

# Unveiling Ecofeminist Paradigms in Macromarketing- An Analysis of Forest Green Rovers

## Introduction

Macromarketing concerns the complex relationship between marketing practices, societal structures, and environmental considerations. This exploration focuses on the intersection of ecofeminism, ecocentric management practices, and macromarketing, particularly emphasising the unique approach Forest Green Rovers Football Club (FGR) takes. This is important because Global sports, especially football, offer a unique perspective on the world. Capitalism has entrenched professional football (Velayutham & Velayutham, 2016), provoking anger and frustration among fans due to the rampant greed and influence of neoliberal business in elite sports (Vaczi, 2022). Rather than adhering to conventional norms, FGR stands as a paradigmatic example, challenging not only the established tenets of the football industry but also redefining prevailing marketing paradigms.

Ecofeminism, a conceptual framework that traces its roots back to François d'Eaubonne's seminal introduction in 1974, is at the core of this exploration. This movement intertwines feminist ideals with ecological concerns, addressing the interconnected inequalities perpetuated by pervasive patriarchy. In this abstract, we delve into the foundational principles of ecofeminism, spotlighting the imperative dismantling of dualisms and the adoption of an ecocentric management paradigm.

Forest Green Rovers Football Club is an intriguing focal point in this analysis. Departing from football clubs' conventional objectives, FGR embarks on a transformative journey that challenges the traditional definition of 'winning.' Instead, the club endeavours to intertwine success with caring and compassionate practices, epitomising an ecofeminist perspective. This exploration unveils how FGR becomes a catalyst for dismantling patriarchal barriers within the football industry and the broader, macro societal context.

## Ecofeminist Principles

*Ecofeminism* is a political and social movement that connects ecological concerns with feminist values. It has its origins in feminist and Marxist theories as well as early environmental studies (Dobscha & Prothero, 2022). This movement highlights the interconnectedness between feminism and ecology and the inequalities they experience in environmental and patriarchal exploitation and oppression (Ourahmoune et al., 2014).

The oppression of women and the deterioration of the environment are interconnected, and this link needs to be highlighted. The unequal position of women and nature in society's patriarchal structures is responsible for perpetuating this inequality. It is essential to consider gender dynamics when addressing the climate crisis. Patriarchy and unequal gender relations can worsen vulnerabilities and hinder climate action in various ways (Steinfeld & Holt, 2020).

Many interpretations of ecofeminism exist, and their differences can be significant (Lahar, 1991; Merchant, 1992; Warren, 1987). However, most ecofeminists share the belief that the same structures that devalue and potentially harm nature are the ones that dominate women. Therefore, they argue that women should align themselves with nature to transform the system that harms them (Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001).

In the realm of macromarketing, Seager's (1993) emphasis on considering ecofeminist issues within the context of social relations resonates significantly. The call for a more holistic examination, extending beyond women's connections with nature to encompass the relationships of both men and women with institutional frameworks (McDonough & Prothero, 1997; Beck, 1995; Macnaghten & Urry, 1995; O'Connor, 1994) aligns with the principles of macromarketing. Macromarketing benefits from

recognising how institutional cultures influence ecologically unsustainable lifestyles. Seager's perspective reinforces the idea that within the structures and institutions explored in macromarketing, efforts for ecological enlightenment and sustainable change should be actively pursued. This connection underscores the relevance of ecofeminist insights in shaping broader societal paradigms.

### Dualisms

Dualisms are linguistic pairs separated into two contrasting parts (e.g. hot/cold, good/evil, and war/peace) and then used for analysis. Dualism is a crucial feature of ecofeminist thought, separating humans from nature and men from women (Dobscha, 1993; Maclaran & Stevens, 2019) and putting them in opposition. Such dualisms imply that humans are superior to nature and men to women and can, therefore, sit in a dominant and controlling position. They preserve the hierarchy in which men's contributions are overvalued and women's undervalued. Consequently, women find themselves in an inferior position to men and out of positions of power and decision-making (Dobscha & Prothero, 2022). The critique of dualism is significant as it extends beyond the subjugation of women to men or animals to humans. Within humanity, individuals categorised as manual workers, people of colour, people with disabilities, non-heterosexuals, and the elderly have also faced disadvantages stemming from dualistic thinking (McDonough & Prothero, 1997).

To apply ecofeminist theory to modern social problems, it is essential to view gender and nature through an intersectional lens and break down patriarchal dualisms that reinforce women's inferior position in modern organisational and relational structures (Dobscha & Prothero, 2022). Breaking down these dualisms is crucial to promote equality and an inclusive worldview and to protect the natural environment from harmful human activities. Ecofeminism challenges the notion of dualisms, and in doing so, it lays the foundation for breaking down oppressive structures, disrupting paradigms, and emphasising interconnectedness. Ecofeminism also advocates for diverse gender identities and fosters a more inclusive worldview. It urges a shift toward a holistic understanding that recognises the value of all interconnected components in the web of life.

### An Ecocentric Management Paradigm

An ecocentric management paradigm is a philosophy that emphasises the importance of ecological considerations in decision-making processes. It represents a fundamental shift in organisational practices, recognising the interdependencies between ecological and social systems. Unlike anthropocentrism, which prioritises humans and underlines the dualism between organisations and the natural environment (Purser et al., 1995), an ecocentric approach acknowledges the interconnectedness of ecological and social systems. Organisations adhering to an ecocentric paradigm understand that their actions have far-reaching environmental and societal consequences. They actively strive to align their operations with sustainability and ecological well-being (Shrivastava, 1995).

In today's world, where environmental crises are escalating, some view adopting an ecocentric perspective as a strategic necessity that aligns seamlessly with the growing environmental consciousness among consumers (Borland & Lindgreen, 2013). Influential scholars like Paul Shrivastava and McDonough & Prothero have advocated for the explicit consideration of the natural environment in organisational study and management, with a focus on interrelatedness and equality between nature, humans, and genders (Shrivastava, 1995; McDonough & Prothero, 1997). Organisations embracing this perspective are prompted to consider the broader social implications of their actions, resulting in a positive social impact (Shrivastava, 1995).

Environmentalism and sustainability are becoming increasingly important for football clubs worldwide, although the degree of commitment varies among clubs. While some clubs have taken significant steps

to integrate eco-friendly practices into their operations, others are still in the early stages of adopting sustainable initiatives. Notable examples of clubs that have made strides include Forest Green Rovers, discussed further below, and Arsenal FC (Lockwood, 2020), which has installed renewable energy systems at its Emirates Stadium. Real Madrid CF (Jones, 2022) and Bayern Munich (Kurmayer, 2021) also invest in renewable energy and promote environmental awareness.

An ecocentric management paradigm aligns effortlessly with the core principles of ecofeminism. It challenges outdated dualistic notions and urges organisations to recognise their impact on ecological and social systems. This transformative shift from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric paradigm, facilitated by ecofeminism (McDonough & Prothero, 1997), necessitates a commitment to ecological balance and the active pursuit of solutions beneficial to humanity and the planet (Sartore-Baldwin & McCullough, 2018). This paradigm is particularly relevant in the face of escalating environmental challenges, as it seeks to shift organisational practices toward sustainability and ecological responsibility, fostering a balanced and mutually beneficial relationship between humanity and the natural environment.

This transformative shift also has implications for macromarketing. The ecocentric management paradigm prompts organisations to consider the broader social context of their activities, including the welfare of local communities, social justice, and overall quality of life (Purser et al., 1995; Shrivastava, 1995). Organisations actively contribute to a more balanced and mutually beneficial relationship between humanity and the natural environment by prioritising sustainability and ecological responsibility (Shrivastava, 1995). In essence, ecocentric management aligns harmoniously with the principles of macromarketing, where the interconnectedness of marketing practices, societal structures, and ecological concerns is increasingly recognised as a central aspect of responsible and ethical business conduct (Purser et al., 1995)

### Spotlight on Forest Green Rovers

Founded in 1889, Forest Green Rovers (FGR) is a pioneering force in English football. Situated in League 2, this football club has undertaken a remarkable journey transcending traditional norms within the sporting world (Samuel et al., 2022). Notably, the New Lawn Stadium, FGR's home ground, is a testament to its commitment to sustainability, being powered entirely by solar energy and boasting the world's first organic pitch (BBC News, 2012). Beyond the pitch, FGR has garnered acclaim for its environmental initiatives, winning multiple green business awards and being recognised by FIFA as "the world's greenest football club" (BBC News, 2012). Demonstrating an unwavering commitment to environmental stewardship, FGR became the inaugural football club to enlist in the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme, solidifying its dedication to sustainable practices (Euractiv, 2019). Furthermore, the club's owner's (Dale Vince) appointment as a UN Climate Change Ambassador attests to FGR's influential role in promoting environmental responsibility within the sports industry (Sustainability in Sport, 2021). As a trailblazer in the footballing world, FGR has achieved the noteworthy milestone of being the first football club to receive the Vegan Trademark, a symbol of their dedication to encouraging a sustainable and responsible approach to sports (The Vegan Society, 2017; Euractiv, 2019).

FGR extends its impact beyond environmental concerns, actively engaging in gender-inclusive initiatives and community-based social activities (Samuel et al., 2022). The club's commitment to inclusivity is evident in its endeavours to challenge gender norms within the footballing landscape. Forest Green Rovers made history in 2023 by becoming the first professional men's team to hire a female coach, appointing Hannah Dingley as caretaker manager (ESPN.com, 2023). FGR encourages

participation and representation across genders in both playing and administrative roles by fostering an environment that transcends traditional boundaries.

This commitment to inclusivity extends to community engagement, where FGR leverages its influence to promote social well-being and unity. FGR Community, a charity established to educate, motivate, and inspire through football, runs programs that positively impact the local community and beyond ([www.fgr.co.uk](http://www.fgr.co.uk), n.d.).

#### Forest Green Rovers as an Ecocentric, Ecofeminist Organisation

Forest Green Rovers (FGR) stands at the forefront of transformative change within the football industry, challenging traditional norms and embracing sustainability principles. This metamorphosis aligns with an ecocentric management paradigm that mirrors ecofeminist ideals, emphasising the centrality of nature in organisational concerns and rejecting anthropocentric norms prevalent in contemporary society. FGR's commitment extends beyond the conventional focus on on-field victories, incorporating caring and compassionate practices that deviate from the conventional, male-dominated ethos in football (BBC News, 2012).

The club actively dismantles dualistic thinking, particularly in the realm of gender roles, as evidenced by the appointment of Hannah Dingley as caretaker manager, challenging the traditional binary opposition of male/female within football management (ESPN.com, 2023). FGR's initiatives also transcend the pitch into sustainability, community engagement, and social responsibility. The club fosters a family-friendly match atmosphere, breaking down hierarchical structures to promote a more inclusive and egalitarian culture (Euractiv, 2019).

FGR's dedication to veganism disrupts dualisms associated with the treatment of animals, moving beyond environmental considerations to ethical concerns. The eco-friendly stadium design and sustainable transportation initiatives exemplify an ecocentric management paradigm that aligns seamlessly with ecofeminist ideals, challenging dualisms related to nature/culture and humans/animals (The Vegan Society, 2017; Euractiv, 2019). The club's holistic approach to sustainability extends into the local community, involving them in eco-friendly practices and breaking down dualisms associated with professional sports organisations and their communities ([www.fgr.co.uk](http://www.fgr.co.uk), n.d.).

The ethical considerations embedded in FGR's decision-making processes reflect an ethics of care, emphasising interconnectedness, empathy, and responsibility. By engaging the local community in sustainability practices, FGR actively fosters inclusivity and collaboration, further dismantling dualisms within its organisational structure. The club's commitment to environmental education contributes to disseminating ecofeminist principles, challenging existing power structures and fostering a more equitable and sustainable world (Sartore-Baldwin & McCullough, 2018).

Forest Green Rovers' journey toward sustainability and inclusivity positions the club as a paradigmatic example of an ecofeminist organisation within the football industry. The club's initiatives, from breaking down gender stereotypes to embracing sustainability practices and fostering community engagement, showcase a commitment to challenging dualisms and advocating for a more interconnected, caring, and compassionate world.

It is important to note that while many positive aspects are associated with the practices mentioned above and belief systems, there are also some concerns that should be considered. For example, it has been said that these changes have led to a less vociferous place (Herd, 2017), resulting in a less lively atmosphere at football matches compared to other venues in the same league. Although this perceived decline in the atmosphere at football matches is not unique to FGR (Steadman et al., 2021),

it has led some to assert that the club's friendly and welcoming stance was 'detrimental' to creating the hostility that is considered necessary to give teams 'home advantage' in a very competitive sport (Fiske, 1992).

### Extending the Link with Macromarketing

Forest Green Rovers (FGR) groundbreaking ecofeminist journey not only reshapes the landscape of the football industry but also sends ripples across the broader field of macromarketing, challenging established paradigms and setting forth a progressive model for responsible marketing practices. Since the 1960s, scholars engaged in the study of macromarketing have delved into the realms of sustainability and environmental crises, examining how marketing systems wield influence over market actors and impact the well-being of consumers (Mittelstaedt et al., 2014). By seamlessly integrating ecofeminist principles into its operational ethos, FGR emerges as an exemplary case study that challenges and actively disrupts traditional marketing norms. The club's steadfast commitment to sustainability, inclusivity, and community engagement starkly contrasts the profit-driven and individualistic competition often associated with conventional marketing approaches. FGR's success in aligning its brand with ecofeminist values positions it uniquely within the football industry, providing a potential blueprint for other organisations looking to integrate ethical considerations into their marketing strategies.

The influence of FGR extends beyond the confines of the sports sector, offering valuable insights for entities seeking to adopt ecofeminist perspectives and contribute to positive societal and ecological impacts. In the realm of macromarketing, FGR serves as a beacon, encouraging a paradigm shift towards more ethical, inclusive, and environmentally conscious practices. The club's innovative approach challenges prevailing notions within the broader context of markets, marketing, and society, signalling the potential for a transformative influence that goes beyond the boundaries of the football pitch. FGR's journey exemplifies how organisations can redefine their societal role, emphasising a holistic approach that prioritises sustainability, social responsibility, and ethical marketing practices within the dynamic and interconnected landscape of macromarketing.

### Conclusion

Forest Green Rovers (FGR) is a paradigmatic example of an ecofeminist organisation challenging traditional norms within the football industry and beyond. The club's commitment to sustainability, inclusivity, and community engagement aligns seamlessly with the principles of ecofeminism and an ecocentric management paradigm. FGR's transformative journey actively dismantles dualistic thinking, particularly in gender roles, and fosters a more interconnected, caring, and compassionate world. The club's holistic approach extends beyond on-the-pitch victories to encompass sustainability practices, community engagement, and social responsibility. Forest Green Rovers' influence extends to the broader field of macromarketing, offering a progressive model for responsible marketing practices. By interweaving ecofeminist principles into its operational ethos, FGR challenges conventional marketing norms, encouraging a shift towards more ethical, inclusive, and environmentally conscious practices within the dynamic context of markets, marketing, and society. The club's journey exemplifies how organisations can redefine their societal role, prioritising sustainability and ethical practices to contribute positively to societal and ecological well-being.



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