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Data-Driven  
Innovation

*Building Back Better, Data Driven Innovation and the Scottish Football Industry<sup>1</sup>*



## **Micro Briefing: International Engagement through Scottish Football Clubs**

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<sup>1</sup> We are grateful for the support and co-operation given to this study from the four football clubs that participated in the study (Aberdeen, Heart of Midlothian, Hibernian and Motherwell) and the Scottish Football Association.

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## *Introduction*<sup>3</sup>

1. Football is Scotland's most popular sport. It delivers in communities and connects with those on the margins of society on a scale that other cultural institutions and sports fail to match. Football clubs are anchor institutions within Scottish communities, giving a sense of place, hope and resources. Yet, they do not exist in a vacuum, isolated from the broader contexts and forces that affect the people, communities, and countries in which they are situated- including the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. Moving beyond these localities and the micro lives of people, Scottish football has an international context. Indeed, Scottish football's reach and potential to foster international engagement for Scotland is a form of soft power that Scotland has still to fully capitalise upon. Scotland is a small nation with a large football footprint. Scotland has a set of football and sporting assets that can help to promote Scotland as a brand on the international stage, whilst also advancing influence and opportunities for dialogue and co-operation that have yet to be fully realised<sup>4</sup>. Scottish football must be viewed as an asset in the facilitation of international relations and as a vehicle to promote the values of Scotland into the lives of the global population.
3. In the words of the Chair of Scotland's Sustainable Growth Commission, 'I can think of no other business, institution or organisation with the communication reach of football. Every week it dominates swathes of broadcast media, social media, and crucially, public discussion<sup>5</sup>. Scottish football conversations also travel, facilitated by the dissolving of geographical boundaries through social media.
4. International engagement through Scottish Football Clubs is but one of a series of micro briefings from the Edinburgh University Data Driven Innovation project analysing the Scottish Football Industry. The data base for this specific briefing resulted from primarily, but not solely, international engagement with YouTube data across the four premier Scottish clubs who participated in this study.
5. As Scotland's most popular sport the opportunity for football to enable a positive Scottish narrative to promote a story on a global stage of solidarity, innovative support, resilience, and connectivity and social bonding between people regardless of geographic distance or sociocultural differences, should be an aspiration and supported and nurtured.
6. This is one of two micro briefing papers to be produced on international engagement with the other micro briefing paper focusing upon Scottish international engagement and reach through the co-hosting of the Euro 2020 football championships in Glasgow.

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<sup>3</sup> Project Team: Jake Barrett, Ellen Frank Delgado, Grant Jarvie, Neil Mason, Neil McGillivray, Mason Robbins, Michael Rovatsos, Josh Scott, Paul Widdop, Yujun Xu.

<sup>4</sup> In 2019 the Jarvie Report on the Scottish Sporting Landscape specifically recommended that Scottish sport be supported to develop its potential as a soft power asset to advance Scotland's cultural relations.

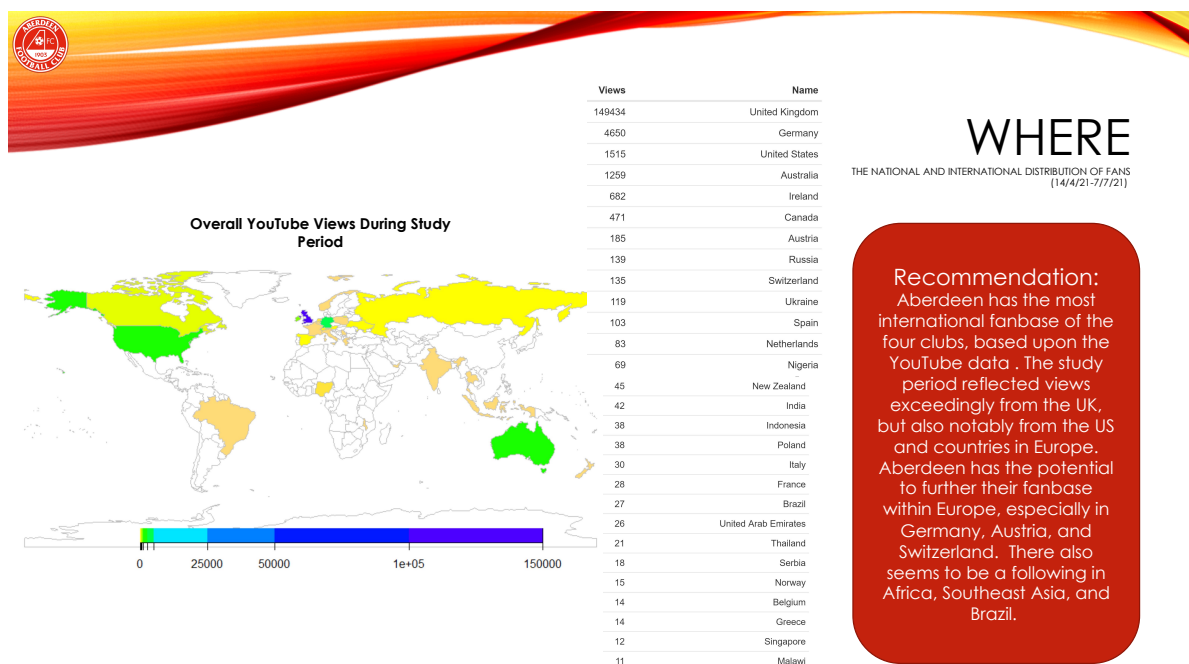
<sup>5</sup> Wilson, A. (2020). Football must be the foundation of stone as we rebuild. Nutmeg No 18: December 2020, p17.

## ***Data Driven Innovation and the Scottish Football Industry.***

7. The series of micro briefings on the Scottish Football Industry have resulted from a Scottish Funding Council grant as part of the Data-Driven innovation Initiative and the '[Building Back Better](#)' open funding call, helping to transform the City region into the data capital of Europe. The Scottish Funding Council has provided £75m funding to boost the Scottish university research, to contribute to the mitigation of effects of Covid-19 pandemic. The University of Edinburgh received £23.2m of these funds.
8. The data driven approach to Covid recovery and job retention in the Scottish football industry project was led by the University of Edinburgh's Academy of Sport<sup>6</sup> in partnership with the Bayes Centre<sup>7</sup>.
9. The project was designed to (i) produce unique data sets that could help the Scottish football industry build back better from Covid-19 and (ii) demonstrate the potential of the University of Edinburgh's capability to inform and support both the football industry and the broader sports industry.
10. The project consisted of three sets of data driven activities, including (i) an analysis of Scottish football conversational sentiments, generated through online communications; (ii) a spatial and demographic analysis of supporters and non-supporters and (iii) a cataloguing of a Scottish football data set.
11. This section of this micro briefing focuses upon specific data capture around international engagement on the social media site YouTube, through analysing engagement with content produced by the four football clubs that partnered in the study, namely Aberdeen FC, Hibernian FC, Heart of Midlothian FC, and Motherwell FC.

### ***Four Cases***

#### ***Aberdeen FC***



<sup>6</sup> [University of Edinburgh Academy of Sport](#)

<sup>7</sup> [University of Edinburgh Bayes Centre](#)

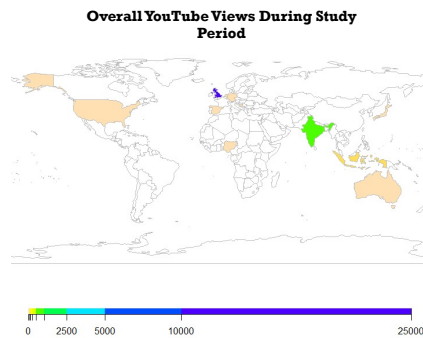
## Heart of Midlothian FC



### Where

#### Season Ticket Campaign Launch Summary

Of the four clubs analysed, Hearts has the lowest number of YouTube viewers both in raw numbers and in terms of international distribution. The vast majority of Hearts viewers stem from the UK, with India second (and quite far ahead of third). It is unclear why Indian viewership is so high, perhaps due to historic links: this could provide a potential area for future growth.



Views	Name
17239	United Kingdom
918	India
70	Indonesia
22	Australia
21	United States
14	Germany
14	Netherlands
13	Nigeria
12	Japan
11	Spain
10	Bosnia & Herzegovina

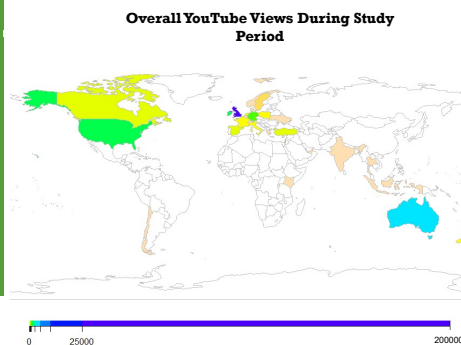
## Hibernian FC



### Where

#### Season Ticket Campaign Launch Summary

Hibernian's international YouTube viewer base comes predominantly from the UK, with other anglophone countries also registering a significant number of views. Other countries are generally either in Europe (a proximity effect) or have links with players, for example Ofir Marciano and Israel (a player effect).



Views	Name
153837	United Kingdom
2963	Australia
2428	Ireland
1956	United States
541	Germany
497	Canada
385	Netherlands
349	Spain
277	Turkey
243	New Zealand
225	Italy
200	France
118	Poland
100	Sweden
66	Israel
57	Jamaica
47	Indonesia
39	Thailand
23	India
23	Ukraine
21	Belgium
11	Switzerland
10	United Arab Emirates
10	Chile
10	Denmark
10	Greece
10	Kenya
10	Norway

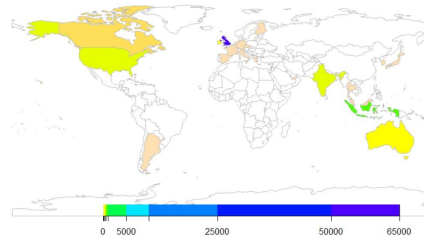


## Where

YouTube Viewership (15/4/21 -07/07/21)

The second most common viewer country for Motherwell's YouTube channel is Indonesia, followed by India. Motherwell also had a decent number of viewers from mainland Europe, in the Netherlands, Greece, Finland, France, Italy, and Germany. Two other countries with relatively high viewership were South Korea and Argentina. It is possible that Motherwell has an opportunity to expand their following in some of these key geographies, especially Indonesia and India.

Overall YouTube Views During Study Period



Views	Name
55861	United Kingdom
643	Indonesia
422	India
343	United States
190	Australia
104	Ireland
78	Canada
47	Netherlands
45	Greece
45	South Korea
37	Argentina
35	The Czech Republic
31	Finland
29	Spain
26	France
23	Italy
23	Malaysia
16	Thailand
14	Germany
13	Hong Kong

Motherwell FC  
49,949 followers



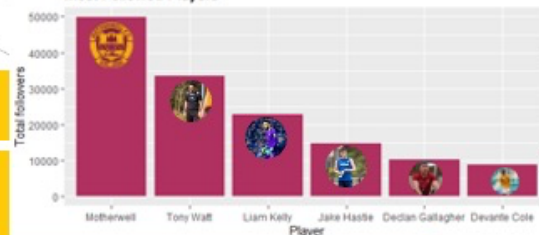
Squad Size:  
32

Squad on Twitter:  
22 (68%)

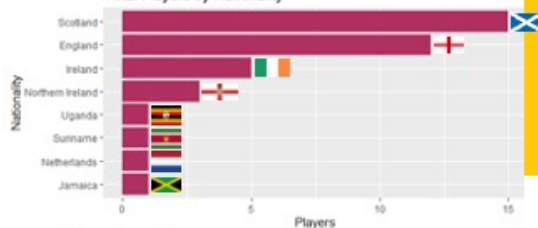
Total team value:  
£10.46m

Total Twitter  
followers:  
142.6k

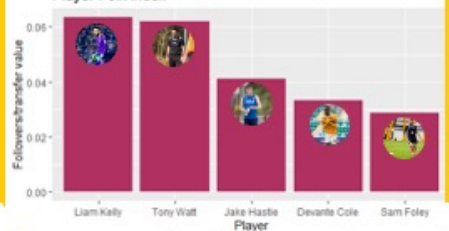
Most Followed Players



Total Players by Nationality



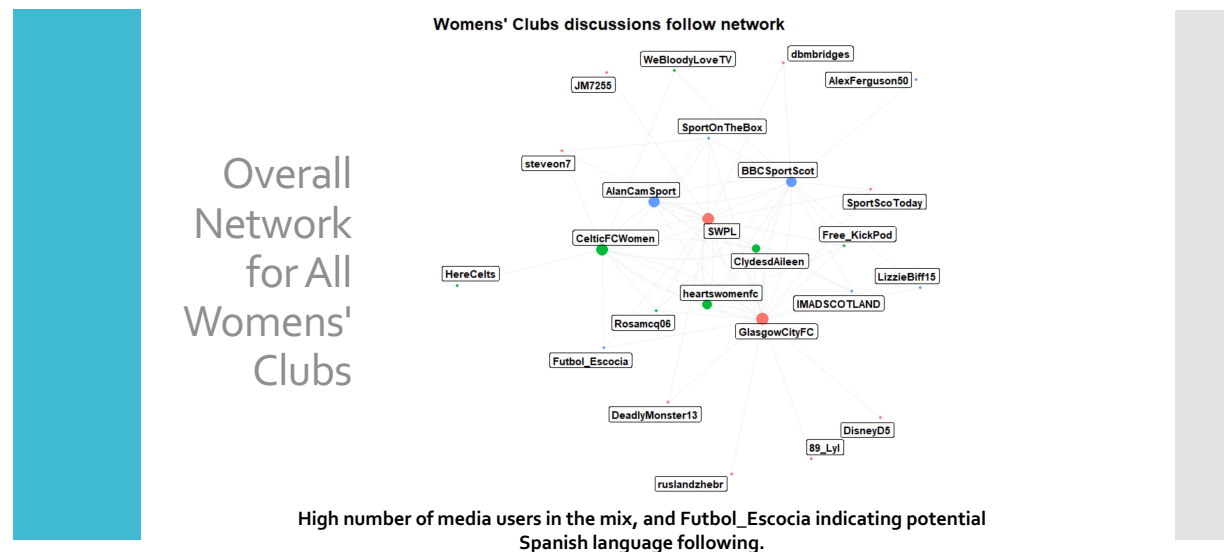
Player Folk Index



The Player Folk Index is a measure of a player's online footprint compared to his transfer fee. A player with a high PFI (e.g. with a low transfer fee and a high Twitter follower count) may be more popular with the fans and thus more helpful in driving engagement than a player with a low PFI (e.g. with a high transfer fee but no Twitter presence).

**Analysis:** Motherwell's 68% Twitter proliferation is standard among the four clubs. In terms of team value, Motherwell sit above Hearts, and for total followers sit above Gillingham FC. Nationalities are mainly restricted to home nations, but some international representation comes from Bevis Mugabe (Ugandan, 6,499 followers), Devante Cole (English/Jamaican, 8,960 followers) and Sherwin Seedorf (Netherlands/Suriname, 2,986 followers). The team itself is the most followed Twitter account, with striker Tony Watt and goalkeeper Liam Kelly also demonstrating considerable reach. Liam Kelly over-indexes on the Folk Index, bringing in 0.64 followers/£.

SWPL Week 5



**Key Findings from the Data Analysis**

12. Social media opens up different ways of communicating with clubs and other fans. Where once individuals engaged in a one-way stream of information, millions of people are now interacting with football in a variety of different ways, across various platforms in a two-way process of interaction. Interacting with social media content not only has a national reach but also an international reach and should be seen as an increasingly sustained, focused, and enlarged means of engagement with football clubs. In addition, the fact that interaction occurs on these sites is of sociological interest to football clubs as they seek to better explore fan behaviour, idea and habit formation, and interaction dynamics.
13. As noted on the various slides above, all clubs had a variety of international and domestic engagements. The data shows that Aberdeen had the greater concentration of international engagement with people based upon the YouTube data.
14. Between April and June 2021, the online engagement of the two Edinburgh football clubs, namely Hibernian and Hearts, accounted for 31 different countries. The benefit of sharing data between clubs helps to support the evidenced case for Scottish football contributing to Scotland's capacity and capability for international engagement and potential relationship building.
15. Data further shows that in one 5-week spell between March and April 2021 Motherwell had an international following across 21 countries. International engagement of this kind (see also the three other clubs) allows us to start understanding the meaning attached to these clubs, the city of Edinburgh itself, and Scotland as a nation. Only by understanding the behaviours of people across different national context can we start to understand the power of soft power.

16. Building a global digital footprint requires an active presence in countries with different languages and cultures. While fans in all countries may understand football, telling football stories requires local language — using a community manager and media partners who can deliver the content in that language are important factors.
17. Furthermore, it is not enough to simply sit back and admire the general engagement statistics, we must seek to understand the role these engagements are making in the everyday micro interactions of people and how these micro interactions are generating a macro reflection of Scotland, the Scottish brand and the clubs.
18. It is increasingly important to understand fan engagement data, from a variety of different sources. It is important for clubs to understand that platforms are not homogenous, they require different forms of content. With regards to major social media platforms - Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, Weibo and more - rather than creating one piece of content and posting it to every platform, content might be tailored for each specific platform in the way users consume their content. Even on a platform like Twitter, you may have alternative sites focusing on different markets, for example a Spanish-speaking account. These decisions are based on fan engagement data that should be analysed by the football clubs' marketing and communication teams. Where once traditional marketing was broadcast model, today's communication has to increasingly seek interaction with and between customers and supporters.
19. There remain several untapped opportunities for clubs to use. One such opportunity involves the social media footprint of footballers in the club. The individual and collective international player profile of players at clubs has not been optimised as a means of international reach, dialogue, and co-operation between clubs and international communities. International player folk appeal has not yet been fully leveraged. International players could appear much more as key content drivers out of the UK for each club. This could represent an untapped online resource.
20. Elite women's football mirrors that of their male counterparts and is global in nature. The leading territories from a revenue-generating perspective are globally spread and the 30 clubs (generating the highest revenue (more than USD 1m)) come from 13 different countries.
21. With the growth of the women's game accelerating at a time when social media is so prevalent, it provides a platform that can help drive interest if utilised in creative and innovative ways, including international reach of the SWPFL and the clubs.
22. The capacity of women's football to generate and make use of data driven innovation to support women's football in Scotland remains unequal when compared to the capacity of the men's game.

### ***The Context***

23. The new SFA 2021-2025 strategy specifically states that Scottish football decisions will be data led and that innovative ways of improving the game will be embraced. It also states that it will connect Scottish football's diverse communities, that the game will embrace all cultures and football is open to all with no boundaries or limitations.



24. We recognise that data driven innovation can help understand behaviours and what fans want and care about but also the potential in digital transformation of the football engagement journey to engage fans and communities beyond Scotland's geographical borders.
25. We are also aware that fans can be segregated into different target markets. For example, we are aware of the much-contested dichotomy between legacy fans and new fans (although these terms are also contested). We still have far to go to start to understand behaviours of Millennials, Generation X and Generation Z and how they engage with football clubs. Data driven approaches remain essential to better understanding these groups online and offline behaviour.
26. Scotland's international development reports champion Scotland's role in the world as a global citizen. Scotland's External Affairs Directorate is fronted by a Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture and supported by a Minister for Culture, Europe, and International Development. Both are accountable for enhancing Scotland's international relations and promoting Scotland's ambition to be a global citizen.
27. If Scotland is ambitious about foreign policy and international relations the political parties need to recognise the tools that they have, and football and sport is one of them.
28. A series of Scottish engagement strategies and reviews exist that are designed to drive and enable international engagement with, for example, Canada, USA, China, India, Pakistan, Malawi, Rwanda, Columbia, not to mention Scotland's Arctic Policy Framework and bespoke strategic reviews for dialogue and co-operation between and together with different parts of the UK.
29. The British Council's (2019) review of Scottish soft power specifically pointed to Scotland's strong sporting culture in football, rugby, tennis, and golf, and that Scotland should urgently consider employing sports diplomacy tools such as engaging in friendly matches or exchanges with Dubai, Qatar, and the US.
30. Scotland prides itself both in a pre-Covid and Covid-19 periods of contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals and yet has failed to maximise the potential of sport being given a UN mandate to enable the realisation of the 2030 agenda.
31. In a recent account of how the pandemic was affecting society an international call was issued asking for the forging of a new common good and the strengthening of resilience at individual, community, and societal levels across the globe.
32. One of the consequences of lockdown is that many may have had time to reflect upon the world we live in, see more of our common humanity, care about our interdependence and reflect on the possibilities of different futures.
33. Football should clearly be seen as a key tool in the armoury of Scotland's politicians as they pursue Scotland's international interests and quest for influence on the world stage, if not an enlarged common good.



34. If you have a tool that is a language and has characteristics of scale, popularity and reach then why would countries, non-governmental agencies and clubs not leverage it fully to build mutuality and trust that works for the common good.
35. We should start to measure soft power through understanding the micro interactions of those involved in the conversations around Scottish football. Only by knowing these micro interactions and their contents can we start to truly uncover how Scotland is projected to the world.

### ***Culture and Football***

36. Football as part of the sports portfolio, in Scotland, sits within the health portfolio but there is just as strong an argument for sport to be recognised across portfolios. Football and sport should be recognised much more within international and external portfolio briefs and recognised as being a vital part of an international and global narrative that works for Scotland in terms of forging international engagement and co-operation. Football like sport, as this study evidences, is political, economic, as well as social and this should perhaps be reflected centrally.
37. An understanding of contemporary cultural relations requires an understanding of contemporary cultures. This includes the political, economic, and social roles of football in culture and in cultural markets.
38. By its very nature cultural relations is relational, it involves interaction, relationships, and networks. The medium of exchange is culture, and what is created is a relationship in a wider network structure. Football in Scotland is not always afforded the same status as other aspects of culture and confusion continues to exist about what should and should not be included in cultural missions and visits. The role of the arts has long been recognised and celebrated in European culture as a valuable social tool. Football should be afforded the same status as other facets of culture in Scotland's efforts to engage internationally.
39. If Scottish cultural relations are to be effective, it should embrace what football and sport have to offer not just in terms of its qualities of reach and scale but because of its capability of delivering outcomes beyond simply relationship building and doing this through culture.
40. A continuing challenge for Scottish governments interested in advancing effective cultural relations through football is not to exclude football from delivering cultural outcomes by adopting elitist or non-inclusive cultural portfolios that do not position football as a potential deliverer of cultural relations and/or the common good.
41. Scotland does not have an intervention like the Premier Skills which has reached 29 countries since 2007<sup>8</sup>. Perhaps this should be considered.

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<sup>8</sup> See <https://premierSkills.britishcouncil.org/>

42. Scotland does not have the equivalent of the Norway Cup, described by a Norwegian Minister for International Development as one of the best international tools for winning friends that Norway has<sup>9</sup>.
43. Scotland must harness the power of football to develop and nurture relations abroad, but it must also seek to influence the lives of everyday people as well as industry and political delegates. Football can do this.

### ***National and International Developments***

44. Countries with a similar profile to Scotland are increasingly utilising the power of sport to build international relations and build a national brand. Wales are using sport to help position itself in the global World. The Welsh Government has recently placed sport within the Welsh Government's *International Relations through Public Diplomacy and Soft Power 2020-2025 Action Plan*. This builds upon the back of *Towards a Welsh Sports Diplomacy Strategy Report* that evidenced the way in which countries were using sport in innovative ways to enable international engagement, co-operation, and dialogue. In many ways, Wales in the UK, if not beyond the UK, are leading the pathway for other nations to follow.
45. North Macedonia has a specific ministerial adviser to the Prime Minister to specifically advise on sports diplomacy.
46. The U.S. Department of State's sports diplomacy programming taps into sport to bring together Americans and people from around the world with the goal of supporting a more stable and secure society. Housed in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), people-to-people sports exchanges open doors in hard-to-reach places and engage communities at the grassroots level.
47. The U.S. Department of State's Sports Diplomacy Division works with American sports entities and partner non-profits to manage core sports diplomacy programmes. This office serves as the linchpin between these organizations and U.S. Embassies and Consulates around the world to manage four pillars: Sports Envoys, Sports Visitors, the International Sports Programming Initiative, and a Global Sports Mentoring Program (GSMP).
48. France: A sports diplomacy strategy was launched in 2014 by Valérie Fourneyron, the then Minister of Sports. Looking forward to 2024 and the Olympic Games in Paris, a new role for French sport is envisaged, one that: delivers not just health outcomes but is to be a driving force for educational and civic engagement, is an enabler for solidarity, equality and inclusion and helps to intensify the positive impact of sport in societies across the world.
49. The latter is assisted through Sport En Commun<sup>10</sup>, launched in September 2020 and supported by a coalition of Public Development Banks and partners. It will enable the sustainable development goals through funding projects that will deliver specific outcomes through sport. Given the historical links between France and Africa one

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<sup>9</sup> See <https://norwaycup.no/about-us/about-norway-cup/>

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.sportencommun.org/en/actualite/launch-of-the-sport-en-commun-platform/>

specific strand of activity will be to support sports investment through a Pan African platform located in Senegal. In simple terms Sport En Commun will fund, support, connect, advocate, and promote French soft power through sport, including football.

50. Australia launched its first sports diplomacy strategy in 2015 and its second in 2020. The aim of this journey was to ensure that Australia's domestic culture, identity and love of sport was included in its diplomacy. Sport was identified by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) as a key soft power asset. Working in tandem with Australia's overseas embassies, posts and missions, sport, diplomacy, and soft power were seen as vital to help shape an environment that was positively disposed to Australian foreign policy interests and values.

## ***Conclusion***

51. Social media has opened up new lines of communication with those based across international borders. Clubs, Cities and Scotland must work collaboratively to fully explore this potential.
52. The use of football to make a difference, carry a message, deliver statements on a scale that few other areas of public life can should not be underestimated.
53. As Scotland's most popular sport, the opportunity for football to enable a positive Scottish narrative beyond Scotland is a potential story of solidarity innovative support, resilience, and connectivity between people regardless of geographic distance.
54. Scottish football clubs have a significant social media footprint internationally that could be developed further.
55. By understanding the micro interactions of international groups, we can start to explore what Scotland represents to them at the macro level. Football is an increasingly important vehicle to communicate a nations value into the everyday lives of communities across the globe.
56. It is important to understand fan engagement data. Traditional forms of marketing are eroding as people consume and interact in various ways across various platforms. Where one piece of marketing content would fit across a variety of different media outlets, various social media sites require remarkedly different content. These decisions are based on fan engagement data that should be analysed by the football clubs' marketing and communication teams.
57. Social media sites are built on prosumption. That is consumers produce and consume the content, that is they are said to co-create the product. Clubs must better understand the importance of prosumption and this co-creation dimension, as essentially fans and consumers are actively part of co-creating the club and its brand online.
58. In a marketing sense, all players in a squad have to some extent domestic and internationally reach. Yet, the individual and collective international player profile of players at clubs has not been optimised as a means of international reach, dialogue, and co-operation between clubs and international communities. International player folk appeal has not yet been fully leveraged. International players could appear much more

as key content drivers out with the UK for each club. This could represent an untapped online resource.

59. Elite women's football mirrors that of their male counterparts and is global in nature. The leading territories from a revenue-generating perspective are globally spread and the 30 clubs (generating the highest revenue (more than USD 1m)) come from 13 different countries.
60. With the growth of the women's game accelerating at a time when social media is so prevalent, it provides a platform that can help drive interest if utilised in creative and innovative ways, including international reach of the SWPFL and the clubs.
61. Under devolution, foreign policy is a matter reserved to the UK parliament and government. But, like many devolved and regional governments, the Scottish Government has developed its own external relations. Harnessing its soft power, it has contributed to shaping foreign policy agendas and arguably shown leadership in areas of human rights and the sustainable development goals while forging stronger relations with some parts of the world.
62. As part of these ongoing discussions that include but go beyond diaspora networks, sports tourism and attracting major sporting events, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Football Authorities should recognise and value much more how football, and sport, might boost dialogue, co-operation and international activities and relations. There is a great deal for Scotland to learn from. Some potential case studies for Scotland to look to, include: Wales has done around sports diplomacy, Norway has done with the Norway Cup, France is doing with Sport En Commun, the USA is doing with sport through USAID, what Germany has done through football being part of toolkit used by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and what the UK through the British Council has established through Premier Skills.
63. Intuition can be a valuable tool, but it is through data driven innovation and analysis that we verify, interpret and measure to consistently achieve results and outcomes. Data-based decision- making has to date enabled sports business leaders validate courses of action before committing to it. Data driven tools and innovation are continually evolving and the both the football industry and sports industry need to connect with new knowledge, methods, and skills to harness data at scale if they are for example to fully understand the fan base and potential fan base. The ability of clubs to access in depth data, analytics and innovation is uneven and disproportionately focused upon player performance. An over-dependency upon gate receipts as primary revenue streams should be both valued and recognised as a risk by Scottish football clubs.
64. Building back better requires lessons to be learned: (i) by national response teams led by the Scottish Government about the total contribution that football can make, and (ii) by football itself about how it reacts through the crises, how it recovers from the impact of the crises, how it develops and uses its own data driven innovation to be more resilient and proactive in relationship to different stakeholders, perceived or otherwise in Scottish football.

## ***Micro Briefings: Building Back Better, Data Driven Innovation and the Scottish Football Industry.***

The Academy of Sport in partnership with the Bayes Centre have developed a series of micro briefings written in collaboration with partners from the Scottish Football Industry. They are intended to inform and contribute to enhancing the capability of Scottish football to learn from the Covid-19 pandemic and embrace the possibilities of how data-driven decision-making, innovation and sharing can support, for example, business data analysis and off-field data analysis.

It is envisaged that other micro briefings on Scottish football would include international engagement through football; social and demographic analysis of football season ticket holders; bespoke briefings for individual football clubs supporting the project; Scottish football building back better from Covid-19 and more.

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