your Saudi club?

The number of no respondents was 1,081, or 46.7%, while the number of yes respondents was 953, or 41.1%, and finally, the number of respondents was Yes, this is my duty as a fan of my team 283, or 12.2%.

**Have you purchased any product or service from your club's sponsors?**

	Numbers	Percent
No	1435	61.9
Yes, this is my duty as a fan of my team	163	7
Yes	719	31
Total	2317	100.0

*Table (7): Supporters Purchases from Club's Sponsors*

In question have you purchased any product or service from your club's sponsors?

The number of no respondents was 1435, or 61.9%, while the number of yes respondents was 719, or 31%, and finally, the number of respondents was Yes, this is my duty as a fan of my team 163, or 7%.

**How often you purchase the products of sponsors of your favorite club?**

	Numbers	Percent
Frequently	703	30.3
Only during match events	313	13.5
Never	1301	56.2
Total	2317	100.0

*Table (8): Frequency of Purchases by Supporters from Club's Sponsors*

In question how often you purchase the products of sponsors of your favorite club?

The number of never respondents reached 1,301, or 56.2%, then the number of Frequently respondents reached 703, or 30.3%, and finally, the number of Only during match events reached 313, or 13.5%.

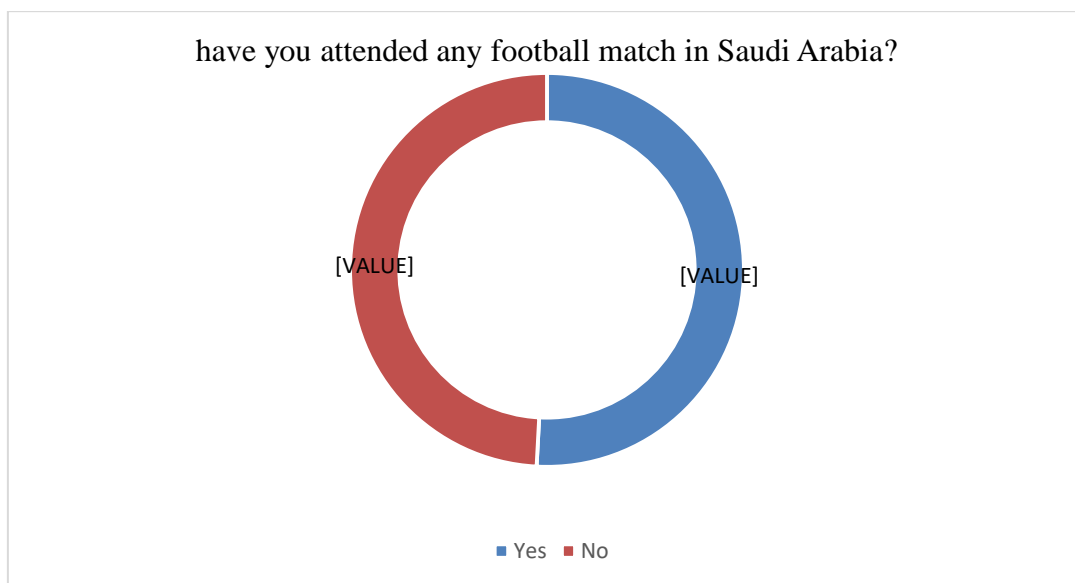
**What did the sponsoring companies of your favorite club offer you?**

	Numbers	Percent
did not provide anything	1457	62.9
Discounts or special offers	700	30.2
They gave me something else	160	6.9
Total	2317	100.0

*Table (9): Club's Sponsors Offers to Supporters*

In question how often you purchase the products of sponsors of your favorite club?

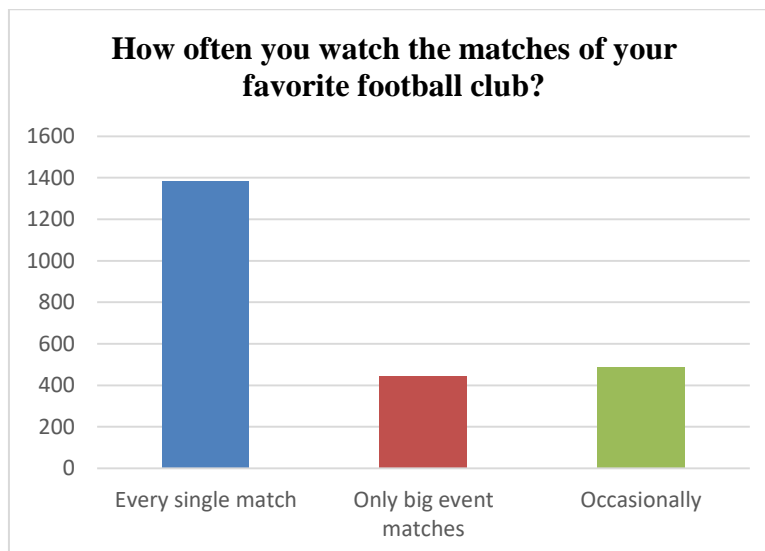
The number of respondents who see that the sponsoring companies of their favorite club did not provide anything was 1457, at a rate of 62.9%, while the number of respondents who agrees that these companies provided discounts, or special offers were 700, reached 30.2%, and finally, the participants who found that companies gave them something else 160, at a rate of 6.9%.



*Figure (4): Fans Attendance*

In question have you attended any football match in Saudi Arabia?

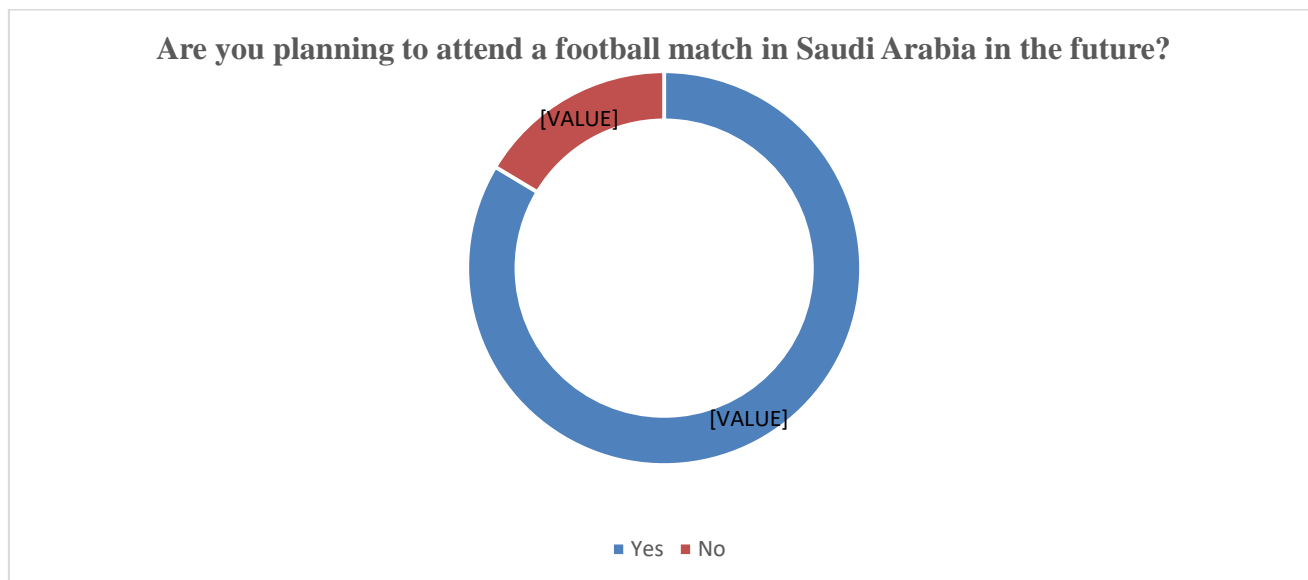
Out of 2317 participated in the study almost half of them have attended a football match in Saudi Arabia with 1178 responses and 50.8%, While the other half 1139 participant (49.2%) did not attend any football match in Saudi Arabia



*Figure (5): Frequency of Fans Watching Their Club's Matches*

In question how often you watch the matches of your favorite football club?

Out of 2317 participants in the study, 1383 answered that they watch every single match of their favorite club which is 40.8%, and 445 watch only big event matches for their favorite club which is 19.2%, while 489 answered that they watch their favorite club's matches occasionally which is 21.1%.



*Figure (6): Fans Planning to Attend Football Matches*

In question are you planning to attend a football match in Saudi Arabia in the future?

the number of yes respondents was 1937, or 83.6%, and the number of no respondents was only 380, or 16.4%.

**How did you buy a ticket for the match in the Saudi League?**

	Numbers	Percent
I never bought a ticket	1151	49.7
online	871	37.6
From the stadium ticket office	217	9.4
in another way	78	3.4
Total	2317	100.0

*Table (10): Ways of Purchasing Tickets by Supporters*

In question how did you buy a ticket for the match in the Saudi League?

Out of 2317 participant, majority disclosed that they never bought a ticket (1151 respondents) with a percentage of 49.7%, 871 answered that they bought a ticket online at 37.6% and 217 answered that they bought a ticket from the stadium ticket office with a rate of 9.4%, and finally 78 answered that in another way with a rate of 3.4%.

**What is your favorite way to watch your favorite Saudi team?**

	Numbers	Percent
in the TV	1348	58.2
Through mobile apps	347	15
In the field	548	23.7

in another way	74	3.2
Total	2317	100.0

Table (11): Ways of Watching Matches by Supporters

In question what is your favorite way to watch your favorite Saudi team?

In the last question, 1348 answered that they watch the matches on television, which is 58.2%, and 548 answered that they watch it in the stadium, which is 23.7%, and 347 answered that they watch the matches through the mobile applications, which is 15%. and finally, 74 answered that they watch matches through other ways that were not mentioned in the questionnaire which is 3.2%.

#### 4.3.1. The result of the mean and standard deviation of all questions.

questions	Mean	Std. Deviation
gender	1.5352	.49883
age	1.3223	.65182
living location	3.6614	3.02846
Do you consider yourself a fan of a Saudi club?	1.3397	.47367
What would describe you best as a fan	1.9786	.92498
Which Saudi Football club do you support?	2.8350	2.08263
which social media platform you use to follow your favorite club?	3.5098	2.26261
How often you share media related to your favorite club through your social media account?	2.6050	.69461
Do you own the shirt or any other item of your Saudi club that you support?	1.5968	.85165
Have you purchased any product related to your Saudi club?	1.6629	.89630
Have you purchased any product or service from your club's sponsors?	1.4873	.82966
How often you purchase the products of sponsors of your favorite club?	2.4785	.82223
What did the sponsoring companies of your favorite club offer you?	1.3474	.60110
Have you attended any football match in Saudi Arabia?	1.6090	.48804
How often you watch the matches of your favorite football club?	2.0276	.91770
Are you planning to attend a football match in Saudi Arabia in the future?	1.3634	.48103
How did you buy a ticket for the match in the Saudi League?	1.5466	.80400
What is your favorite way to watch your favorite Saudi team?	2.0325	1.18166
Total	1.63595	0.825945

In this table, all results of the mean and standard deviation are shown for each question

#### 4.3.2. The result of the percentage of Reliability.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.746	18

In this table, the Reliability result has been proven, which is a valid result that proves the validity of the information data that appeared.

## Discussion And Conclusion

### 5.1. Discussion

#### 5.1.1. Loyalty of Fanbase

The term “fan loyalty” refers to the result of consistent support and dedication to a team (Johnston, 2004). Loyalty of sports fans has been studied previously, describing the loyalty to the team can be achieved by external and social factors as attending the matches and utilizing the media related to the supported sports team (Wann et al., 1996; Kolbe and James, 2000; James, 2001). Another concept to measure the loyalty of fans is behavioral, which means to measure it by the actions made by the fans toward their supported team, which include the arrival and attending the matches and also, by purchasing the products related to the team (Funk, et al. 2002; Martin, 2013).

In this study the findings showing that the majority of the fans (50.8%) have attended the football matches in the stadium while only 23.7% of the total participants in the study stated that their favorite way to watch their team is by attending to the stadiums, this percentage is a huge in relation to a previous study done by Binjwaied et. al, (2015) which stated that only 1.9% of Saudi football fans prefer to watch the matches in the stadiums. The findings of this study also found that 83.6% of the participants are willing or planning to attend the football matches in the Saudi football league which could be related to the improvements made by the ministry of sports in Saudi Arabia to attract the fans to attend.

Nowadays, social media platforms play a major role in the relationship between the football club and the fans, Twitter for example is a perfect social media platform to let the football clubs engage with the fans and increase the fans’ loyalty (Tenorio, 2017). In this study 18.9% of the participants are not following their favorite Saudi football team on any social media platforms. While the majority prefer Twitter as their favorite platform to follow their clubs by 47.1%. One of the behavioral ways to measure the loyalty of the fans could be by the actions of the fans on these social media platforms and by sharing the media related to their supported clubs on them (Funk, et al. 2002; Martin, 2013). The findings of this study shows that 17.7% of the participants are sharing the media related to their club on a daily basis, while 21.3% are sharing them on the huge event matches.

### **5.1.2. Loyal Fans as Consumers**

The concept of loyalty defined by Oliver (1999) as “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior” and it has been covered extendedly on the marketing literature (Oliver, 1999).

Attitudinal loyalty refers to a consumer's psychological commitment to a product, whereas behavioral loyalty refers to a customer's relationship with the brand through various types of consumption and other activities (Dick & Basu, 1994). Purchasing a favorite football club’s related products was one of the most important behavioral factors (Martin, 2013). It is also found that the football fans have the highest level of identification and they consume more club’s products than the other sports fans such as volleyball (Kościołek, 2019). In this study, the findings show that the majority of the fans who participated in the study have purchased products related to their football club with a percentage of 53.3% and 12.2% answered that it is their duty as a fan of the team to purchase these products. and more than half of the respondents owning their favorite club jersey (50.9%) and 16.5% see that owning a club shirt is their duty as fans.

Other studies show that the fanatic football fans dedicate both financial and emotional resources towards their favorite football club (White & Absher, 2013; Stander & Beer, 2016). The findings of this study show that 21.3% of the participants describe themselves as fanatics fans, while 63.4% described themselves as fans.

Thus, football fans and consumers can be described as the procedure by which individuals choose, purchase, utilize, and dispose of sport-related products, services, and rewards where both the club and the companies that sponsor them can get benefits (Da Silva & Las Casas, 2017). The finding of the study shows that 7% of the participants stated that it is their duty as fans to buy products or services from their favorite club sponsor companies, whereas 31% have bought a product or a service from the sponsors of their club.

## **5.2. Conclusion**

Football industry is a large market with huge revenues and the fans are the soul of the game and they are the heart of that industry. Creating a loyal fanbase is a critical target for each football club and in Saudi Arabia as it is the most popular sport in the country it is important to study the fans behaviours and attitude toward their favourite football teams. The study shows variety of data about the behaviour of the fans, and it could help all parties working or planning to work on the football industry in Saudi Arabia. 83.6% of the participants are willing or planning to attend the football matches in the Saudi football league. Increasing the numbers of the clubs could be one of the steps to encourage the fans to attend to the stadium as it will secure a place for some clubs in other regions where football fans are located but no local club are representing them on the Saudi Professional league.

### 5.3. Limitations and Scope for Future Research

The limitations of the study that it is focused on limited behaviors of the fans and further investigations can be achieved to include what are the factors preventing the fans from being loyal to their football clubs or why they are not attending to the stadiums although they have showed the intention to.

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## Appendix:

### The Survey Questionnaire

#### 1-gender

- Male
- Female

#### 2-age

- 18 years or younger
- 19 to 25 years old
- From 26 to 35 years old
- From 36 to 50 years
- over 50 years old

#### 3- living location

- Riyadh region
- Makkah Region
- Medina area
- Eastern Region
- Tabuk region
- Qassim region
- Hail region
- Asir region
- Northern borders
- Jizan region
- Najran Province
- Al Baha area
- Al-Jawf region

#### 4-Do you consider yourself a fan of a Saudi club?

- Yes
- no

**5-What would describe you best as a fan**

- fan
- fanatical fan
- not interested

**6-Which Saudi Football club do you support?**

- Al Hilal
- Al Nasser
- Al Ittihad
- Al Ahli
- None
- Others (please mention it below) .....

**7-which social media platform you use to follow your favorite club?**

- Twitter
- Instagram
- snap chat
- Facebook
- Other
- None

**8- How often you share media related to your favorite club through your social media account?**

- Every time
- Only big event media
- Occasionally

**10-Do you own the shirt or any other item of your Saudi club that you support?**

- Yes
- Yes, this is my duty as a fan of my team
- no

**11-Have you purchased any product related to your Saudi club?**

- Yes
- Yes, this is my duty as a fan of my team
- no

**12-Have you purchased any product or service from your club's sponsors?**

- Yes
- Yes, this is my duty as a fan of my team
- no

**13- How often you purchase the products of sponsors of your favorite club?**

- Frequently
- Only during match events
- Never

**14-What did the sponsoring companies of your favorite club offer you?**

- did not provide anything
- Discounts or special offers
- They gave me something else

**15-Have you attended any football match in Saudi Arabia?**

- Yes
- no

**16-How often you watch the matches of your favorite football club?**

- Every single match
- Only big event matches
- Occasionally

**17-Are you planning to attend a football match in Saudi Arabia in the future?**

- Yes
- no

**18-How did you buy a ticket for the match in the Saudi League?**

- I never bought a ticket
- online
- From the stadium ticket office
- in another way

**19-What is your favorite way to watch your favorite Saudi team?**

- in the TV
- Through mobile apps
- In the field
- in another way