

Galácticos of the Digital Age: How Brand Loyalty and Strategic Marketing Propel Real Madrid's Global Dominance

Dr. Ranjith Somasundaran Chakkambath¹, Dr. Shamsi Sukumaran², Deedu Sara John³

¹Asst. Professor, AMITY KOCHI, Ernakulam, Kerala, India

²Asst. Dean, AMITY KOCHI, Ernakulam, Kerala, India

³BBA Student, AMITY KOCHI, Ernakulam, Kerala, India

Abstract

Football clubs today rely heavily on marketing strategies to strengthen fan engagement and loyalty beyond on-field performance. This study examines the impact of Real Madrid's marketing strategies on fan loyalty among supporters in Ernakulam, with a particular focus on digital engagement, emotional connection, brand identity, and sponsorship influence. The research adopted a descriptive research design and utilized primary data collected through a structured questionnaire from 101 Real Madrid fans. Convenience sampling was employed for respondent selection. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, Chi-square tests, and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with Principal Component Analysis and Varimax rotation. The findings reveal that the majority of respondents are young individuals aged between 15 and 30 years, with working professionals and students forming the largest segments of the fan base. Digital platforms, particularly online websites, streaming services, and Instagram, emerged as the most preferred channels for match viewing and fan engagement. A significant proportion of respondents acknowledged that marketing activities enhance their emotional connection to the club. Star player influence was identified as the most impactful marketing element affecting loyalty. The Chi-square analysis indicated a significant relationship between age and viewing platform preference, while no significant association was found between gender and loyalty duration. Factor analysis identified four key dimensions of fan loyalty: Emotional Loyalty and Fan Engagement, Club Identity and Social Media Engagement, Performance and Prestige, and Sponsorship Influence and Brand Trust. The study concludes that Real Madrid's integrated marketing strategy plays a vital role in fostering strong and sustainable fan loyalty.

Keywords: Fan Loyalty, Sports Marketing, Real Madrid, Social Media Engagement, Brand Identity, Emotional Connection.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Football has transcended its origins as a mere sport to become a global cultural phenomenon, a multi-billion-dollar industry, and for millions of supporters, an integral component of personal and social identity. The globalization of football has been accelerated by television broadcasting, digital media platforms, international sponsorships, and transnational fan communities, enabling clubs to cultivate supporters far beyond their local geographic boundaries. In the contemporary sports industry, football clubs function not only as competitive sporting organizations but also as global entertainment and commercial brands that influence consumer behaviour, lifestyle choices, and cultural

affiliations. Among the world's most iconic football institutions, Real Madrid Club de Fútbol occupies a unique position due to its unparalleled sporting success, historical legacy, and brand prestige. Founded in 1902 and granted the royal designation "Real" by King Alfonso XIII in 1920, the club has built a remarkable tradition of excellence, winning a record number of UEFA Champions League and La Liga titles. Through decades of sustained success and the recruitment of legendary players, Real Madrid has cultivated a powerful brand identity associated with excellence, ambition, prestige, and global appeal. Beyond attracting football supporters, the club has become a symbol of sporting greatness that resonates across diverse cultures and generations.

However, Real Madrid's prominence extends far beyond its achievements on the field. The club has evolved into one of the most valuable and influential sports brands in the world, serving as a benchmark for strategic sports marketing and brand management. Real Madrid has successfully combined its rich heritage with innovative marketing practices, utilizing digital platforms, social media engagement, global tours, merchandising strategies, and high-profile sponsorship agreements to strengthen its connection with fans worldwide. The club's long-standing partnerships with global brands such as Adidas and Emirates, along with its extensive digital ecosystem, have enabled it to maintain consistent visibility and relevance in an increasingly competitive sports marketplace. Furthermore, Real Madrid's strategic use of star players, often referred to as the "Galácticos" approach, has enhanced both its sporting performance and commercial attractiveness by attracting media attention and expanding its international fan base. The club's digital presence is equally significant, with hundreds of millions of followers across social media platforms, allowing it to engage supporters through personalized content, live interactions, and immersive fan experiences. As a result, Real Madrid exemplifies the modern sports enterprise—an organization that competes simultaneously on the pitch and in the global marketplace, where fan loyalty, emotional attachment, and brand engagement are as important as sporting victories in sustaining long-term success.

1.2 Problem statement

While extensive research exists on the commercialization of European football, there remains a significant gap in understanding how global clubs like Real Madrid cultivate and maintain brand loyalty in emerging markets, particularly in regions with distinct football cultures. Kerala, India, represents a fascinating case study: despite cricket's dominance nationally, football enjoys passionate support, particularly in urban centers like Kochi (Ernakulam). This research addresses the gap by examining how Real Madrid's marketing strategies influence fan loyalty among this specific demographic, exploring the intersection of global branding and local fan engagement.

1.3 Research objectives

1. To examine the demographic profile and viewing behaviour of Real Madrid fans in Ernakulam, and to determine whether demographic factors such as gender and age significantly influence loyalty duration and match-viewing platform preferences.
2. To identify the most influential marketing elements that drive fan engagement and emotional connection toward Real Madrid, including star player influence, merchandise, social media, and sponsorships.
3. To explore and extract the underlying dimensions of fan loyalty toward Real Madrid through Exploratory Factor Analysis, identifying the key factors that contribute to long-term fan commitment

1.4 Scope of the study

This study focuses on analyzing how Real Madrid's branding and marketing strategies influence fan loyalty and engagement, with a specific focus on football enthusiasts in Ernakulam, Kerala. The research explores various marketing elements including social media presence, sponsorship deals, merchandise, and star player influence, while examining their impact on fan behaviour and emotional connection. The study employs a quantitative approach, collecting primary data from 101 respondents through structured questionnaires, and utilizes statistical techniques including descriptive analysis, Chi-square tests, and Exploratory Factor Analysis. The research is confined to fans who follow international football clubs, particularly Real Madrid, and are familiar with its branding and marketing presence. While the findings are

centered on Real Madrid, they may offer valuable insights for other sports brands and clubs seeking to understand fan loyalty in emerging markets. However, the study is limited to a specific geographic location and may not fully represent the views of Real Madrid fans across India or globally.

1.5 Hypotheses

H1₀: There is no significant relationship between gender and the duration of following Real Madrid.

H2₀: There is no significant relationship between age group and the platform used to watch Real Madrid matches.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The transformation of football clubs into global brands has attracted considerable attention in contemporary sports marketing research. Modern football organizations are no longer evaluated solely on sporting achievements but also on their ability to develop strong brand identities, expand international fan bases, and create long-term emotional relationships with supporters. Real Madrid represents one of the most successful examples of sports brand management, leveraging its historical legacy, star players, commercial partnerships, and digital presence to maintain global relevance. Recent studies suggest that fan loyalty has evolved beyond geographic affiliation and is increasingly influenced by branding strategies, digital engagement, and emotional attachment to clubs.

One of the most important drivers of sports brand success is fan loyalty. Brand loyalty in sports differs from traditional consumer loyalty because it is deeply connected to emotional identity and personal attachment. Crisp (2025) argued that sports brand equity is strengthened through fan engagement, community participation, performance excellence, and meaningful interactions between clubs and supporters. Similarly, research by Mănescu and Cristian (2025) emphasized that fan loyalty represents a critical intangible asset for football clubs, influencing merchandise sales, viewership, sponsorship value, and brand advocacy. Their findings suggested that emotional commitment and digital connectivity significantly enhance supporter loyalty in modern football environments.

The rapid development of social media has fundamentally changed how football clubs engage with supporters. Romero-Jara et al. (2023) found that social media has become a central strategic tool for elite football clubs seeking to maintain fan relationships and generate engagement. Their comparative analysis of leading football clubs demonstrated that marketing-focused and sports-related content generated the highest engagement levels across digital platforms. Further research by Romero-Jara et al. (2024) revealed that Instagram was the most effective platform for fan interaction and engagement, while content quality had a greater impact on supporter involvement than posting frequency. These findings highlight the importance of strategic digital communication in strengthening fan relationships and brand loyalty.

Digital engagement has become particularly important for football clubs with global audiences. Mohammadkazemi and Falahat (2024) investigated professional football clubs and found that social media engagement significantly contributes to fan loyalty, fan expansion, and overall business growth. Their study concluded that active digital communities create stronger emotional connections between clubs and supporters, increasing long-term loyalty. Supporting this argument, Barve (2023) identified social media content, athlete-generated media, and digital interaction as key factors influencing fan engagement and purchasing behaviour related to football clubs and sponsors. These findings demonstrate that football clubs must continually innovate their digital strategies to maintain supporter interest in increasingly competitive entertainment markets.

The influence of star athletes remains another major factor affecting fan loyalty. Football clubs often utilize elite players as brand ambassadors capable of attracting supporters across different markets. Research on football fan behaviour found that attractive social media content significantly influences fan loyalty, with athlete popularity serving as an important mediating factor. The study revealed that supporters develop stronger emotional bonds with clubs when they identify with celebrated players and engage with player-related content on social media platforms. This finding aligns

with Real Madrid's historic "Galácticos" strategy, which involves recruiting globally recognized football stars to strengthen both sporting performance and commercial appeal.

Sponsorship and commercial partnerships also play a critical role in reinforcing trust and loyalty among football supporters. Contemporary sports marketing research suggests that sponsorship effectiveness depends on the perceived credibility, relevance, and reputation of sponsor brands. Barve (2023) found that sponsorship recognition positively influences fan engagement and purchasing decisions, particularly when supporters perceive alignment between the club and sponsoring organizations. Real Madrid's long-term partnerships with global brands such as Adidas, Emirates, HP, and other multinational corporations illustrate how strategic sponsorships enhance brand visibility and financial strength while reinforcing consumer trust in the club's brand image.

Recent literature also highlights the significance of brand heritage and prestige in shaping fan behaviour. Real Madrid's brand value is strongly associated with its rich history, record-breaking sporting achievements, iconic players, and global reputation for excellence. Studies examining Real Madrid's marketing strategy have emphasized that the club consistently integrates historical legacy with contemporary innovation to maintain its competitive advantage. The club's ability to connect historical success with modern digital storytelling enhances brand authenticity and strengthens supporter identification. Researchers have observed that football clubs possessing strong heritage brands are more effective in retaining loyal supporters and attracting new generations of fans.

Another emerging area within sports marketing is the relationship between viewing behaviour and digital consumption patterns. Nielsen (2022) reported a growing trend toward digital and social media-based sports consumption, particularly among younger audiences. Contemporary football fans increasingly access live matches, highlights, statistics, and club content through mobile devices and streaming platforms. Research on sports organizations in the digital era similarly indicates that younger supporters show stronger preferences for social media engagement and digital viewing channels compared with older demographics. These developments have encouraged clubs such as Real Madrid to invest heavily in digital ecosystems that provide personalized content and real-time fan experiences.

While previous studies have extensively examined social media engagement and sports branding in European and North American contexts, limited research has explored how these factors influence Real Madrid supporters in emerging football markets such as Kerala, India. Therefore, the present study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by investigating the key determinants of Real Madrid fan loyalty and evaluating the role of strategic marketing initiatives in sustaining the club's global dominance.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive and analytical research design with a quantitative approach to investigate how Real Madrid's branding and marketing strategies influence fan loyalty and engagement. Primary data was collected through a structured Google Form questionnaire distributed between January 21 and March 31, 2026, targeting football enthusiasts who follow international clubs, particularly Real Madrid, in Ernakulam, Kerala. The questionnaire consisted of 11 questions covering demographics, viewing habits, marketing perceptions, and loyalty factors. A convenience sampling method was utilized, reaching 101 valid respondents through online platforms and offline interactions. Secondary data was gathered from Real Madrid's official website, sports business journals, and industry reports to strengthen the theoretical background and support the analysis.

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS (Version 26), employing frequency distribution tables to summarize demographic data and overall response trends. Chi-square tests were applied to examine associations between categorical variables, specifically investigating relationships between gender and loyalty duration, as well as age group and match-viewing platform preferences. Factor Analysis was conducted using Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation to identify underlying loyalty dimensions from the Likert-scale statement responses

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic profile of respondents

Variable	Category	n	%
Age	Below 15 years	5	4.95%
	15-20 years	27	26.73%
	21-25 years	36	35.64%
	26-30 years	26	25.74%
	31+ years	7	6.93%
Gender	Male	87	86.14%
	Female	14	13.86%
Occupation	Student	35	41.18%
	Working Professional	41	48.24%
	Business Owner	23	27.06%
	Retired	2	2.35%

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Source: Survey Data, Sample size =101

The demographic analysis reveals that the majority of respondents (87.12%) fall within the 15-30 years age range, with the 21-25 years cohort representing the largest segment (35.64%). This concentration indicates that Real Madrid's fan base in Ernakulam is predominantly young, aligning with the club's digital-first marketing approach. The gender distribution shows a significant male majority (86.14%), reflecting broader patterns in football viewership demographics, though the 13.86% female participation suggests growing interest among women. Occupationally, working professionals (48.24%) and students (41.18%) constitute the overwhelming majority of respondents (89.42%), confirming that Real Madrid's brand resonates most strongly with economically and digitally active demographics who have greater access to digital content and disposable income for merchandise consumption.

4.2 Duration of following real madrid

Duration	n	%
Less than 1 year	6	5.94%
1-3 years	31	30.69%
4-6 years	52	51.49%
More than 6 years	12	11.88%

Table 2. Duration of Following Real Madrid

Source: Survey Data

The duration of fandom data demonstrates remarkable loyalty among respondents, with 63.37% having followed Real Madrid for 4 years or more. The largest segment (51.49%) has been following the club for 4-6 years, suggesting that the club's success during this period—including multiple UEFA Champions League titles—has significantly contributed to fan retention. Additionally, 30.69% have been supporters for 1-3 years, indicating successful new fan acquisition. Only 5.94% are recent followers (less than 1 year), while 11.88% represent long-term loyalists (more than 6 years). This distribution suggests that Real Madrid has maintained strong appeal across different periods, with the club's consistent on-field success and strategic marketing efforts effectively converting casual viewers into committed supporters.

4.3 Match viewing preferences

Platform	n	%
Online Websites	38	37.62%
Online Streaming	26	25.74%
TV	19	18.81%
Social Media Updates	18	17.82%

Table 3. Match Viewing Preferences

Source: Survey Data

The match viewing preferences reveal a clear shift toward digital consumption, with 63.36% of respondents utilizing online platforms (websites and streaming services) to watch Real Madrid matches. Online websites (37.62%) and online streaming services (25.74%) together account for the majority of viewership, reflecting the increasing accessibility of digital platforms and the growing preference for on-demand, flexible viewing options. Traditional television viewership accounts for only 18.81%, indicating a significant decline in conventional broadcasting consumption among the younger demographic. Notably, 17.82% of fans follow matches through social media updates, likely due to convenience or limited access to live broadcasts. This distribution underscores the critical importance of digital presence for football clubs to maintain connectivity with modern fans who prioritize accessibility and real-time engagement over traditional viewing methods.

4.4 Marketing's impact on emotional connection

Response	n	%
Yes	86	85.15%
No	15	14.85%

Table 4. Marketing's Impact on Emotional Connection

Source: Survey Data

An overwhelming majority of respondents (85.15%) affirm that Real Madrid's marketing efforts—including advertisements, social media content, and branding initiatives—have enhanced their emotional connection to the club. Only 14.85% believe marketing has not influenced their emotional engagement. This finding demonstrates that Real Madrid's marketing strategies are highly effective in building a sense of belonging and loyalty among fans. In the context of modern football, marketing transcends mere brand promotion to become a critical tool for emotional engagement, creating meaningful connections that sustain long-term loyalty. The high affirmative response rate validates the club's substantial investment in digital and traditional marketing campaigns, suggesting that strategic marketing communication effectively translates into deeper fan commitment.

4.5 Most influential marketing efforts

Marketing Element	n	%
Star Player Influence	73	77.66%
Jerseys & Merchandise	11	11.70%
Social Media Engagement	9	9.57%
Sponsorship (Adidas, Emirates)	8	8.51%
TV Ads	0	0.00%

Table 5. Most Influential Marketing Efforts

Source: Survey Data

Star player influence emerges as the dominant factor, with 77.66% of respondents indicating that high-profile players significantly drive their connection to the club. This finding validates the effectiveness of Real Madrid's "Galácticos" transfer policy, which involves signing world-class players who deliver both on-field performance and global commercial appeal. The influence of star players extends beyond the pitch—players like Cristiano Ronaldo, Jude Bellingham, and Vinícius Júnior serve as powerful brand ambassadors whose global recognition attracts fans worldwide. Jerseys and merchandise (11.70%) and social media engagement (9.57%) are secondary but meaningful contributors. Interestingly, sponsorships (8.51%) have minimal direct fan influence despite their substantial financial importance, and TV ads registered zero impact (0%), reflecting a generational shift toward digital platforms and influencer-driven marketing over traditional advertising mediums.

4.6 Social media engagement preferences

Platform	n	%
Instagram	67	66.33%
YouTube	14	13.87%
Facebook	12	11.88%
Twitter (X)	8	7.92%

Table 6. Social Media Engagement Preferences

Source: Survey Data

Instagram's dominance (66.33%) as the preferred social media platform for engaging with Real Madrid content reflects the platform's visual nature, which aligns exceptionally well with football content—including match highlights, player posts, behind-the-scenes footage, and interactive stories. This finding suggests that Real Madrid's digital marketing strategy should continue prioritizing Instagram for daily fan engagement and visual storytelling. YouTube (13.87%) maintains relevance, particularly for longer-form content such as match replays, documentaries, and tactical analyses. Facebook (11.88%) and Twitter/X (7.92%) remain relevant but play secondary roles, with the latter being more suitable for match-day updates, news, and quick highlights. The platform distribution highlights the importance of a multi-platform strategy while emphasizing Instagram as the primary channel for reaching the younger, visually-oriented fan demographic.

4.7 Cross-tabulation and chi-square test

a. Gender × Loyalty Duration Cross-tabulation

	1-3 Years	4-6 Years	Less than 1 Year	More than 6 Years	Total
Female	5	6	2	1	14
Male	25	46	4	12	87
Total	30	52	6	13	101

Table 7. Gender × Loyalty Duration Cross-tabulation

Source: Survey Data

b. Age × Viewing Platform Cross-tabulation

	Online Streaming	Online Websites	Social Media Updates	TV	Total
15-20 years	8	10	4	5	27
21-25 years	9	14	9	3	35
26-30 years	9	9	3	4	25
31+ years	0	1	1	6	8
Below 15 years	0	3	2	1	6
Total	26	37	19	19	101

Table 8. Age × Viewing Platform Cross-tabulation

Source: Survey Data

Association Tested	χ^2	df	p	Significance
Gender × Loyalty Duration	2.622	3	0.454	Not Significant
Age × Viewing Platform	28.85	12	0.004	Significant

Table 9. Chi-Square Test Summary

Note: $p < .05$

Gender × Loyalty Duration: The Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 2.622$, $p = 0.454$) indicates no statistically significant relationship between gender and the duration of following Real Madrid. Both male and female fans demonstrate similar patterns of loyalty, with the majority from both groups having followed the club for more than 4 years. This finding suggests that gender does not influence loyalty duration, and marketing strategies need not be gender-specific for retention purposes. However, the male majority in the sample (86.14%) indicates potential opportunities for expanding engagement among female audiences through targeted initiatives such as promoting Real Madrid Femenino.

Age × Viewing Platform: The Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 28.850$, $p = 0.004$) reveals a statistically significant relationship between age group and the platform used to watch Real Madrid matches. Younger fans (15-25 years) predominantly prefer online streaming and social media updates, demonstrating their digital native status and preference for flexible, accessible content. In contrast, fans aged 31 years and above largely prefer traditional television, reflecting more conventional media consumption habits. This significant finding underscores the necessity for multi-platform content distribution strategies that cater to different generational preferences. Real Madrid must maintain both digital and traditional broadcasting options to ensure accessibility across all age demographics.

4.8 Exploratory factor analysis: to identify the underlying dimensions of fan loyalty toward real madrid.

Prior to conducting factor analysis, the suitability of the data was assessed through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The KMO value of 0.683 indicates adequate sampling adequacy, suggesting that the sample size is sufficient for factor analysis. The significant Bartlett's Test ($\chi^2 = 156.273$, $df = 66$, $p < 0.001$) confirms the factorability of the correlation matrix, indicating that the variables share sufficient common variance to proceed with factor extraction.

Variables	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Watching RM play increases loyalty	0.801			
RM merchandise influences support	0.791			
RM success affects loyalty	0.689			
Support brands that sponsor RM		0.787		
RM collaborations improve brand image		0.732		
Improved engagement would increase loyalty		0.726		
Sponsorships increase interest			0.818	
Marketing creates emotional connection			0.788	
Social media keeps fans engaged				0.888
Brand identity stands out				0.646
Eigen values	4.95	1.356	1.356	1.02
Percentage of total variance	49.497	13.563	13.563	10.2

Table 10. Pattern Component Matrix, Eigen Values and Total Variance Percentage for Components obtained by Principal Component Analysis with Varimax Rotation Method

Note: Factor loadings <0.35 have been omitted from the table.

Factor Analysis was employed using Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation to identify the underlying dimensions of fan loyalty toward Real Madrid. The analysis extracted four distinct factors, collectively accounting for 86.823% of the total variance, indicating a robust and well-defined factor structure.

Factor 1: Emotional Loyalty & Fan Engagement (49.497% variance)

This factor captures the emotional bond that fans develop through experiences like watching matches (.801), owning merchandise (.791), and observing on-field success (.689). The strong loadings suggest that fans are not mere spectators but emotionally invested supporters whose loyalty extends beyond rational evaluation. This dimension demonstrates that watching Real Madrid matches, whether live or online, enhances feelings of loyalty, while merchandise ownership serves as a tangible symbol of belonging. The inclusion of "RM success affects loyalty" (.689) indicates that on-field performance reinforces emotional bonds, validating the importance of sustained sporting excellence in maintaining fan devotion.

Factor 2: Club Identity & Social Media Engagement (13.563% variance)

This factor emphasizes the importance of branding and digital engagement in shaping fan loyalty. The loadings on "Support brands that sponsor RM" (.787), "RM collaborations improve brand image" (.732), and "Improved engagement would increase loyalty" (.726) highlight that fans are significantly influenced by how the club presents itself through partnerships and online presence. This dimension suggests that Real Madrid's premium brand positioning, reinforced through collaborations with global brands like Adidas and Emirates, enhances fan identification with the club. Furthermore, the potential for improved engagement strategies to increase loyalty indicates that continued innovation in digital fan experiences can further strengthen these connections.

Factor 3: Performance & Prestige (13.563% variance)

This factor reflects loyalty driven by the club's elite status and success on the pitch. The highest loading on "Sponsorships increase interest" (.818) and "Marketing creates emotional connection" (.788) indicates that fans perceive Real Madrid's association with prestigious brands and its marketing communications as affirmations of the club's elite status. This dimension demonstrates that fans derive pride and satisfaction from the club's global recognition, with success in major tournaments and partnerships with premium brands contributing to a sense of belonging to an exclusive community. The "Galácticos" policy and strategic sponsorships mutually reinforce this perception of prestige.

Factor 4: Sponsorship Influence & Brand Trust (10.200% variance)

This factor captures the trust and indirect loyalty generated through commercial partnerships. The strong loadings on "Social media keeps fans engaged" (.888) and "Brand identity stands out" (.646) indicate that digital presence and brand distinctiveness are critical for maintaining engagement and trust. Fans not only notice but also trust the brands associated with Real Madrid, viewing these partnerships as validations of the club's quality and reliability. This dimension emphasizes how commercial collaborations—such as those with Adidas, Emirates, and BMW—enhance the club's premium appeal and drive indirect brand loyalty by association, influencing both consumer perception and behavior.

The four-factor solution reveals that Real Madrid's fan loyalty is multi-dimensional, shaped by emotional connection, branding, performance, and commercial influence. These findings align with modern sports marketing strategies, where success is not merely about trophies but about building a powerful brand identity that emotionally resonates with fans across different engagement dimensions. The results also validate the club's integrated approach of combining sporting excellence with strategic marketing, demonstrating that sustained global popularity requires simultaneous investment in player recruitment, digital engagement, and brand partnerships.

4.9 Discussion

The results indicate that Real Madrid has established a strong and loyal fan base in Ernakulam, primarily among young adults, working professionals, and students. The demographic findings reveal that the majority of respondents are between 15 and 30 years of age, highlighting the club's strong appeal among digitally connected and economically active individuals. This is further supported by match-viewing preferences, where most fans rely on online websites and streaming platforms rather than traditional television. The dominance of Instagram as the preferred social media platform also reflects the importance of digital engagement in maintaining fan interest. Moreover, the finding that 85.15% of respondents believe marketing activities strengthen their emotional connection with the club demonstrates the effectiveness of Real Madrid's branding and communication strategies in building meaningful relationships with supporters. The influence of marketing is particularly evident through the club's ability to connect with younger audiences via social media, interactive content, and global digital campaigns.

The study further reveals that fan loyalty toward Real Madrid is driven by multiple interconnected factors. Star player influence emerged as the most powerful marketing element, confirming the continued success of the club's strategy of attracting globally recognized players who enhance both sporting performance and brand appeal. The chi-square analysis showed that while loyalty duration is not significantly associated with gender, viewing platform preferences vary significantly across age groups, emphasizing the need for age-specific content delivery strategies. The exploratory factor analysis identified four dimensions of fan loyalty—emotional loyalty and engagement, club identity and social media engagement, performance and prestige, and sponsorship influence and brand trust. These findings suggest that loyalty is shaped not only by on-field success but also by emotional attachment, digital interaction, brand image, and commercial partnerships. Overall, the results highlight that Real Madrid's integrated approach of combining sporting excellence, star power, strong branding, and digital marketing has been highly effective in cultivating long-term fan loyalty and sustaining its global popularity.

5. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Real Madrid has successfully developed a strong fan base in Ernakulam, particularly among young, digitally active supporters. The findings reveal that digital platforms and social media play a crucial role in fan engagement and match consumption. Marketing activities significantly strengthen the emotional connection between fans and the club, contributing to long-term loyalty. Star players emerged as the most influential marketing element, highlighting the importance of player branding in attracting and retaining supporters. The study also found that viewing preferences differ across age groups, emphasizing the need for diversified media strategies. Factor analysis confirmed that fan loyalty is multidimensional, driven by emotional attachment, club identity, performance prestige, and brand partnerships. Real Madrid's integration of sporting success with effective marketing strategies has been instrumental in sustaining fan loyalty and global brand strength. Future research could focus on female football fans and their engagement patterns to better understand this growing audience segment.

REFERENCES

- [1] Barve, Y. D. (2023). *Assessing the impacts of digital marketing and sponsorship on the football industry as a business and their implications on fan engagement* (Master's thesis, National College of Ireland).
- [2] Crisp, B. (2025). *Beyond match day: Sports brand equity and fan engagement model*. Crisp Consultancy Research Paper.
- [3] Deloitte. (2024). *Annual review of football finance 2024*. Deloitte Sports Business Group.
- [4] Mandis, S. G. (2024). *The Real Madrid way: How values created the most successful sports team on the planet*. BenBella Books.
- [5] Mănescu, C. O., & Cristian, V. C. (2025). The impact of social media interactivity on fan loyalty: An empirical study of football clubs in Europe. *Review of Management and Comparative International Management*, 26(4), 759–772.
- [6] Marketingino. (2024). Real Madrid's marketing strategy: The blueprint behind the world's most valuable football brand. *Marketingino Sports Marketing Review*.
- [7] Mohammadkazemi, R., & Falahat, M. (2024). Leveraging social media for business development: An empirical analysis of fan loyalty and fan expansion. *Cogent Business & Management*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2393739>
- [8] Nielsen. (2022). *Brands and platforms are using data to score big with football fans*. Nielsen Sports Insights Report.
- [9] Real Madrid C.F. (2024). *History of Real Madrid Club de Fútbol*. Real Madrid Official Website. <https://www.realmadrid.com>
- [10] Romero-Jara, E., Solanellas, F., López-Carril, S., Kolyperas, D., & Anagnostopoulos, C. (2024). The more we post, the better? A comparative analysis of fan engagement on social media profiles of football leagues. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 25(3), 578–599.
- [11] Romero-Jara, E., Solanellas, F., Muñoz, J., & López-Carril, S. (2023). Connecting with fans in the digital age: An exploratory and comparative analysis of social media management in top football clubs. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02357-8>
- [12] Sports Business Journal. (2024). The role of attractive social media content on fan loyalty with the mediating role of athletes' popularity. *Sports Business Journal*.
- [13] Widjaya, I. (2024). The value of a brand: Real Madrid case study. *Small Business CEO Magazine*.