



**2020**  
**GANASSA**

**The First Report on the State of European Football in East Asia**

# The Ganassa Report

## The State of European Football In East Asia 2020

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And -yes!-, we are also looking for partners and sponsors for 2021.

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# Introduction

# Infosummary



Tottenham Hotspur, Manchester United and Liverpool combined are supported by almost half of the the Korean fans surveyed



Over two thirds of the fathers of the Korean fans we interviewed are not interested in football



Two Spanish clubs and two German clubs are in the Korean fans' second favourite teams

Top 5

#3  
The Bundesliga is the third most popular league in Korea Rep.



대한민국



Almost nine European football supporters in Korea Rep. also actively support their national teams

Less than one Korean supporter in five reads news from the Internet in foreign languages



19.5%  
The average age at which Koreans become supporters is higher than in the rest of East Asia



Less than one supporter in five bought the original jersey of their favourite club during the 2019/20 season



# The Ganassa Report



About a year ago, in the summer of 2019, we were looking for ways to enhance the portfolio of services we offer our clients, and decided to focus upon certain research. Our task was to gain a solid grasp on the behaviour of the fans in the region where we work, East and Southeast Asia.

The first question was: “Which are the most popular clubs in each country?” We also wanted to get more information on the fans, and specifically who they are: how old they are, what jobs do they do – we wanted their full profile! Finally, we hoped to learn about their behaviour vis-a-vis their lives as supporters: how do they get informed about their favourite clubs? Do they watch every match? Have they bought an official jersey this season?

Well, it has been said that nowadays you can find anything on the internet, so we approached our search with great optimism... only to discover that basically none of the data we were looking for existed – or if it did, it was not public.

As some of us have worked for more than ten years as chief or managing editors in Asia, we decided to pull some strings and asked our influential friends in the region – top journalists, TV producers, heads of fan clubs, players etc. with the same result: we got some interesting opinions, but no hard data.



How is this possible, we wondered? We live in an age when football has finally opened its doors to data: Moneyball, Soccernomics, Soccermatics, with plenty of online platforms capable of dissecting every element of a football match... Is it possible that nobody has taken the time to gather data on the most important people in the game – the fans?

Be that as it may, it was clear that there was only one way to get the data that we wanted. So, we rolled up our sleeves and – as we have done several times in the past – brought together a team of football brains from across Asia and started gathering information from six different countries. Beginning with Southeast Asia, our goal was to interview hundreds of people in each country, approximately half of them in the streets and the other half online.

It is not always easy to get the busy and somewhat shy Asian people to open up about their passion for football, but we quickly gained experience and after overcoming a few hiccups we cruised through the first four countries. Alas, as we started with the fifth, early in 2020, COVID-19 swept across the planet and we were forced to complete the surveys in China and Japan mostly online.

By the end of spring 2020, we had gathered over 130,000 pieces of data, provided by almost 5,500 European football clubs’ fans in Vietnam, Indonesia, Singapore, Korea Rep., China and Japan.



We then organised all information into six separate reports plus a regional summary. For the most part, the data confirmed the impression that many of us who had worked in the region for several years had, but, for the first time, it gave us precise numerical details on fans tastes and behaviour. So we now finally know for a fact that Manchester United is the most beloved club in East Asia, that LaLiga’s popularity has surpassed Serie A, that Asian fans love social media (but in their own language!), that many still buy counterfeit jerseys and that in the Orient as well, Borussia Dortmund is every football geek’s “second favourite club”.

Most interestingly perhaps, we have managed to profile reasons why fans choose or change their favourite club, the influence parents have on such

choices, and how support for a European club mixes with that for a local team and national teams. Overall, we believe we have successfully begun to define the “body and soul” of Asian fans. However, this is only the beginning. A lot of lessons were learned in the making of this research, and there are already plenty of ideas to improve it in the years to come.



We offer our work as our contribution to the ongoing discourse on football as a worldwide phenomenon. We hope that the leagues, clubs, media, sponsors, fans and football lovers around the world can make good use of the data we are willing to share with the community; and we are always open to ideas, comments and criticism that will allow us to come back with an even better report. Thanks to all who have worked on this project, and all who will read and utilise this data. But mostly, thanks to the Asian football fans, who found the time and were willing to tell us about themselves: the hope is that thanks to this research many will be able to serve them better – as they deserve

**Cesare Polenghi, CEO**

Ganassa PTE LTD  
Higashikawa, Japan  
June 25, 2020



Cesare Polenghi is a native of Italy and resides in Japan since 1994. His career as journalist, editor and content producer has brought him all around East Asia, where he has opened over 20 football websites in ten different countries for goal.com, football-channel.jp and football-tribe.com. As a TV commentator, Cesare has appeared in over 300 shows, mostly in Japan, before opening his own agency, Ganassa, in 2016. He lives between Tokyo and Higashikawa, in Hokkaido, Japan.

# Foreword to the Korea Rep. Report



Based on the survey we conducted in Korea, it is evident that teams with, and those which previously had, Korean players enjoy the greatest popularity in the country.. Tottenham Hotspur won 19.7% of the hearts surveyed, whilst Manchester United garnered 14.2%, meaning these two teams have the largest fan bases in Korea. It is clear, therefore, that Park Ji-sung, Lee Young-pyo, and Son Heung-min's efforts at these two clubs have played a huge role in the teams' success in the region, and it is important to note that the presence of a local player in a European team greatly affects that club's popularity in Korea.

Manchester United still has the potential to top the list. Upon Park joining United under the helm of Sir Alex Ferguson, the whole peninsula became fanatics of the Red Devils. Apparently, for a country which had previously had no Premier League player in its history, it was a sensation for the people of Korea. Furthermore, Park was not just an unused sub or reserve, but played a core role in Ferguson's system, which in the fans' view made him all the more deserving of love. Park himself became an ambassador for United, leading the promotion of club-related fixtures and events, meaning he has continued to play a key role in the club's popularity.

Several European giants have launched football academies in Korea in order to nurture talent and engage with fans through the means of football education. Liverpool, for example, opened their academy in Sejong in 2017. The academy was created to nurture young players in Korea, as well as their coaches, who received training from Liverpool in England and have been deployed to guarantee the quality of training.

At times, club ambassadors visit the country to promote events as well. In one instance, former Manchester City player Shaun

Wright-Phillips visited Seoul as part of their trophy tour of Asia and participated in various radio shows and events to engage with fans.

In Korea, SPOTV holds the exclusive rights to air English Premier League (EPL) matches. . They have various channels including SPOTV1, SPOTV2, and SPOTVNOW. They took over from SBS Sports, which previously held the broadcasting rights for the EPL for many years. Commentators from SBS Sports gained the trust and love of

fans and built a huge reputation. Other broadcasters such as KBS N SPORTS and JTBC Golf&Sports air LaLiga and Bundesliga, respectively, enabling fans to enjoy a wide range of European football with few restrictions.

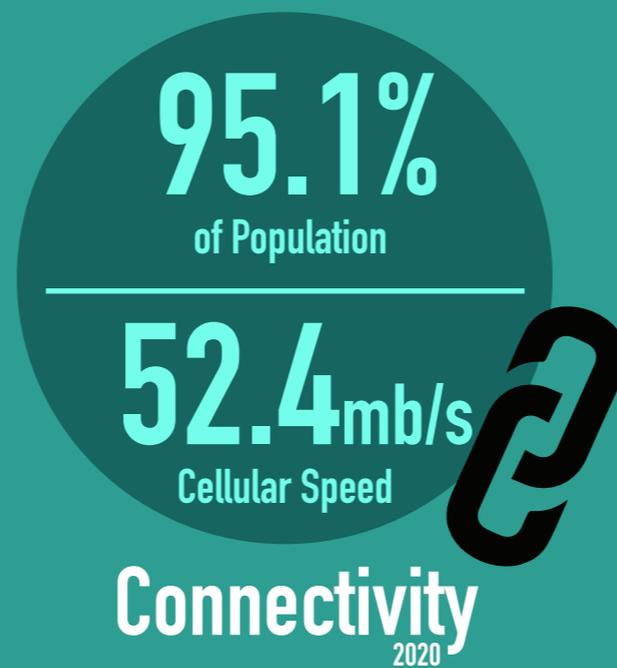
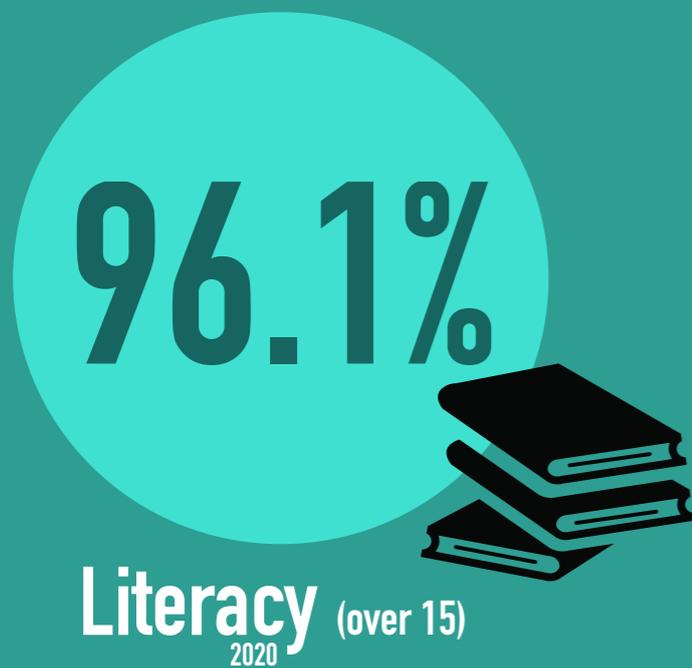
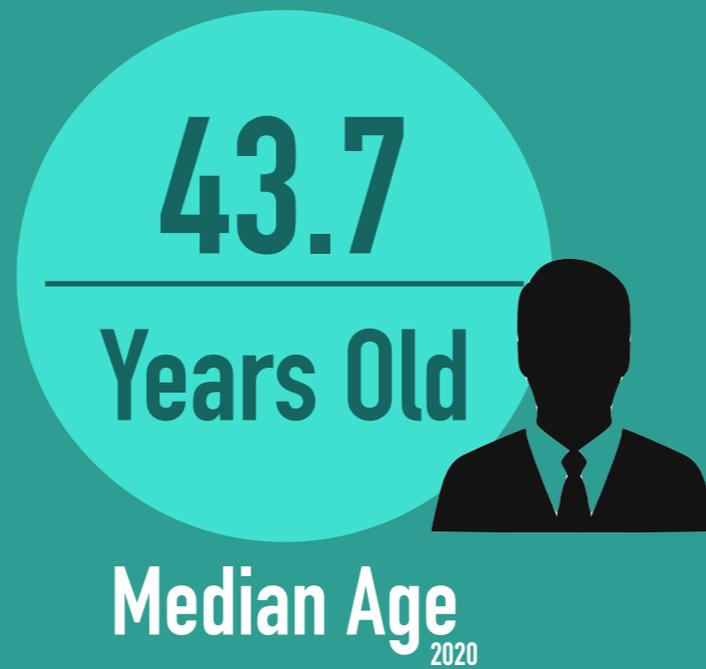
Finally, the survey pointed out the need to address Korean fans in their own language: despite the country featuring a very high level of connectivity, only around 18% of fans read websites or social media in foreign languages.





# Demographics

# Korea Rep. at a Glance

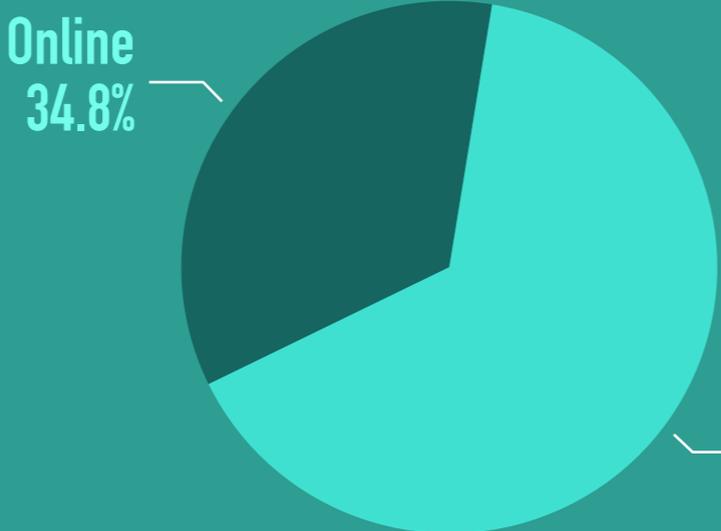


Sources: Worldometers, World Bank, International Telecommunication Union, Opensignal, IMF

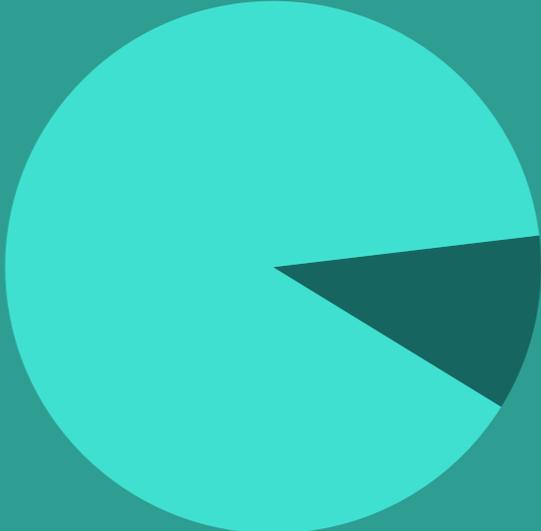
# Survey's Respondents



Average Age

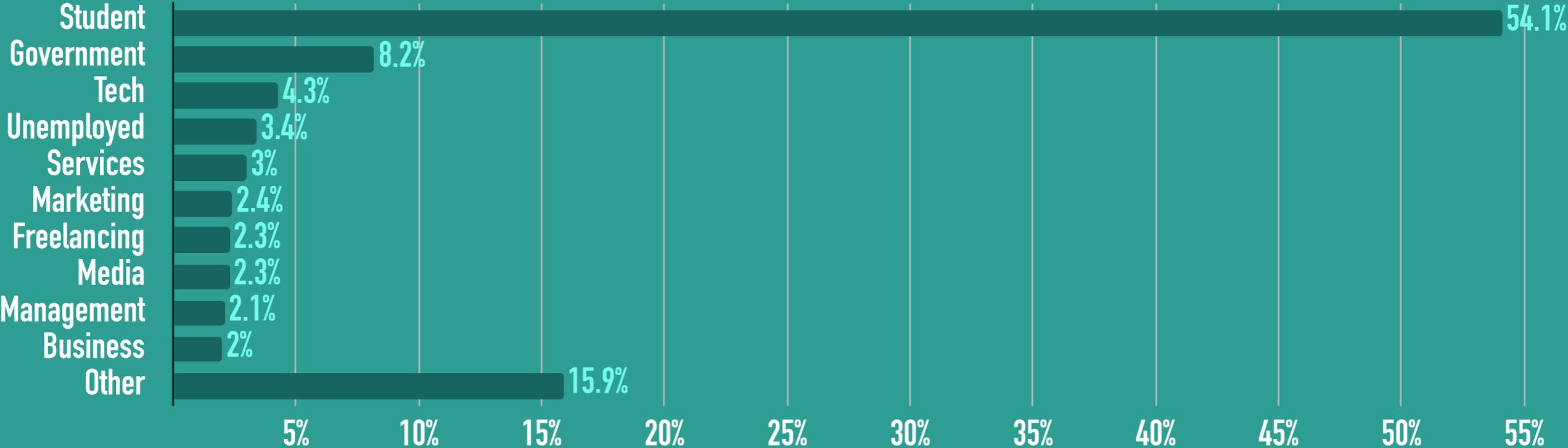


Source



Gender

## Occupation

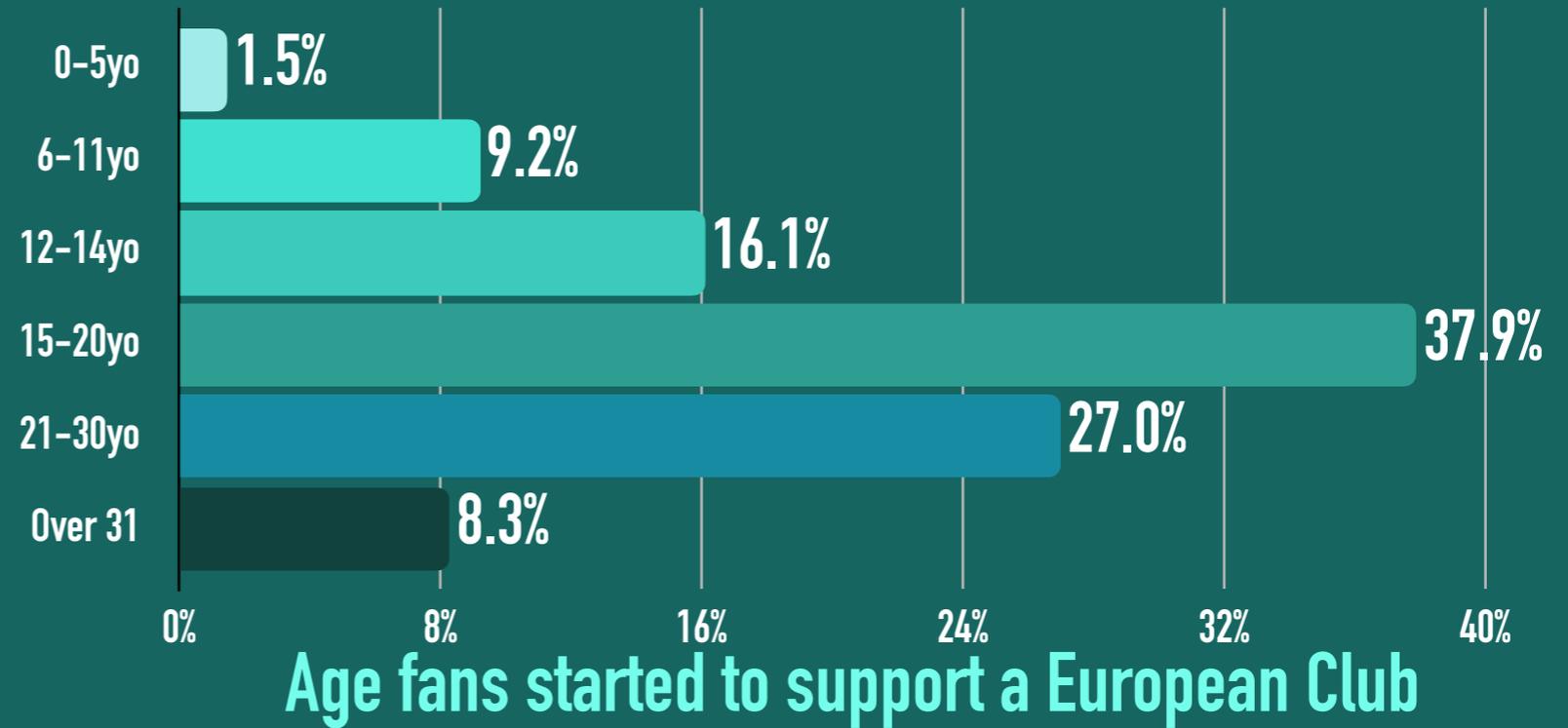


# Age of Respondents



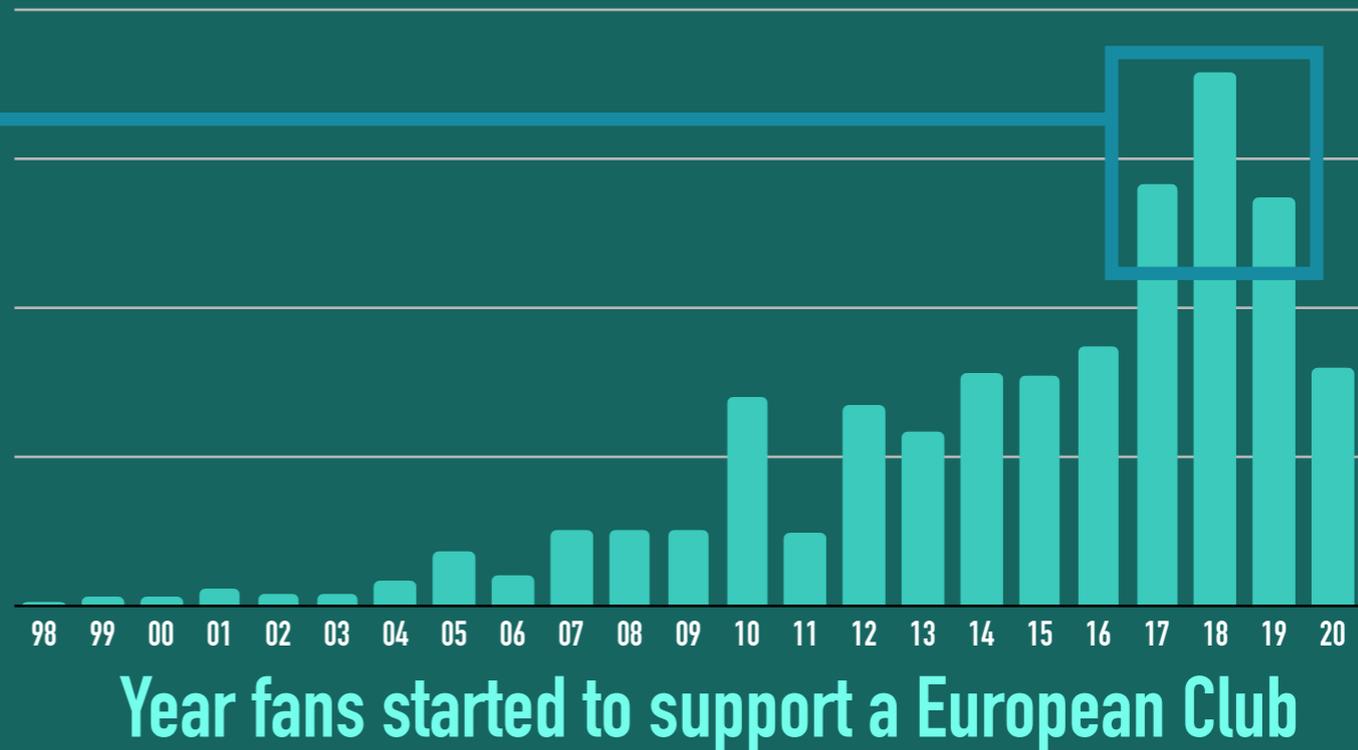
**19.5**  
Years Old

Average age when  
became a supporter



**2017**  
to  
**2019**

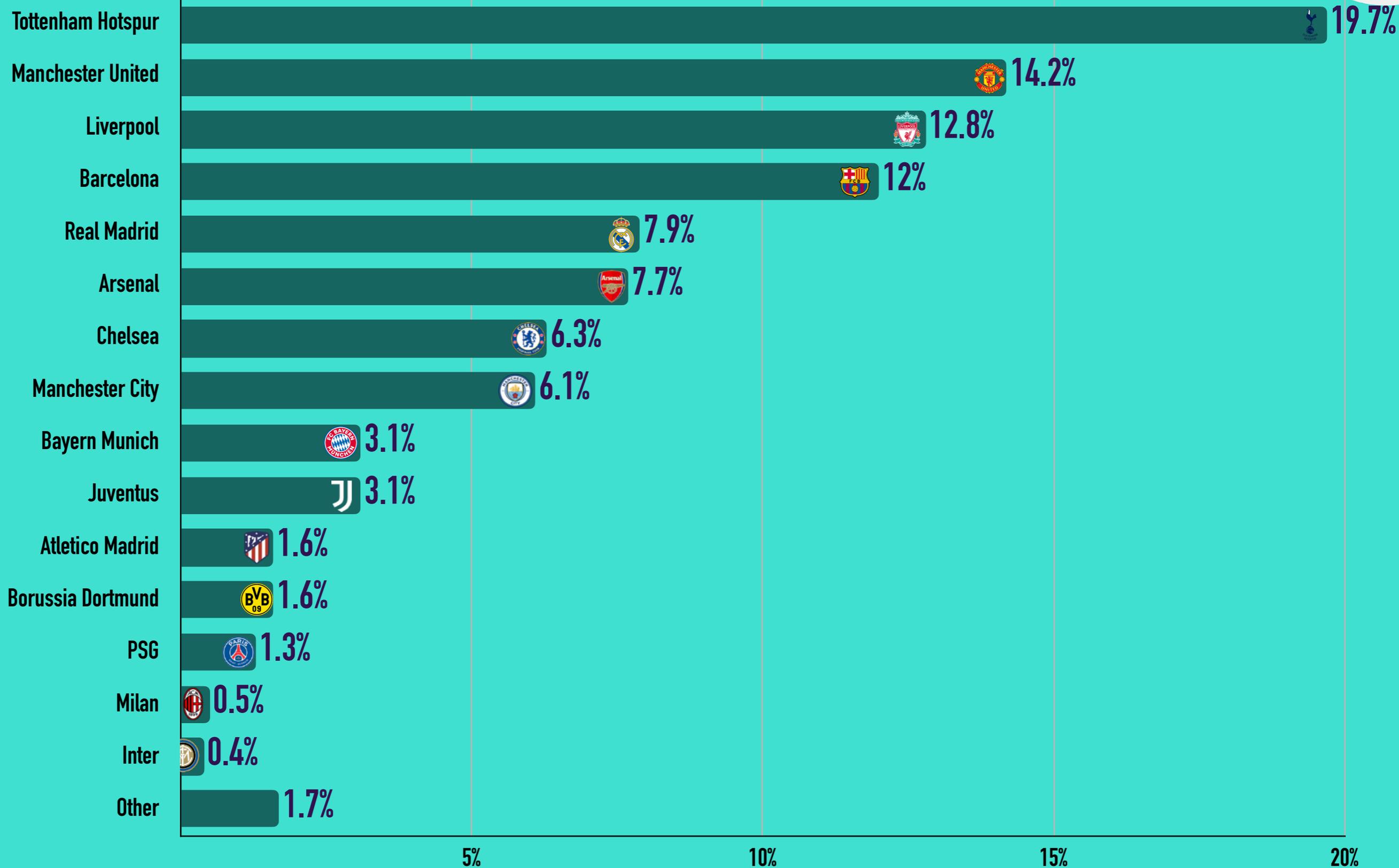
Peak years when most  
Koreans started to follow a  
European club



# Supporting

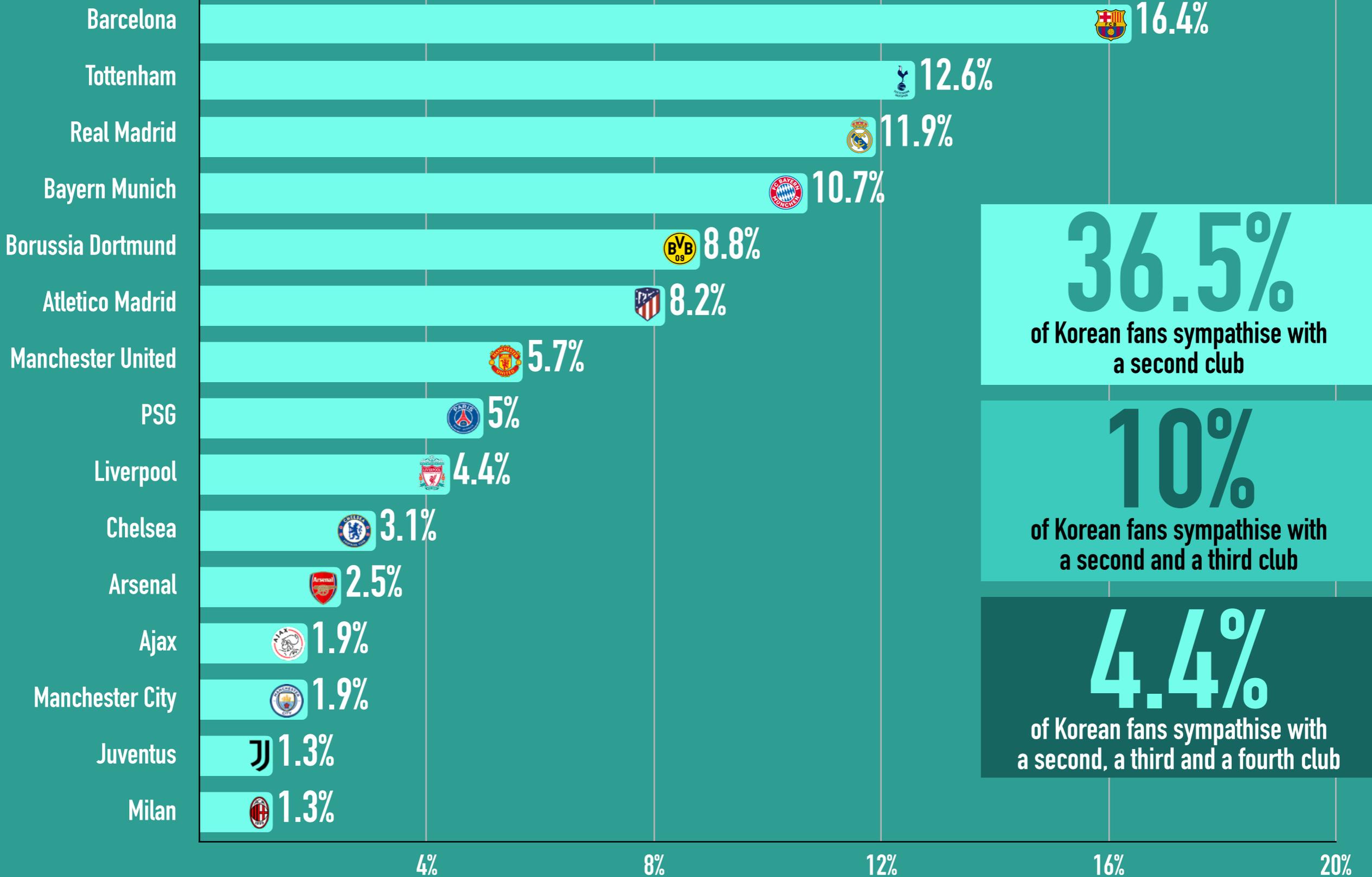


# Most Supported European Clubs



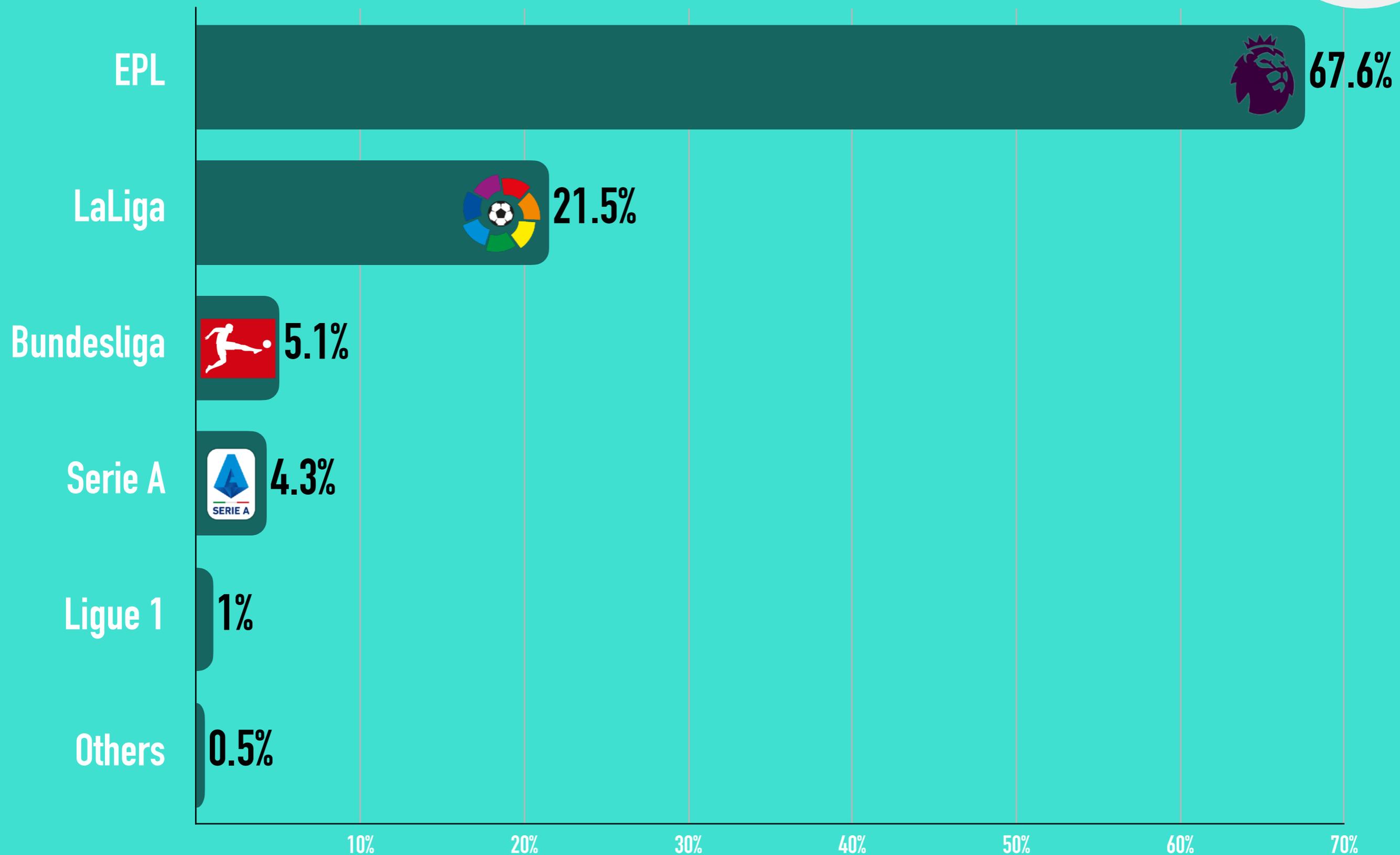
Q: Which is your favourite European Football Club?

# Other Favourite Clubs



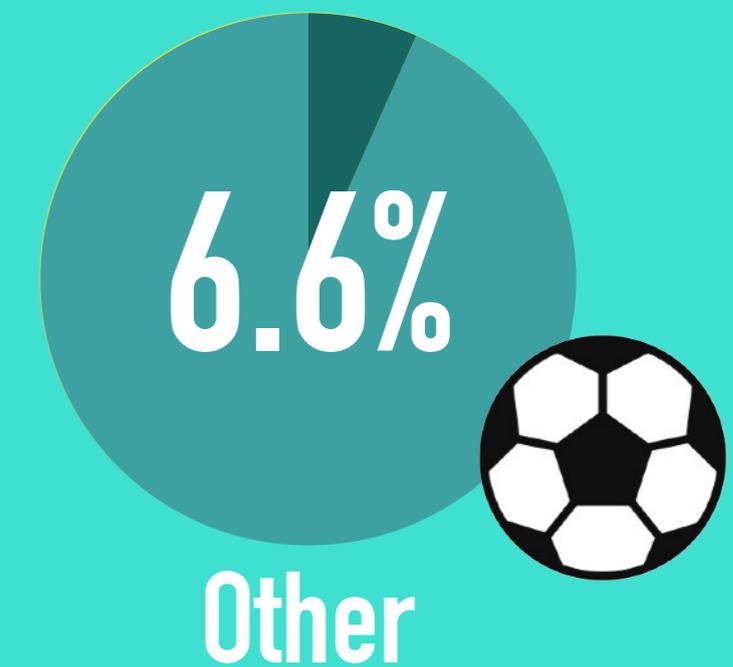
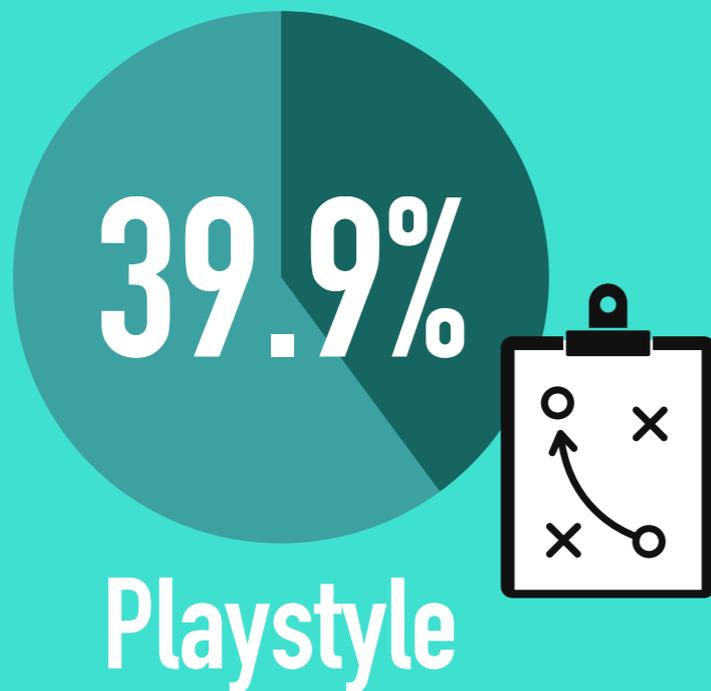
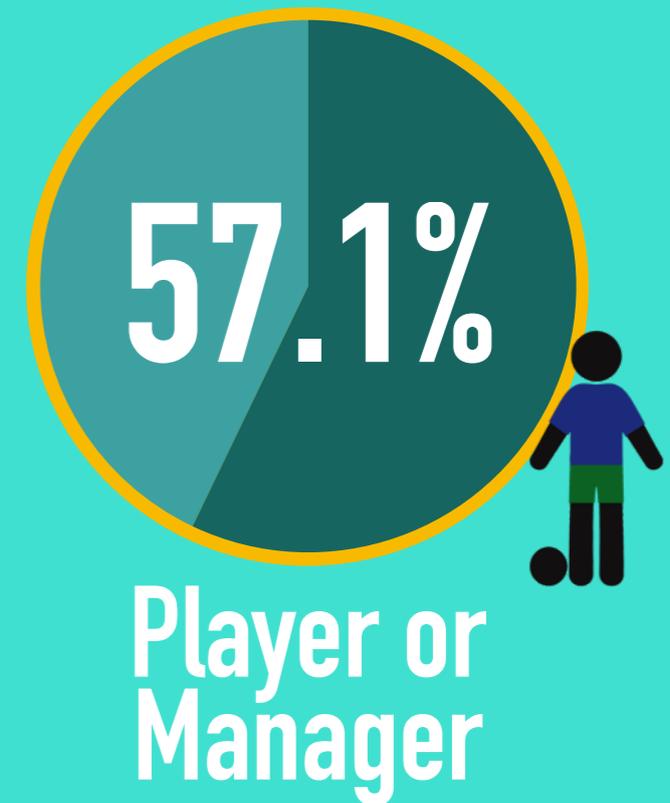
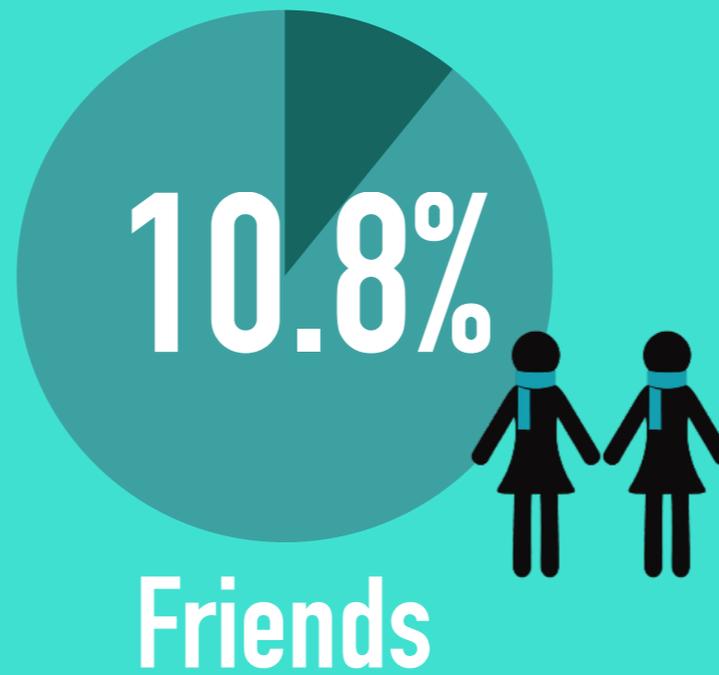
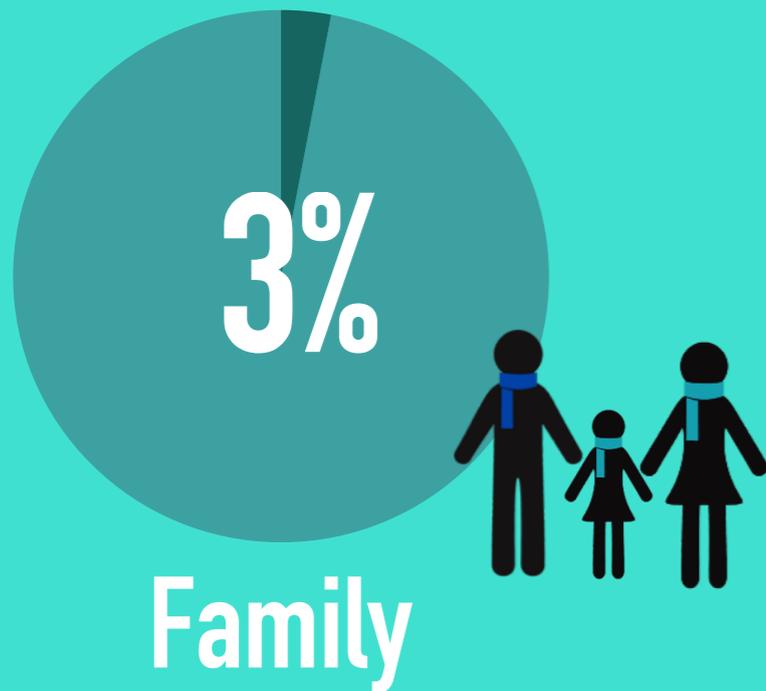
Q: Do you support any other European Football Club in other leagues? Which teams? (up to three)

# Most Supported Leagues (by club)



Q: In which league does your favourite European Football Club play?

# Reason for Supporting a European Club



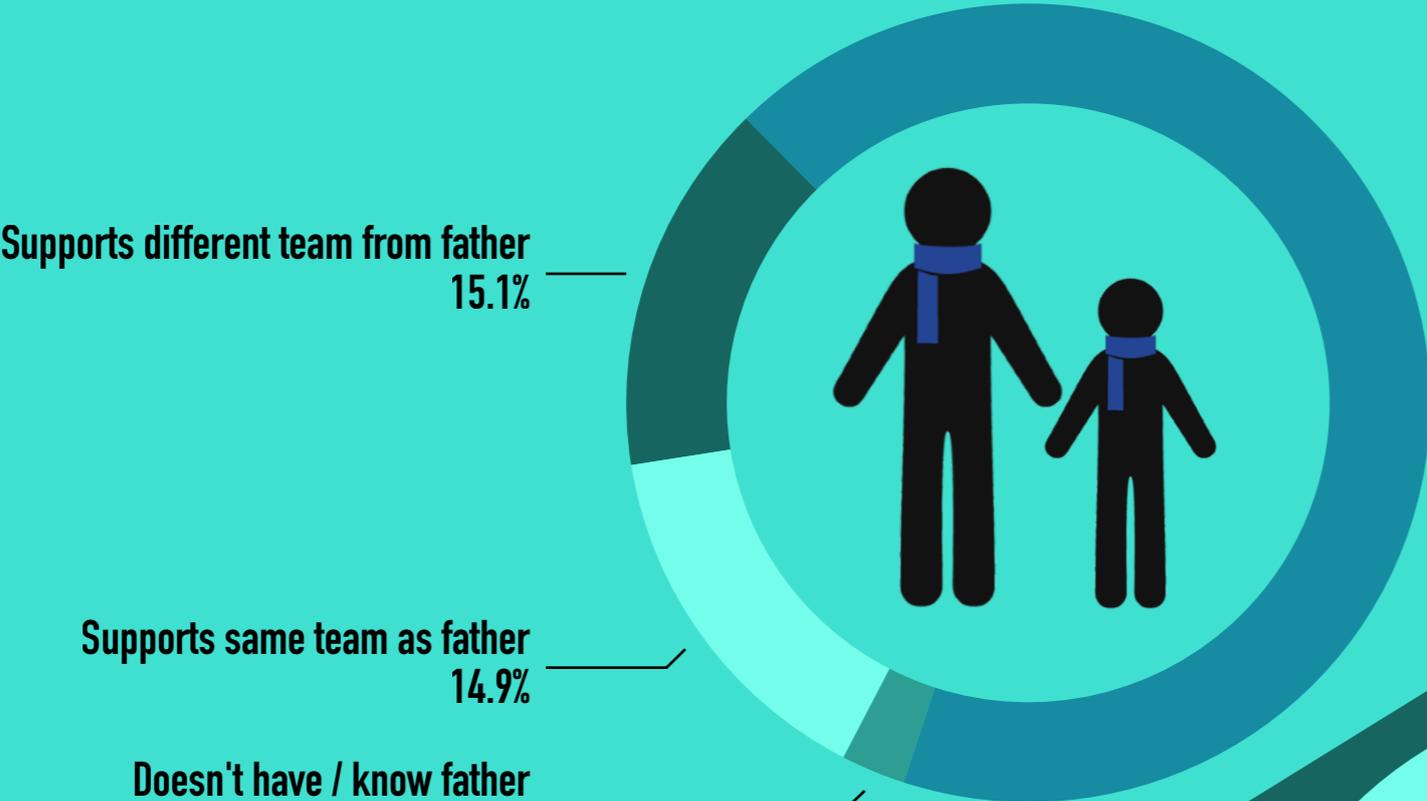
\*Respondents could give multiple answers

Q: Why did you choose the European Football Club you support?

# Influence of Parents



Mother

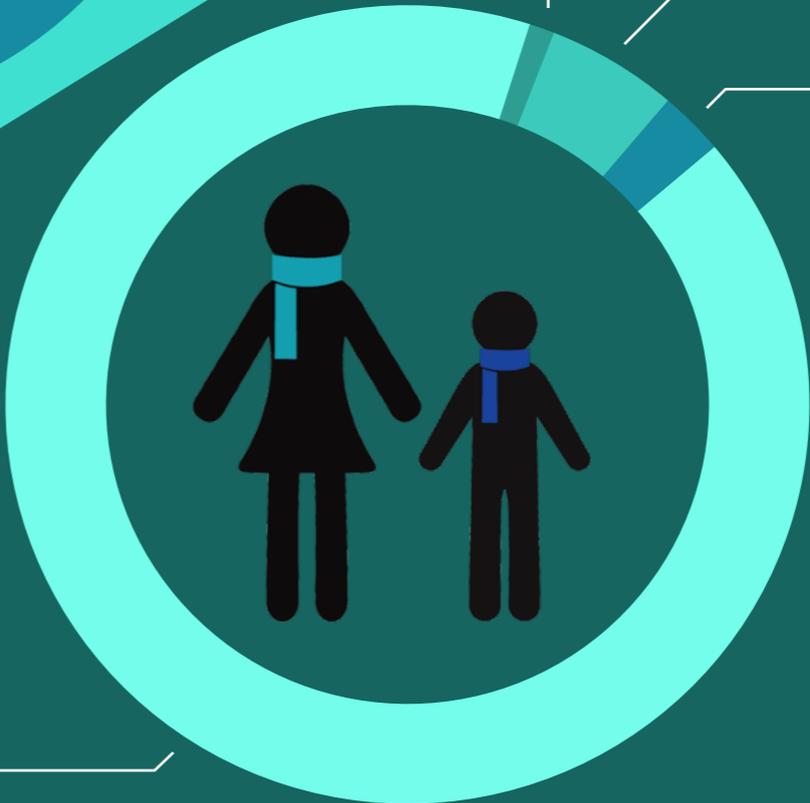


Father is not interested in football  
67.4%

Supports different team from father  
15.1%

Supports same team as father  
14.9%

Doesn't have / know father  
2.6%



Doesn't have / know mother  
1.0%

Supports same team as mother  
5.3%

Supports different team from mother  
2.6%

Mother is not interested in football  
91.1%

Father

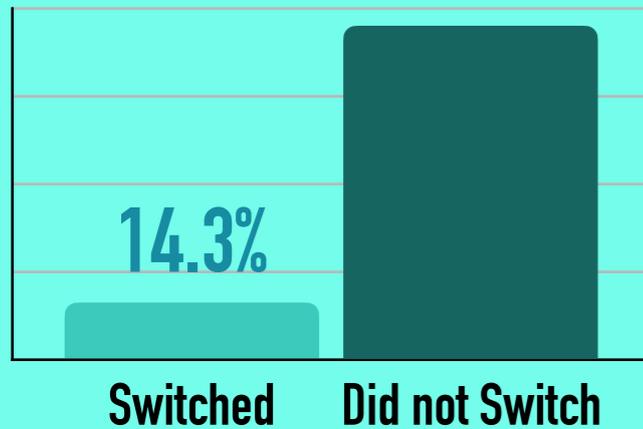
Q: Do you support the same European Football Club as your father/mother?

# Switching Club

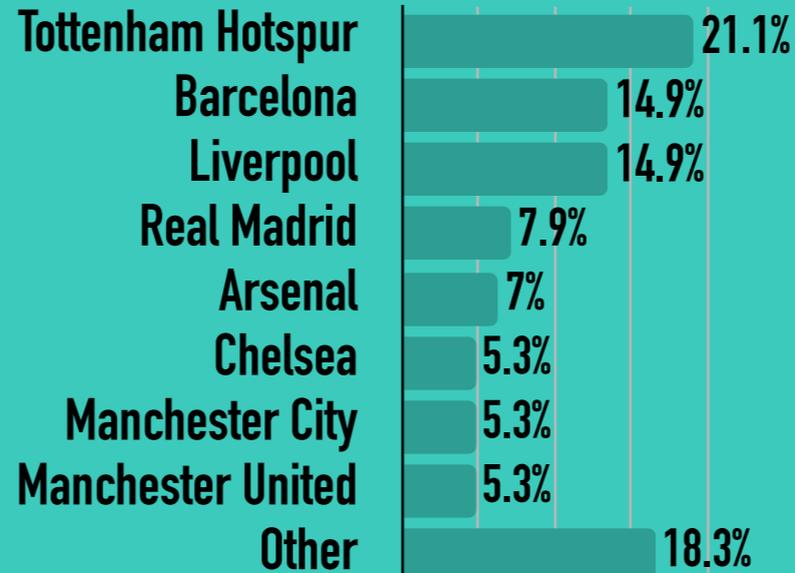


## Supporters who have Switched to another club

85.7%



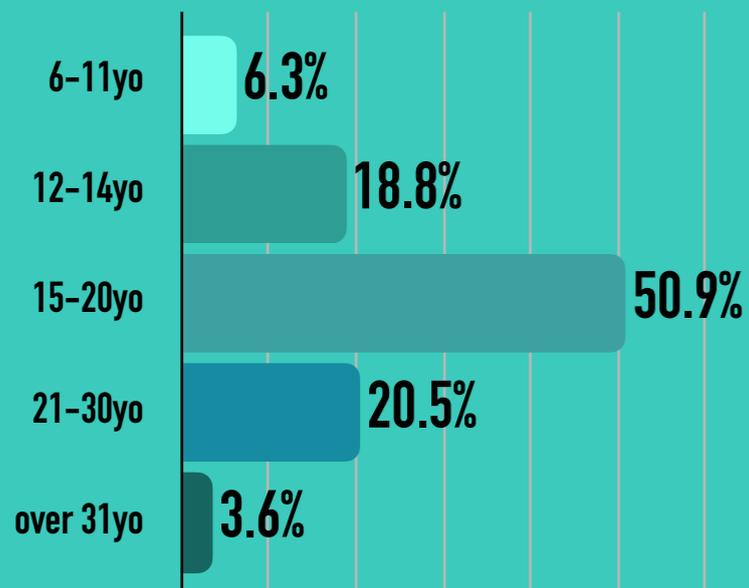
## Adopted Club



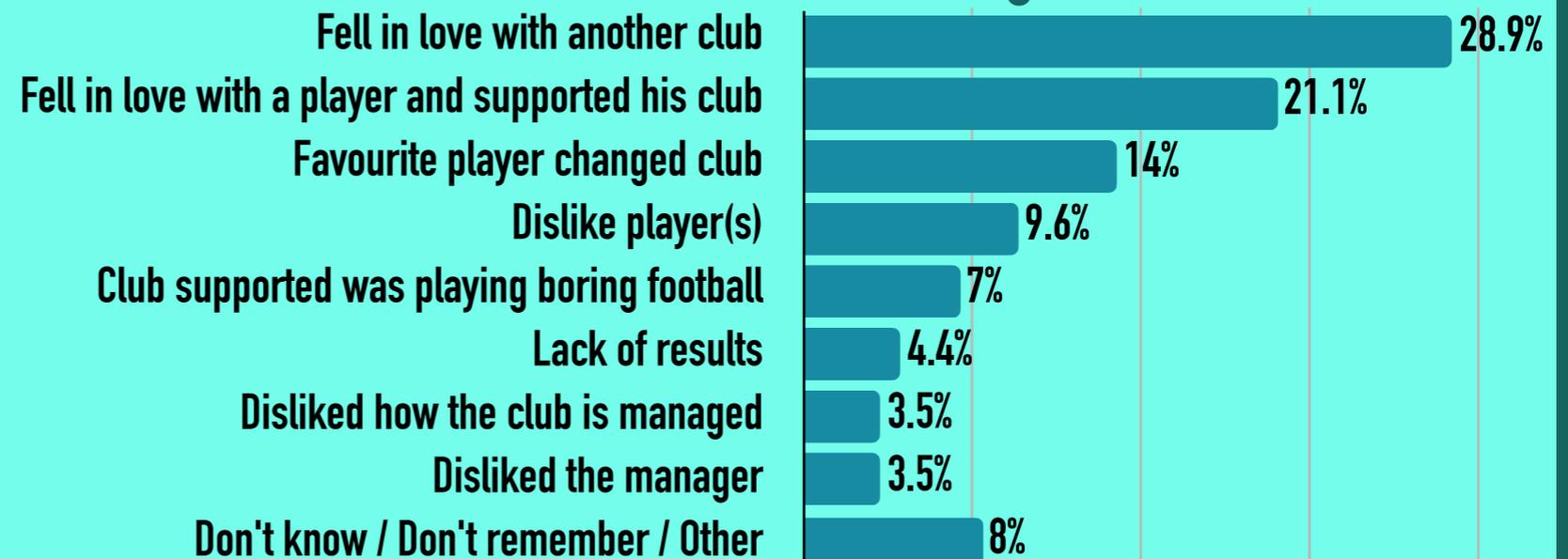
## Abandoned Club



## Age at which Switch happened



## Reason for Switching

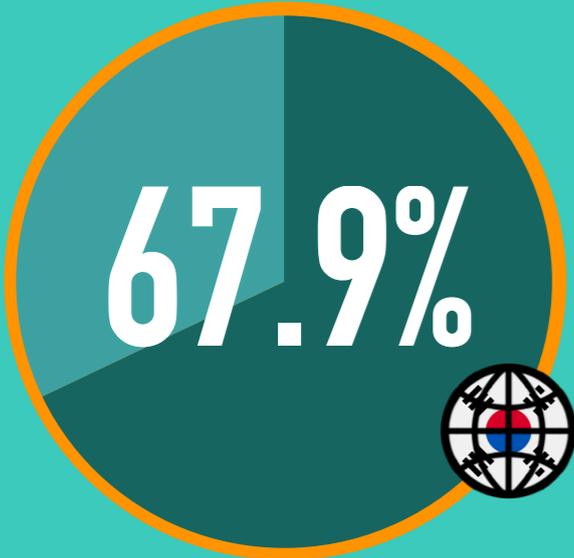


Q: Have you ever changed the European Football Club you support? If yes, why, at what age and which club did you used to support before?

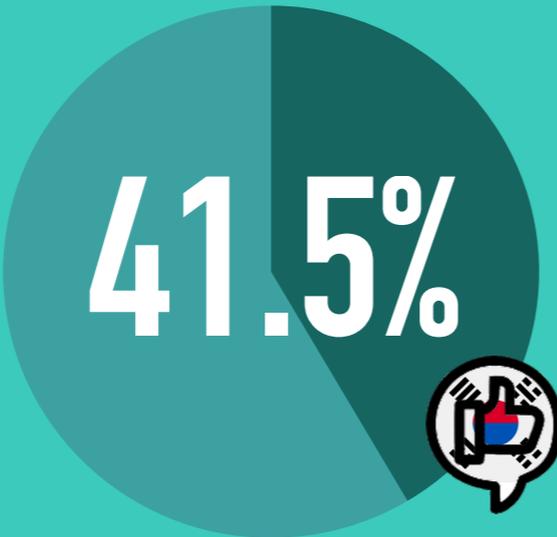
# Media



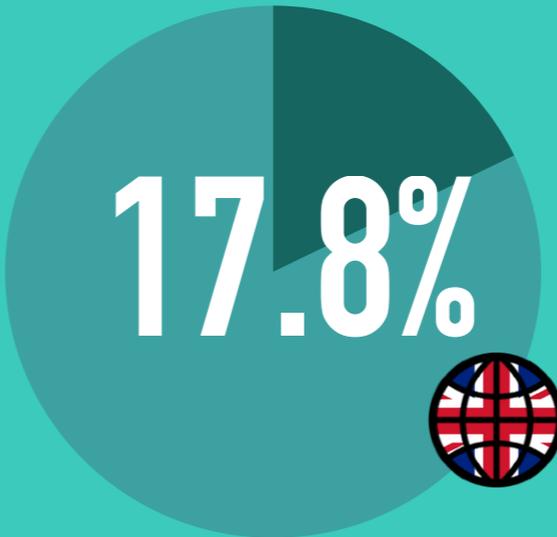
# News Sources



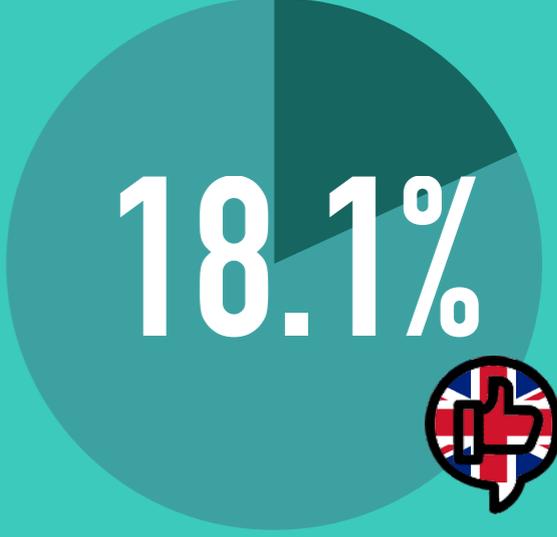
Internet News  
(local language)



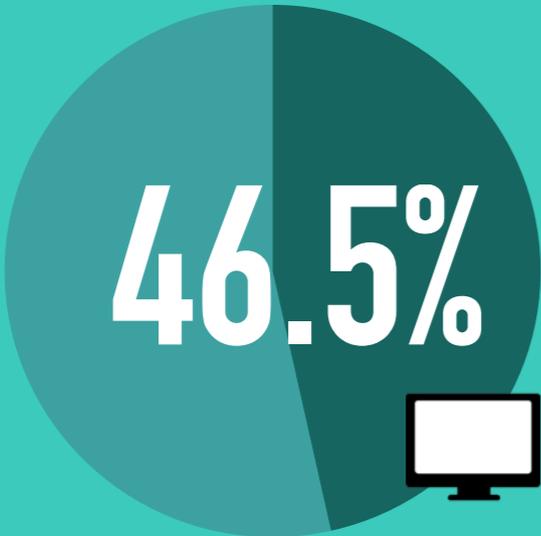
Social Media  
(local language)



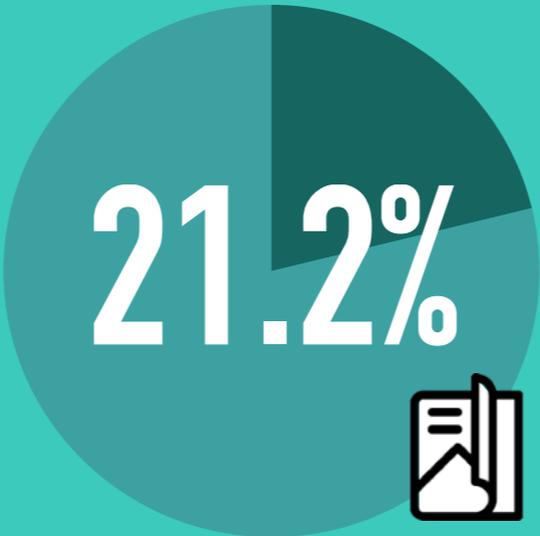
Internet News  
(foreign language)



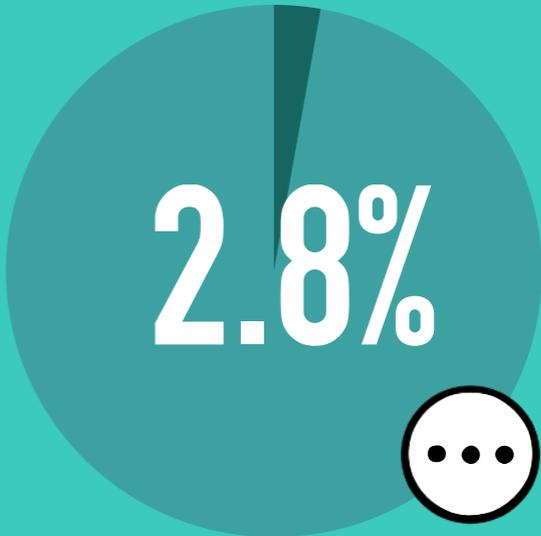
Social Media  
(foreign language)



TV



Newspapers  
and Magazines

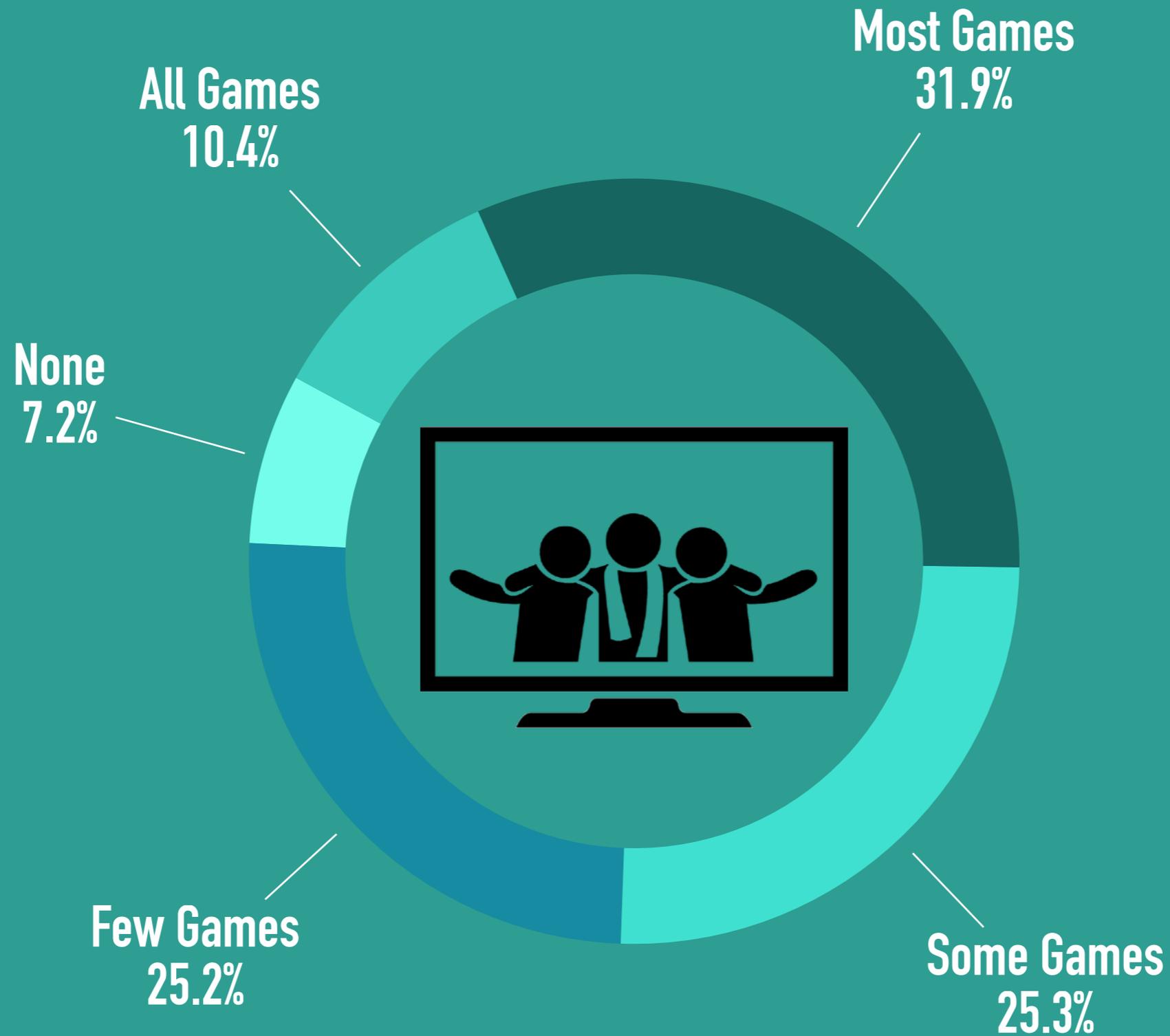


Other

\*Respondents could give multiple answers

Q: Where do you get news about your favourite European Football Club?

# Watching your Favourite Club



Q: How often do you watch matches of your favourite European Football Club?



# Behaviour

# Purchasing Favourite Club's Jersey this Season



Q: Did you buy your favourite European Football Club's jersey this season?

# Following Korean Football



Mostly  
40.7%



Mildly  
10.3%

Not at all  
2.4%

Follow the National Team

Follow a local club and the local league

Mostly  
26.2%



Fully  
19.6%

Mildly  
25.8%

Not at all  
28.4%

Q: Do you support your country's national teams? Do you support a local team and the local league?

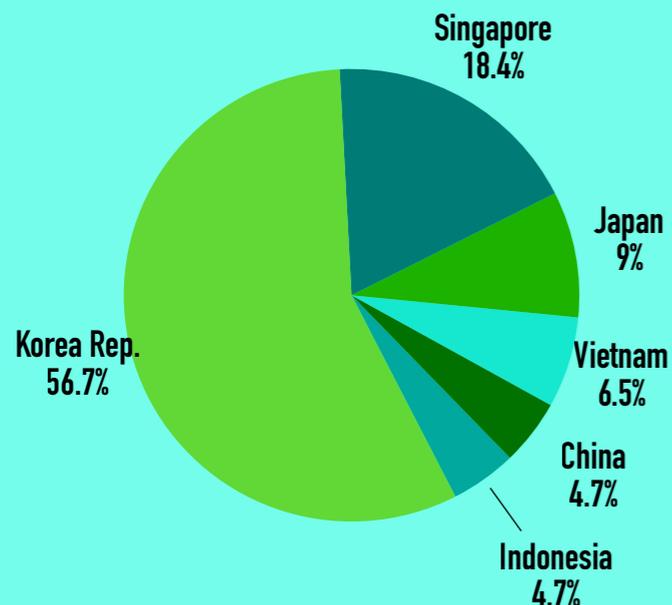
# Data Story



The first Korean professional player in Europe went to Germany over 40 years ago, but Cha Bum-kun's successful spells at Eintracht Frankfurt and Bayer Leverkusen probably fell into the category of 'too early to be good'. In a pre-globalised football era, having a Korean player as their top striker didn't bring the German clubs the rewards that Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester United are receiving nowadays.

Tottenham is the perfect example of a club that made the wisest choice, by signing Son Heung-min and building upon his undoubted qualities on the pitch by making him their Far-East ambassador. While United is clearly the most supported club in all of the surveyed countries, Korea is a significant exception with Tottenham (19.7%) leading the Red Devils (14.2%) as the most supported team. To give a further idea of Tottenham's impressive breakout in Korea, we see that more than half of the Spurs supporters in the six countries we covered in this survey (56.7%) come from this country alone.

## Tottenham Hotspur Supporters in East Asia Distribution by Country



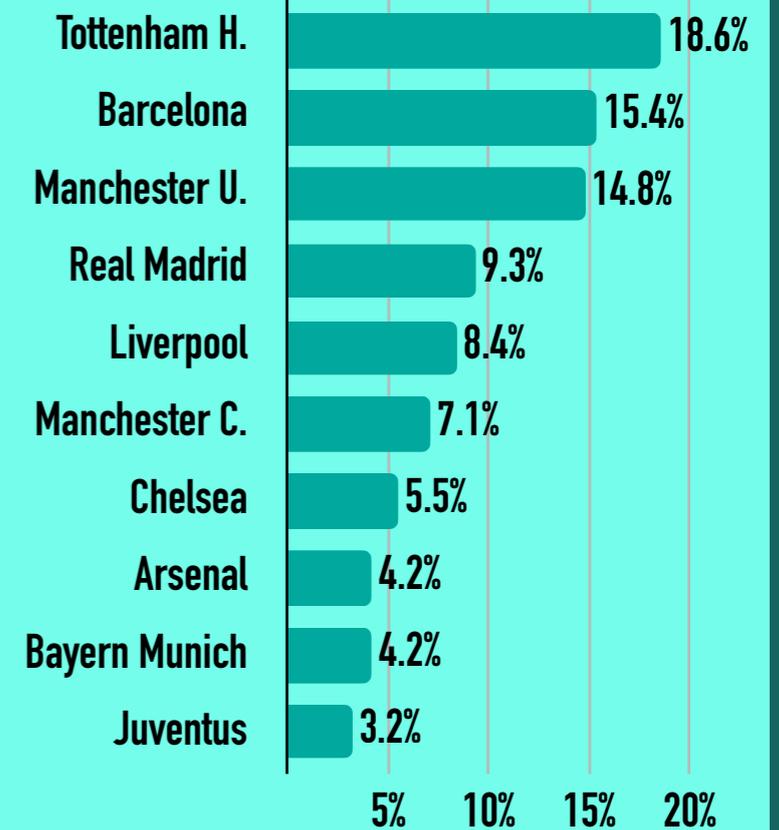
The commitment Korean supporters show to their players abroad is also confirmed by the data from respondents over 35. If we look at the oldest football fans surveyed, we see a clear preference for Tottenham, who almost double their figures to 35.1%, and United also gain more fans (17.6%), surely due to the glorious spell of Park Ji-sung during the Ferguson era.



Korean supporters' loyalty to their clubs is pretty much aligned to the general trend, as only 14.5% have switched from one team to another. 1.75% did switch from Manchester United to Tottenham, however, and while this is a relatively low figure it is still higher than the total amount of supporters for clubs like Atletico Madrid, Borussia Dortmund (which also previously had Korean players), and Paris Saint-Germain. Those clubs still achieve remarkable results as 'second teams', especially Borussia Dortmund, which claims the support of 6.9% of the surveyed Korean supporters, slightly less than Bayern Munich, confirming the special appeal the Bundesliga has cultivated in Korea.

What's next, then? If we take a look at the data for respondents Under 21, we see that things are changing slowly but surely, with LaLiga's reputation significantly growing among the younger segment and FC Barcelona as the second most supported team, not too far behind Tottenham (15.4% v 18.6%), and Real Madrid's figures also progressing from 7.9% to 9.3%. Imagine what would happen if a Korean player were to arrive at one of the Spanish giants. Barcelona made an attempt a few years ago with the youngster Lee Seung-woo, currently in the Belgian League, but a hypothetical Korean regular starter in 'El Clasico' would almost certainly change the current balance.

## Most Supported European Clubs among U21 Korea Rep. fans





# Appendices

# Local Voices



**Seo Sang-won** is fluent in three languages – English, Korean, and Spanish. After moving to exotic Las Palmas in Spain with his parents at the tender age of three, Sang-won naturally fostered a love for football. Today, he leads LaLiga’s globalisation in South Korea as the LaLiga Global Network Korea Delegate in Seoul. He is a man living the dream of so many others, working in football.

We spoke with Sang-won about how LaLiga and other European clubs engage with football fans in Korea, and began by asking about his responsibilities. “The main role of a LaLiga delegate is to promote the league and its clubs in their respective market. I am responsible for Korea, and the advantage of being physically present is the key aspect of our role as delegates to research and develop ‘localised’ strategies to promote our product, increase brand value, and communicate with fans.”

South Korea, like the majority of other Asian countries, was known for having a fervent love of the English Premier League (EPL) thanks to its rich pool of talents, including Park Ji-sung and Son Heung-min. We enquired as to how popular LaLiga is in Korea, and which teams enjoy the largest followings. “LaLiga’s popularity has grown immensely in the last three years, since we launched our global strategy,” Sang-won explained. “Due to Koreans’ interest in football, historically Real Madrid and FC Barcelona were the most followed teams, and that continues to be the case. The outstanding performances of Atlético Madrid and Sevilla in European competitions has also made them familiar to Korean fans as well. And of course, the presence of Korean player Lee Kang-in has made Valencia the most followed LaLiga team behind Real and Barcelona.

“For Korean fans, the presence of a Korean player is one of the most important factors when it comes to supporting a certain club. Koreans are very proud of the Korean sports stars who carve out impressive careers in major competitions, and their success

naturally encourages fans to support the Korean players’ clubs. Another important factor is the proactive initiatives clubs undertake to engage with Korean fans. For instance, communicating in Korean through clubs’ official accounts and organising on-site events are some examples that create a tight bond with Korean fans.”



We asked for more specific details on the initiatives conducted by European clubs to engage with fans locally. “I believe there have been several,” Sang-won said. “We can certainly say that LaLiga has conducted many. These included the organisation of an ‘El Clásico’ viewing party with LaLiga Ambassador Fernando Morientes, the development of ‘Shoot for Love’ co-branded videos with top Korean football creators, and prize promotions for Korean fans via social media. From a club perspective, Valencia CF has been running Korean social media accounts since last season, becoming the first LaLiga club to communicate in Korean with local fans.

Despite the presence of rising superstar Lee in LaLiga, competing in an EPL-dominated environment is always a tough challenge for other European leagues in Korea. We asked how Sang-won would evaluate LaLiga and its clubs’ presence on Korean media compared to other European leagues. “I think we have much more exposure in the Korean media than ever before,” he said. “We are

working hand-in-hand with the local media and continuously communicating to find better ways to increase LaLiga and its clubs’ presence. LaLiga is the only European league to organise media conferences in Korea, as part of which Korean media are invited on trips to Spain.

“LaLiga’s position in Korea is actually very good even without having a successful Korean player in the league. With continuous work and hopefully a successful player in LaLiga soon, I see LaLiga as being one of the most popular foreign leagues in this country sooner rather than later.”

At the time of this interview the number of COVID-19 cases was rising, with football one of many fields heavily affected. We asked Sang-won how clubs’ strategies to engage with fans would differ as a result of the pandemic. “Even before the coronavirus, the consumption of products and engagement between producers and consumers was turning rapidly to the digital forum in many sectors. Huge damage is being caused to the sports industry without fans in stadiums. However, this pandemic will end and it is an opportunity for clubs, leagues, and players to test and discover efficient digital strategies, as they will become the main environment for product consumption.”

Whatever comes next, Sang-won is determined to keep showing the same passion to help football grow.

“The pride of representing a global organisation such as LaLiga is enormous regardless of my nationality. I’ve been living in Korea for the last 12 years and my job has always been linked to Spanish football one way or another. So, to represent LaLiga is a dream come true for me. Having said that, the job also brings with it a heavy sense of responsibility. I take this job as part of my soul, so there is a personal aspect for me in developing it to the very best of my ability.”

# Top 10 Comparison Tables



## Most Fans in Korea



1. Tottenham H. 
2. Manchester U. 
3. Liverpool 
4. Barcelona 
5. Real Madrid 
6. Arsenal 
7. Chelsea 
8. Manchester C. 
9. Bayern Munich 
10. Juventus 

## UEFA Ranking



1. Real Madrid 
2. Atletico Madrid 
3. Barcelona 
4. Bayern Munich 
5. Juventus 
6. Manchester C. 
7. PSG 
8. Liverpool 
9. Manchester U. 
10. Arsenal 

\*June 2020

## Deloitte Money League



1. Barcelona 
2. Real Madrid 
3. Manchester U. 
4. Bayern Munich 
5. PSG 
6. Manchester C. 
7. Liverpool 
8. Tottenham H. 
9. Chelsea 
10. Juventus 

\*2018/19

## Most Followers Worldwide



1. Real Madrid 
2. Barcelona 
3. Manchester U. 
4. Bayern Munich 
5. Chelsea 
6. Juventus 
7. PSG 
8. Manchester C. 
9. Arsenal 
10. Liverpool 

\*June 2020

# About Ganassa



## Our Editorial Teams



## About Us

At Ganassa we are a team of digital football media experts, specialized in the creation, localization, development and maintenance of websites and social media networks.

We work in Japan and across Asia with a crew of local creators and editors, and we have a close relationship with the fans and the football community.

Our mission is to create a bridge between the football cultures in Asia and those across the rest of the world.



**GANASSA** | Bridging Asia and the Global Football Community

[www.ganassa.jp](http://www.ganassa.jp)

## Our Clients



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**Survey's Creator and Director:**  
**Cesare Polenghi**

**With the Cooperation of:**  
**Youngsub Lee, Alberto Cazzaniga, Sean Carroll, Charlie Houghton and Stuart Woodward**

**Special Thanks to:**  
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## **Specifics:**

The total number of valid forms used to compile the 2020 Ganassa Report report is 5457. Interviews were conducted in the streets and online in six different countries: Vietnam, Indonesia, Singapore, Korea Rep., Japan and China. Street interviews were conducted mostly at university campuses and during work breaks in areas where office workers have lunch. The utmost effort was put into interviewing people of both genders and of every age. Online data was acquired with the cooperation of reliable regional websites, Facebook groups, Twitter and Weibo accounts and with the help of influencer's accounts. Great care was put into selecting unbiased sources and in checking the reliability of the data. A comparison between street and online data was used to confirm the consistency of the data. Confidence Level (95%) and Margin of Error ( $\pm 3\%$ ) were kept within professional standards. When data had the same values, alphabetical order was used to tiebreak. The terminology in questions about watching matches (All, Most, Some, Few, None) was explained to interviewees by using respectively the following values: 100%, 75%, 50%, 25%, 0%. The terminology in questions about following local football (Fully, Mostly, Mildly, Not at All) was explained to interviewees by using the following values: 100%, 70%, 35% and 0% respectively.

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# The Six Countries' 2020 Reports

**The Ganassa Report**  
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