Identifying the Need for Healthy Community Building for a Football Club with Respect to Indian Football Scenario

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Abstract

Background: The objective of the study was to understand the importance of striving towards building a strong and healthy local community for a football club especially in India. It has only been few years where the football culture and top tier Indian Super League has grown from a local league to a worldwide viewership league. The study attempts to find the social, economic and health contribution of clubs towards its community. Methods: The study aims to establish a connection between a club and its local environment through primary research from community members of various clubs specifically Kerala Blasters FC and Bengaluru FC as well as through research papers pertaining to various football clubs. Conclusion: The research attempts to find the obscure challenges in defining the term ‘Community’ and investigating the contemporary resonance of a healthy community for a football club. The research found that a football club not only generates income towards its community but helps prosper and contributes to various social, cultural and health factors towards its local population.

Keywords: Community, Football club, Indian Football, ISL, Social Indicators

Introduction:

Sports as a subject has been extensively studied all around the globe for its capability as an industry to create entertainment quotient, create employment opportunities, better physical health and engage the community by bringing everyone on a common platform. Sports industry in India, even though in its nascent stage, has contributed to all the mentioned parameters in the country and it has just scratched the surface. The debate as to whether India is still a one sport nation or a multi-sport nation is ongoing and doesn’t seem to die down in the near future. Much has been spoken about how a country of over billion people has failed to achieve the pinnacles of sports competition when compared to other developing countries with the same resources, and in the end all boils down to how the grass-root levels are functioning [1]. The country does not lack a structure when it comes to the federations and associations with almost every sport being represented in the federal system which works under the umbrella of Sports Authority of India. The blame is almost always thrust upon the state for the inefficiency of the whole system to contribute to the sport participation and lack of sports achievement. In the recent years, we have seen a rise in investment both from the public and private players to improve the scenario and diversify participation in multiple sports by combining it with entertainment. Since the inception of football clubs across Spain and England in the early 1900’s and before, the term ‘community’ have been associated with it. However nowadays, sports clubs or football clubs and their governing bodies are seen as communal institutions working towards reaping in profits by providing entertainment value to its customers. English clubs which emerged have deep roots linking to their ‘communities’. Football clubs, as forever have been a symbol of connectivity, tradition and identification which have been signified as a ‘community’ [2]. Many clubs originated from churches, railway depots, pubs etc. As more and more people got involved, the clubs went into modernization and a strong link was formed between...
the local population and the respective clubs. The vast majority of the clubs emerged, and was named according to their emerging town or city name. As the clubs grew in size and fame, the value of belongingness eloped into the locals. Clubs once formed to form bonds, to have fun and create mutual groups of shared ideologies turned into a performance oriented business model. Clubs like Manchester united which was formed in 1878 as Newton Heath LYR Football Club by the Carriage and Wagon department of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway depot at Newton Heath and which in 2017, according to Forbes had a net worth of $3.69 Billion USD. Having a strong community helps in sustaining the club even when it’s underperforming. Clubs like Liverpool, formed of people working in the industrial sector are hardcore fans and do not leave their club because it is what gives them identity across the world. Similarly in India, football clubs were established mainly in Bengal and Kerala during the British reign. However the football clubs were solely established due to the passion for the sport. For example Mohun Bagan Athletic club was formed in 1889, which is one of the Asia’s oldest clubs to be have formed. The footballing community in Bengal and Kerala is much stronger than in other parts of India. With the introduction of the Indian Super League, although there are only ten teams playing the tournament, not more than handful clubs have a legacy towards football and neither do they have a community to support them. It is here where ‘community’ building, as a project should be taken care of. The newer clubs like Mumbai City FC (now owned by the city group), Odisha FC, Hyderabad FC should focus. The research paper considers how relationship between a Football club and it’s community have become ambiguous and challenging in recent years with respect to the changing political, social and economic situations of the economies the club operate in. It is also greatly noted and disregarded how the term community has been gravely misrepresented and miss interpreted. Classifying a football club classically, it may be just an organization where players practice and provide entertainment to the fans; the other viewpoint could be where it is more than just a sporting institution. They help in advancing the economy of the society they work and local environment. They can help bringing sustainable development to the place it originates from. Football being a business, the regulation and norms take into consideration the financial aspects it has and omits community impacts on the local, social, and cultural stakeholders on other business. The impact generated by a football club can be tracked by finding out and researching the following target points:

1. The impact of the football club into the life of the people in it’s community.
2. Finding out how integrated is the club towards the community development extending beyond its traditional operation of schemes.
3. Understanding the effect of core social and cultural values of the club on the community.
4. Understanding the financial effect club has towards its local population and businesses.

Answer to these questions can be sought only after studying the relation between the social and community value the club operates. Engagement through sports is an upcoming ideology which every club tries to implement in it facilities to cater its local population. This is a project whereby a club aims to bringing in and expecting sporting organizations to increase opportunities for social and multicultural inclusion in sport and increase in physical activity in the community. A football club attracts business and focus points to the town. A football club projects epitome of hard work and physical activity a person can wear. However the same club should initiate its local residents, fans and people and encourage them for a routine physical activity. Stagnant infrastructure should be addressed through sound community development programme including mass participation.

Sanders. A et. al. conducted a detailed study in which, the author argues and challenges the repeated commodification of football and obscure challenges in defining the community associated with it. He states the services that football produces in areas like education, health and other social areas. He reports and uses the case study of Brighton and Hove Albion Football club to support the salience of his argument. The author shows how business of football and its community can offer strong and sustainable linkage. He invites the clubs to start with community stadia set up in the areas which should further used to concretize the ideas of community space against the increasingly fluidity of social life. This could thus be used to play as a liaison between the government and the local population, utilizing its growing clout to shape the lifestyles of citizens, encourages social participation and involvement and promotes integration and cohesion among communities.

Furthermore Andrews[6] carried out a study to structure a conceptual framework for elucidating the rugged term ‘community’. The author after systematic frequent research and study and distilling from the mammoth sociological literature on the topic, noted four distinct conceptions: ‘community’ as 1) a geographical locale; 2) a local social system; 3) a sense of identity and/or belonging (communion); and 4) an ideology. In relation to the research there have been various different discourses on the impact and importance of football and community especially in Europe and Australia. There haven’t been significant studies conducted in field of Football and its culture in India. In this regard[13] through their study argues community to be considered as a responsibility. SBP[14] in their report presented a classified and detailed definition of community. The report suggests three dimensions of a community. Namely:

i. Community as locality, based around specific geographical locations

ii. Community as part of a social network, such as personal relationships, group relationships and as ‘communities of interest’.

iii. Community as communion, including feelings of shared values, collective identity and sense of belonging.

It is an important part of any traditional institution to project itself and embrace wider responsibilities that it adores, beyond the balance sheet and market or brand value. This is a way of business to accept the fact that it not just about extracting more than what is generated but the responsibilities that the clubs hold towards its communities and local environment the club works in. The first part of the giving back to the community starts from identifying the existing and potential stakeholders that the club is catering to. This helps in identifying the corporate social responsibility the club carries, social and environmental impacts it has towards the local economy, and financial return it gives to the community.

The club provides better chance for the local residents to employment and volunteering due to the civic pride[15]. Rosca[7] through her study states that Football clubs can be more than a sporting organization. They can used to drive the local economy and contribute to sustainable development of its city. This can be possible with local authorities and local governing organization taking interest and investing into the football clubs. The local authorities can invest into the clubs directly and indirectly. Direct investment includes funding into the club financially or materially. These discourses apprehend the notion of benefits of community as an audience and viewers. Tacon[16], in his study considers other emotional and social benefits contributed by a football club. The author reports that sports organizations particularly football clubs have been linked to place for social inclusion of people from marginalized communities. English clubs have been subjected to multiple policy adjustment regarding the accommodation of social inclusion agendas in their annual reports.

The football clubs can be seen as projects and as a tool to curb and minimize and divert young people from crimes like drugs, illegal arms dealings, robbery, and gang wars. These projects could aim at reducing the anti-social behavior among young people, enrolling them for formal education and to promote healthy lifestyle. Associating to a club would bring in them a sense of belongingness and a reason to socialize and support each other. Muge and Ozge[17] in their study identify and classify a community as a Brand. They study Fenerbahce club community and illustrate presence of consciousness of kind, presence of shared ritual and sense of moral responsibility. The author presents that FB fans proved that they are not only the fans of the game football and the football club but are connected socially and emotionally to its community and the people. They maybe culturally very different but had great unity and morality in testing times of the club. An Australian sports consultancy firm carried out a study titled ‘Community impact of football in New South Wales’. The report[18] through detailed analysis of the data collected from the community of New South Wales was able to establish that the community football affected in positive relationship between a club and it’s residents. The results administered positive and substantial growth in social, mental and physical benefits. In adherence to this notion[18] carried out a periodic study on the community base of Arsenal football club. He in his research paper suggests that sport-based community development encourages group-based volunteering[14], which in fact helps in leading a sustained high social life and offers opportunities to develop confidence and build up self-esteem ultimately encouraging them a social connection and sense of belonging. Burns carried out a research study aimed at understanding how changes in football and football clubs have varied in various have altered their relationship with their community. The author...
argues that the increased commercialization of the game has helped football clubs increase revenues and other facilities especially due to their strong communities but does at the end tries to address if the game is still a ‘People’s Game’.

The objective of the study was to understand the importance of striving towards building a strong and healthy community and how building a strong community is linked to more prosperous Social, Health, Economic benefits for the community helps sustenance of football clubs in India. The study of the importance of community building for a football club in India in relation to the English and Spanish club will help the Indian clubs, fans club, administration members understand how strong relations with the club stakeholders help build a strong club in the initial days of a football club competing in the top tier national league.

2. Material & methods:

The literature review suggests that a quantitative approach to this research would be problematic. It is due to the context dependent phenomenon. The context in this research was about knowing why community building is important for Indian football clubs which in their nascent stages are just developing as a top tier football clubs only for past few years

2.1 Selection of the Subjects

All community members of Kerala Blasters Football Club in the state of Kerala were selected as subjects for the proposed study as well as some fans of Bengaluru FC. The community members here indicate all the people associated with the football club, fans, players, administration employees and other stakeholders.

2.2 Selection of Variables

For rooting out the relationship between the football club and its community following variables were selected:

a) Involvement in sport as recreation or competition
b) Changing Lifestyle
c) Number of programs run by the Club
d) Impact of Work-life balance by the community
e) Impact on attitude, cooperativeness, and social connection
f) Impact on participation, volunteering, income
g) Participation outside the community
h) Inclusion of multicultural, Disable and Females into the community.

2.3 Data Collection

The First data point would be accessing research papers, articles and journals regarding the impact towards it’s community. The existence of such football clubs over more than 100 years would provide sufficient information of the community benefits of a football club.

The second Data point analyzed the importance of Indian Football clubs especially the ISL clubs towards it’s community which have been established just 5-10 years earlier. A questionnaire was duly circulated among different club stakeholders to measure the impact of the clubs to the community which would help in assessing the position of such clubs and their ideologies and priorities. The questionnaire consisted of self-developed questions pertaining to various social, economic, health factors impacting people in the community. The research focused at collecting data pertaining to various social, economic and health outcomes of being in the community of a football club and compare the situation so as to measure the importance and inter-dependence of football clubs and it’s local community. The respondents were required to answer the questions by comparing the situation before the start of the ISL and presently (after 6 seasons of the league).
Total responses of 236 participants were recorded through Google form and analyzed to identify the target points and understand the questions targeted by the research.

3. Results and Discussion:

The author through the research found that a football club community inherits fractions of all the three factors stated earlier i.e ‘community’ is built upon the sense of common belonging and collective values, it is often originated based on specific geographical location and spreads due being part of a social network. Social inclusion becomes one of the critical factors while considering the indicators. Through the analysis of the social capital indicators, this study adhered to extracting linkage between indicators of sports participation and social capital. These social capital and health indicators included self-assessed physical health status, social diversity, multicultural and minority inclusion, safety, change in lifestyle etc.

The respondents answered fair or poor if there was no difference in their physical activity in contrast to establishment of Kerala blasters FC and answered other options if there was a change in their health status likewise. The figure below shows the self-assessed physical health status of the respondents. Almost 26% of the respondents reported very good health status which means either they trained regularly or played a sport daily. While 91 people had normal healthy lifestyle and only 13% of people restrained themselves from any physical activity.

![Figure 1: Physical Health Status of the Respondents](image1.png)

![Figure 2: Mange Work-Life balance and responsibility to community](image2.png)

The above figure depicts that almost 58% of the respondents were able to efficiently manage and work out their work-life balance and their responsibility towards community. 26% of the people were not able to manage their balance all the time while only 15% failed in fulfilling their duties. Some of the responses acknowledged that being in the community provided them with

“more friendships and social connectedness”. This provided them with additional confidence which helped them in relatively manage their lifestyle more effectively.

Table 1: Selected Social and Health Capital Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Maybe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer within community</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of confidents more than 3</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social diversity</td>
<td>80.9%</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that more than 56% of the respondents would volunteer if an opportunity is provided. Also the study found that over 74% of respondents had more than 3 friends whom they would interact and associate with on a daily basis. The study by Skinner, J et. al. [20] suggests that being part of sports develops social integration due to the community based social interaction it involves. It would not be able to establish a causal link but it is possible to ascertain a linkage between the two. The above figure shows the responses on social and health factors collected from the respondents. Health factor in the research factor define not only the health of the people in the community but the overall health or activeness of the community. Some of the health factors included in the research were: number of people who would like to volunteer towards a challenge arising in the community. It may be for event or unprecedented circumstances, number of people having friends more than 3.

Table 2: Social Capital Indicators Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator (Inclusive behavior)</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female Participants</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with disability</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More than two-thirds of the respondents agreed that their club provided inclusive environment for people from multicultural background and almost 70% of people agreed to increase in initiatives from the club for females. The study found that there has been considerable increase in change of attitude from the people towards the minority people and females. They were now regarded as a part of the environment which was only possible due to the social connectedness.
from being in the football club community. The research also established that the community provides an environment which is inclusive and open to people from a diverse range and of multicultural backgrounds.

A thriving sports sector often has critical and major impact socially and economically and plays a vital role in the physical and mental health status of the country’s population. This in fact affects the national integration and unity. It is estimated that sports industry contributes almost one to five per cent of a nation’s GDP (KPMG Report). However prolonged underutilization of the resources and instability in governing and administration has deferred India in the formation of ‘Sports’ as an industry like in other developing and developed countries. Due to lack of sporting culture and illiteracy of sports investments in sports, India has traditionally been from funded through CSR initiatives of corporates. Although various examples suggest high potential returns from such initiatives domestically and internationally. This indeed thoroughly reflects in the football industry and culture in India. For football and football clubs to survive and remain profitable, increasing amount of importance should be given to sustainability through community development and fan management.

The research found that development of a community and a football club is interdependent and linked. They tend to grow mutually. The benefits to the community offer a path for the football club to grow as well as help the community in various ways. A football club plays a vital role and has the capacity to contribute to the sustainable economic, social and environmental development of the city it belongs to. The football club helps promote the development of its environment where it is operating by creating workplaces, attention of people worldwide and contribution to city marketing. The financial inflow a club generates adds to the economic development of the city. Some of the factors through which a community football club helps its economy are:

1. Job Creation - Football clubs create numerous employment opportunities for its communities. Due to globalization there is rarely a local athlete representing the team. The jobs are not related to the athletes but are relevant for proper functioning and proper conduct of the football club. Most of the jobs are stadium jobs such as gatekeeper, steward, ticket collector, accountant, security personnel etc. these jobs do not necessarily need an academic degree and helps teenagers gain professional experience. These jobs offer unemployed youth of the city who in need for money turn to violent crimes and get their life destroyed. Many of the kids who find their parents not earning daily wages turn to these jobs to help their family sustain.

2. Helping local business – Football club helps build large consumers within their own community by supporting local business such as bakeries, cafes, restaurants etc. depending upon the success of the team, more business are attracted in to the city from various national and international brands which tend to settle near the stadiums.

3. Tourism and local marketing – The reputation of the football club contributes in marketing the club and brings tourists to its city. People always tend to associate a football club with its city it is associated with. This helps in putting the city in the map for people watching around the world in TVs and OTT platforms.

Study from various literatures across clubs identifies certain social traits relating to being engaged in a sports club community. Some of these are; improved community network, community cohesion, the promotion of social communication, increased unity and cultural beliefs and the promotion of ethnic harmony. A literature review by Atherley concluded that sport can provide social benefits such as community unification, cohesion, cooperation, and common beliefs and pride. The research collected 236 responses from various community member of ISL football clubs especially Kerala Blasters FC and Bengaluru FC. Most of the responses were received from Kerala Blasters FC. Kerala have a far long past of football culture in the country unlike other states.
in India. Kerala has rich history of being the front runner when it comes to being associated with football along with West Bengal. The southern side of India has had formally a long association with football. Newly formed ISL clubs thus have originated from this foundation. Clubs like Jamshedpur FC were one of the first to have founding stones in form of Tata Football academy which have produced numerous Indian national players. These clubs already have their strong sustainable community in place. England has their grassroots and amateur football structure set up which is sustainable which helps them in bringing in heavy load of talented players to the field. Unlike England the grassroots are just being developed and placed into the Indian football script. Due to lack of space and shorter version of the game being preferred by the locals, 7 a-side football has always been popular among people in the state of Kerala. With almost 10,000 to 15,000 average attendance, the sport has been from around 1970’s. Sevens football has drawn most of the crown than in ISL and Santosh trophy. By the late 1970’s ‘Sevens’ game had moved to enclosed ground (Muddy ground), ticketed entry with many teams recruiting foreign national players. Many new generation football star of India like AshiqueKuruniyan, CK Vineeth have emerged just because of being popular from the sevens football. Due to this increasing consumption of sevens football, an association was formed to regulate the players and franchises. This lead to daily tournaments being held in towns and cities offering talented players a platform to showcase their skills and earn money. This has grown into football being part of every person’s life who is in the community associated to their football club.

Establishment of a football club greatly benefits its community but more than provides sustainability to its economy. Presence of a close, strong community bears fruits to the football club not only in monetary terms but help the community behold tragedy and gets the people more socially and economically close. Like during the heavy flood in Kerala in 2018 which washed away thousands of people’s home and almost killed 600 people, the community had come together and used boats and airways to get people stranded to safety. The strength of the people had been praised which involved many local footballers and fan club members joining hand in the rescue of people. Studied suggests that indicators of a rugged community are: Consciousness of kind [like minded thinking of fans], Presence of shared ritual and tradition, Sense of moral responsibility. The effect a successful football club can be traced through its community that the club represents. The indicators are mainly through

- Social contribution
- Health contribution
- Economic contribution

There have been number of long standing discourses on the health and economic contribution of a football club to its community. Most important aspect which affects the people in the community is the social contribution. The research takes into consideration society as ‘cohesive’ as it fosters wellbeing of its population, have inclusive environment and fights marginalization, promotes equality and trust, creates a sense of belonging and offers its members the opportunity of upward social mobility. The study from the research has found that the football club [KBFC] brings together people of different ages, culture, race, gender, disability and backgrounds which creates greater social and cultural diversity within individual networks. Football, not just being a sport but as a game has the ability to transcend race, religion and gender to create community connections through a common passion for the game. The football club environment assists and structuring well-polished and civilized individuals who apply their creativity in leadership, teamwork and community spirit to make a positive contribution to society and accomplishing their moral responsibilities. People develop deep affiliations with their football club and often identify themselves as being part of their community through their connections with the club. The research found that Indian clubs are in the initial stages of development and Aiff (All India Football Federation) have just cleared ISL being the top tier league. Indian clubs need to create a better and strong fan and community base for it to sustain. The research found that almost 70% of the respondents did think there were positive changes since their football club has existed while only 51% of the people did not feel any change to their lifestyle. This shows that the club has impacted positively into the lives of the people through various ways but is only critical to development in...
other areas. It would take at least a decade for the clubs to reach the breakeven point and change the environment around it.

4. Conclusion:

The objective of the study was to understand the importance of building and striving towards having a strong local community for a football club. The research tends to understand how critical it is to having a healthy community for football clubs especially in India where the football culture is in the foundation stages and it only has been 5-6 years of worldwide viewership of the nation’s top tier league. Professional football clubs have been regarded as junctions for the expression of common identity of the game and its history. Football clubs now, as much as ever, incorporate and employ many of the collective symbols, identifications, and process connectivity which have been long associated with the notion of the community. The study finds that there is certain linkage socially, economically between a football club and towards the people of its community. A thriving football club not only earns revenue and offers various monetary options to its environment but affect daily lives of the people associated with it. The club affects the emotional wellbeing, social network, inclusion of outcasters and reduction of marginalized in the community. The study argues that presence of a healthy and strong community increases social diversity and provides inclusive environment for multicultural background. The study finds that these communities help sustain the club when the club faces severe challenges. The importance of a rugged healthy community is far vital and critical especially when the Indian clubs have not even attained the breakeven point in their balance sheet.

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References:


