FOOTBALL SUPPORTERS AND FOOTBALL TEAM BRANDS: A STUDY IN CONSUMER BRAND LOYALTY

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This study is a partial replication of research originally carried out on the significance of self-monitoring as a determinant of fan loyalty to American football teams. Self-monitoring refers to the propensity of individuals to adapt their behaviour in order to render themselves more socially acceptable, including a willingness to switch brand loyalties if necessary to achieve this. A survey of 161 soccer fans, with a response rate of 41 per cent, was carried out to ascertain whether or not self-monitoring was a significant determinant of their loyalty to teams associated with the FA Premiership. While the initial results indicate an apparent lack of relationship between self-monitoring and fan loyalty, self-monitoring may in fact be an important influence on the choices and loyalties of football fans. Implications for sports marketers include the possibility that self-monitoring might be a useful basis for market segmentation. Further research on football fans should be carried out, in order to identify more of the factors which affect fan loyalty, and clarify their relative importance. Such research should take a broader, more exploratory perspective than the current study. An ethnographic approach is therefore recommended as the most appropriate methodology for future work in this area.

Introduction

Much of the research on brand loyalty has tended to focus on constructs such as attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty (Fournier, 1998; Mahony et al., 1999). This research has tended to look at the significance of specific variables and their impact on the behavioural and/or attitudinal loyalty of individual consumers. Fournier's recent work offers an alternative perspective utilising the metaphor of consumer/brand relationship, and again this has made a valuable contribution to our understanding of consumer interaction with brands (Fournier, 1998). More recently, Muniz and O'Guinn have argued that brand loyalty is also a function of relationships between consumers (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Schouten and McAlexander's landmark study of the Harley Davidson subculture of consumption further illustrates the potential effect of social relationships and group dynamics on brand loyalty (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995).

The literature on sports marketing already reflects the importance of interpersonal influence. Kolbe and James cite socialisation theory as having a significant contribution to make towards our understanding of fan loyalty and argue that '... consideration must be given to the effects of interpersonal factors and social environments' in future research (Kolbe and James, 2000, p. 25).

In a recent study, Mahony et al. (1999) examined the impact of self-monitoring on fan loyalty to American football teams. Self-monitoring is of particular interest, as it deals specifically with the tendency of some consumers to switch their loyalties in order to enhance their interpersonal relationships, that is, render themselves more socially attractive.

It was therefore decided to conduct a partial replication of Mahony et al., to assess whether or not self-monitoring played a significant part in determining the loyalties of sports fans in a different context, that is, soccer. An exploration of the effects of self-monitoring on the loyalty of soccer fans to FA Premiership team brands would represent a significant contribution to the literature. Also, while the study's primary objective was to assess the extent to which self-monitoring influenced fan loyalty to soccer team brands, a secondary objective was to derive relevant implications for sports marketers.

Self-monitoring

Self-monitoring is defined by Snyder (1974) as 'self-observation and self-control guided by situational cues to social appropriateness'. *High self-monitors* use cues from others 'as guidelines for monitoring, that is, regulating and controlling, his or her own verbal and nonverbal presentation' while by contrast, *low*

self-monitors are 'controlled from within by their affective states and attitudes' – in other words they are less responsive towards, or less motivated by what others may think of them, and are unlikely to adjust their behaviour in an effort to fit in socially or achieve social acceptance (Snyder, 1979).

High self-monitors are quite concerned with social acceptance and are willing to modify their appearance and behaviour to achieve it, while low self-monitors (who are regarded as less socially skilled – see Mahony et al., 1999) do not pay attention to the opinions of others and are much less concerned with being perceived as successful or attractive. In fact, research demonstrates that low self-monitors tend to be very loyal in general – to their friends, dating partners, employers, and so on.

Furthermore, research suggests that self-monitoring is a stable personality trait throughout one's life (Jenkins, 1993). Thus it is reasonable to assume that an understanding of whether a consumer is a low or high self-monitor should facilitate the marketer seeking to predict that consumer's future behaviour, including specifically his or her brand loyalties. One might expect that low self-monitors, for example, are more likely to retain loyalty to particular brands irrespective of whether more socially appealing brands (i.e. brands that give the consumer the opportunity to enhance his or her social image) become available. High self-monitors, by contrast, would be prone to brand-switching, to ensure public association with the most successful or socially accepted brand. Self-monitoring is therefore a useful construct with which to explore brand loyalty in the context of interpersonal social relationships.

While the research therefore focused on self-monitoring as the variable of primary importance, the wider literature on sports fans pointed to several other potentially significant factors which might exert an influence on the consumer behaviour of soccer fans. The *context* in which football is consumed is characterised by certain features that perhaps do not apply to many other consumption categories, and context may in fact impact on fan loyalties and consumption patterns.

Consumption Contexts

Some consumption contexts are frequently characterised by strong emotional response. Consider,

for example, the intense feeling of communion, or 'communitas' that can be felt by an audience with either the performers in an orchestra (Thomas and Cutler, 1993, p. 187) or a pop star during a concert (O'Guinn, 1991). Of course, the crowd at a sports fixture can also feel a strong sense of unity with each other (Belk et al., 1989). Thus in some crucial respects, the consumption of football possibly has more in common with other consumption contexts such as the arts, or even popular music, where '... involvement is high ... responses are important, and ... emotions run deep' (Holbrook, 1980, quoted in Thomas and Cutler, p. 182).

A striking parallel between the consumption of sport and consumption of certain forms of the arts is perhaps illustrated by Holt's research on baseball fans. This demonstrates how important consumer responses may be in determining the quality of the consumer's experience. Baseball fans, through their behaviour at baseball games, help to *construct the consumption object*. In this case, of course, the consumption object is the game the spectators are attending, and the quality of the consumption experience is affected by the behaviour of those consuming it – this in terms of their contribution to the atmosphere in the stadium, through ritual cheering and chanting, for example (Holt, 1995). It is not difficult to imagine how this pattern could also be reflected in attendance at the theatre or opera. While actual practices, including verbal and non-verbal rituals are of course not exactly similar, nevertheless the key feature – consumer enjoyment of the consumption object being enhanced by audience response and atmosphere – is essentially the same.

Research on Football Fans

Recent research into football fandom (King, 1995, 1997, 1998) suggests that key elements of both brand community (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) and consumption as subculture (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) may in fact be present. Authenticity, a dominant theme both among brand community members and Harley Davidson bikers, emerges as a strong influence on consumption patterns among fans of Manchester United. To clarify – while members of brand communities and consumption subcultures share common values, rituals, and traditions, they also typically have a strong sense of who is an authentic user of

the brand and who is not. This authenticity is defined by 'really knowing' the brand as opposed to using the brand for the 'wrong reasons'. Those 'wrong reasons' can include, for example, failing to appreciate fully the culture, history, rituals, traditions, and symbols of the group. Differentiating between 'those who are true believers in the brand, and those who are merely opportunistic is a common concern' (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001, p. 419).

The football fan category labelled by King as the 'lads' (King, 1998, pp. 148–75) 'practise what they regard as the authentic rituals and traditions of "real" fans, such as singing and chanting during a match, along with ritual pre and post match beer drinking'.

The lads question the authenticity of other categories of football fan, in particular those who fall into the category of 'new consumer' fans. The 'new consumers' crave official club merchandise, such as replica shirts and other items (King, 1998, p. 200). This behaviour could certainly be a result of high self-monitoring (adapting behaviour and/or appearance in order to enhance personal social attractiveness), such consumption practices giving fans the opportunity to categorise themselves in relation to society, to define or redefine their own identities (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998), to symbolically self-complete (Wicklund and Gollwitzer, 1982), in this case not just as football fans, but as fans of a particular club. (In fact King's study focused primarily on fans of Manchester United, and the choice of this club in particular by 'new consumer' fans is also quite probably as a result of high self-monitoring. The club have always enjoyed a particularly fashionable and glamorous image, and this, in conjunction with their exploits on the field of play in recent years, would help to explain the attraction of the team for those fans anxious to make a socially attractive/acceptable team brand choice.)

At Old Trafford, these 'new consumer' fans are easily recognisable by their wearing of official replica kits and their passive behaviour. This passive behaviour usually extends to a failure to join in the pre-match drinking and singing, and a complete lack of participation in the ritual singing and chanting during a match (King, 1998, p. 155). To the 'lads', this of course amounts to an unac-

ceptable breach of the rituals, traditions, and values of the group, and the lads therefore utterly reject the notion that these new consumers of football could in any way be authentic fans of their club. In a bid to make clear the distinction between themselves and these 'inauthentic' fans, the 'lads' make a particular point of attending matches dressed in designer labels such as Ralph Lauren, rather than replica jerseys – the wearing of a replica jersey is taken by the lads as an indication that the wearer is not a real fan (King, 1998, p. 156).

Irony is further reflected in the fact that it is these traditional football fans who have helped as much as any marketer to create the mythical image of football, an image that has proved so attractive to the new consumers. The lads' active and highly involved form of fandom has helped to construct the consumption object, to use Holt's term (Holt, 1995), which doubtless has contributed to make attendance at a match a more magical (Arnould et al., 1998) or sacred experience (Belk et al., 1989) for the new consumer. Yet while many of the lads find it increasingly difficult to pay for, or even obtain, match tickets, their places in the ground are easily filled by the legions of new consumers (King, 1998, p. 160) eager to advance from the mere mediated consumption experience of satellite television to the more 'authentic' lived experience of actual match attendance, subsequently interlacing the two forms of consumption to further the construction of their chosen self-images (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998, p. 135) – again self-monitoring may play a role here, as consumers adapt their behaviour (i.e. by attending games) to make their fandom more authentic, more socially interesting, to other consumers.

The above-mentioned theme, that is, deprivation of place as a result of commercialisation, also features in the Harley Davidson subculture. The risk for the marketer in both contexts is the same: if the 'hard core' who contributed so much towards the iconic image of the brand become alienated from it, how can it hope to retain or periodically rejuvenate its image, and sustain its commercial viability (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995, p. 58)? It is a particularly pertinent question in the climate of financial uncertainty in which football currently finds itself. All the more important, then, for sports marketers and academics to take

all possible steps to develop an understanding of the factors that underpin the loyalty of football fans, and how these factors might be linked to actual consumption. The significance of the current study and its implications should be viewed in this context.

Adaptation of Original Study for Replication

As indicated in the introduction, the current study is a partial replication of research originally carried out by Mahony et al. (1999). Again, while their primary objective was to establish the importance of self-monitoring in determining fan loyalty, it was hoped that their findings would enable sports marketers to make predictions regarding the strength of that loyalty. This in turn, they speculated, would help marketers to devise separate marketing strategies for the two categories of fan (high and low self-monitors).

Their study was based on the premise that associating oneself with a particular football team was in fact a social tactic – that (for high self-monitors) presenting oneself as a fan of a particular team was effectively a bid to be seen in a favourable light socially. They hypothesised that high self-monitors would only wish to be associated with successful teams, to avoid the social stigma of failure, of backing a loser, in effect. Given that a team's relative level of success in American football can vary greatly from one season to another, they therefore hypothesised that high self-monitors would demonstrate a proneness to team switching, but that low self-monitors would demonstrate much more enduring loyalty to their teams.

They found firstly that there was a negative relationship between self-monitoring and number of years as a fan of the currently supported team. In other words, high self-monitors were far more likely to have only supported their favourite team for a short period of time, thus implying team switching had taken place. Secondly, there was a positive relationship between self-monitoring and the total number of teams a fan has supported. Effectively – high self-monitors have a pronounced tendency to switch teams.

Self-monitoring was *not* found to be negatively related to the level of *psychological* commitment, or PCT score, to the team currently supported

(PCT score being a simple scale of attitudinal commitment devised by Mahony et al. (1999)). It was expected that low self-monitors would display much greater attitudinal commitment (as measured by PCT) but in fact no relationship emerged.

The authors speculate that this may have been due to a weakness in the PCT scale as a measurement of attitudinal commitment, that is, that high self-monitors may have been able to devise a means of answering the PCT questionnaire in a socially acceptable way (striving to give the appearance of a strongly supportive attitude to their team). However, given the complexity of the issue and the uncertainty as to what actually caused this result, their call for further research into this particular question was deemed worthy of a response.

Therefore, in addition to testing two hypotheses suggested by Mahony et al. *(1999)*, an original hypothesis relating to *obligational* commitment was developed. Thus the hypotheses were as follows:

H1   Self-monitoring will be negatively related to the number of years as a fan of the current favourite team.

H2   Self-monitoring will be positively related to the number of teams a fan has identified as being, or having been, his/her favourite.

H3   Self-monitoring will be negatively related to obligational commitment to the current favourite team.

The concept of obligational commitment is drawn from the literature on organisational loyalty. Loyal behaviour results from the underlying attitude that 'it is the right and "moral" thing to do'. There is some support in the literature for application of such a concept to football team brands, most noticeably De Ruyter and Wetzels' (2000) analysis of fans who consciously choose to buy shares in their clubs, even where they are unlikely to see any sort of financial return on their investment. It was therefore decided to investigate the possibility that obligational commitment was a factor in the loyalties of low self-monitors, as an alternative means of exploring the putative relationship between loyalty and attitudinal commitment.

Figure 1	Overall Sample
Average age	23.5
Average interest level	5.9*
Average number of years as a fan of current favourite team	14.4
Percentage of people who have supported one team only	69%
Average level of self-monitoring**	55.9 (max 90)
Average level of obligational commitment	28.5 (max 42)
Percentage males–females	79%–21%
Nationality (percentage Irish)	97%

* An average result of 5.9 equates to an average response of 'I watch as many of my favourite teams games on TV as I can'.
** Respondents with total self-monitoring scores of 57 or greater were regarded as high self-monitors.

The Survey

A detailed questionnaire (Appendix 1) was prepared and sent by email to the following categories of soccer fan:

1. Members of University College Cork F.C. (male and female).

2. Fans of FA Premiership teams contacted through League of Ireland soccer club internet forums (both official and unofficial). Requests seeking participation in an academic study on football supporters were posted on a number of such websites, and all respondents to the request were emailed a copy of the questionnaire.

3. Subscribers to an Irish-based e-mailing list for women interested in soccer, and respondents (both male and female) to requests placed randomly on national, general football websites.

161 questionnaires were sent in total. Initial non-response by any recipient led to a second and final email reminding them of the study and requesting a response. 67 valid responses were eventually received, yielding a response rate of 41.6 per cent.

The questionnaire was designed to examine respondents' level of self-monitoring, their level of interest in football, the number of teams they supported, and their levels of obligational commitment.

The first part of the questionnaire (questions 1–18) required respondents to complete Snyder and Gangestad's (1986) self-monitoring scale. A five-point Likert Scale was used for all questions relating to the self-monitoring scale. Level of interest in football (and number of teams supported) was examined using questions (questions 19–23)

adapted from Mahony et al. (1999) – this adaptation had to be carried out, given that the subject under scrutiny was loyalty to FA Premiership soccer teams rather than American football teams. The third and final part of the questionnaire (questions 24–31) measured levels of obligational commitment to team (OCT) using an adapted version of Meyer et al.'s normative commitment to organisation scale (Meyer et al., 1993).

Study Findings and Discussion

Of the 67 valid responses, preliminary analysis of all questionnaires yielded the findings displayed in Figure 1. This preliminary analysis indicates several interesting trends in the data, such as the relatively young age at which fans commence their support of teams, and the quite high proportion of fans – almost 70 per cent – who state that they have only supported one team. These factors are discussed below. Of more pressing concern are the findings relating specifically to each of the three hypotheses.

Results of statistical analysis for hypothesis 1 (that self-monitoring will be negatively related to the number of years as a fan of the current favourite team) are outlined in Table 1.

The low t-value of the self-monitoring score indicates that it is not significant (greater than ± 2 is typically needed for significance). The P-value (probability value) is not significant at the 5 per cent level (needs to be smaller than 0.05) – which indicates that self-monitoring is not a good predictor of how many years a fan has been loyal to a chosen team.

It was expected that self-monitoring would be negatively associated with duration of loyalty towards a particular team, i.e. that high self-monitors would tend not to remain loyal to particular

Table 1 Self-monitoring Score as a Predictor for Number of Years as a Fan of Favourite Team

	Value	Std. error	t-value
Intercept	15.853	3.279	4.836
SM score	– 0.026	0.057	– 0.461

Table 2   ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) with Respect to Table 1

	Degrees of freedom	Sum of squares	Mean square	F-value	P-value
SM score	1	5.898	5.898	0.212	0.647
Residuals	65	1807.774	27.812		

Table 3   SM Score as a Predictor for Number of Favourite Teams

	Value	Std. error	t-value
Intercept	1.403	0.080	17.504
SM score	0.004	0.007	0.572

teams over time. This in turn was assumed on the basis that high self-monitors would only support any given team for as long as that team remained successful or popular. Given the number of teams included in the study, clearly not all teams could have attained continued success over the duration of the period of fandom. It is possible, however, that certain teams have remained socially popular (i.e. perceived as amounting to a reasonable or socially acceptable choice of team to support) over an extended period of time. If a particular team remained a socially acceptable choice (for whatever reason), high self-monitors would not perhaps have any great need to change clubs, and this would help to explain the results shown in Tables 1 and 2. Contrary to the initial hypothesis, no negative relationship is apparent between high self-monitoring and duration of support. If high self-monitors do not show an inclination towards short-lived support for particular teams, this may also have implications for the level of team-switching (Tables 3 and 4).

Results for hypothesis 2 (self-monitoring will be positively related to the number of teams a fan has identified as being, or having been, his/her favourite) are outlined in Table 3. As was the case with hypothesis 1, the t-value of the SM score indicates that it is not significant. The P-value is not significant at the 5 per cent level. Therefore hypothesis 2 is also rejected.

With hypothesis 2, it was expected that a strong relationship would be apparent between team-switching behaviour (i.e. reduced or short-lived loyalty to the team brand) and high self-monitoring, due to the expected team-switching behaviour of high self-monitors suggested by Mahony et al., as the success and/or social appeal of various teams fluctuated. Such fluctuations in terms of social appeal might be attributable to a number of factors, such as level of success achieved in a given football season, or the arrival – or indeed the emergence – of one or more charismatic football stars at a particular club. In the absence of any apparent relationship between high self-monitoring and team-switching, however, the relative usefulness of such speculation would appear to be very limited. It may therefore be more fruitful to look for alternative explanations as to why even high self-monitors have failed to demonstrate team-switching behaviour.

Looking back at the data presented in Figure 1, it is apparent that team-switching as a phenomenon is engaged in only by a minority (albeit a sizeable minority at 31 per cent) of fans. Also the age at which fans began to support their currently supported team (less than ten years of age, on average) suggests that team-switching is not an activity engaged in beyond childhood. This renders the lack of association between high self-monitoring and team-switching more explicable. Adult fans do not engage in team-switching, whether they are high self-monitors or not. This suggests that either self-monitoring influences fans in some other way, or that other variables are more important in determining fan loyalty.

Table 4   **ANOVA with Respect to Table 3**

	Degrees of freedom	Sum of squares	Mean square	F-value	P-value
SM Score	1	0.141	0.141	0.327	0.569
Residuals	65	27.979	0.430		

Table 5   **SM Score as a Predictor of Obligational Commitment (OC) score**

	Value	Std. error	t-value
Intercept	25.238	6.655	3.793
SM Score	0.058	0.117	0.501

Table 6   **ANOVA with Respect to Table 5**

	Degrees of freedom	Sum of squares	Mean square	F-value	P-value
SM Score	1	28.776	28.776	0.251	0.618
Residuals	65	7447.970	114.584		

Results for hypothesis 3 (self-monitoring will be negatively related to obligational commitment to the current favourite team): the t-value of the SM score suggests that it is not significant. The P-value is not significant. Hypothesis 3 is also rejected.

In relation to the findings shown in Tables 5 and 6, that is, no connection between a low self-monitoring score and level of obligational commitment, here it is useful to reflect on the findings of Mahony et al. (1999). They did not succeeed in detecting any apparent relationship between attitudinal commitment (measured in their case by PCT score) and self-monitoring. Even though the current study utilised an alternative measurement of attitudinal commitment, the findings were very similar. This confirms that underlying attitudinal commitment to a team would not seem to be particularly related to self-monitoring. This in turn raises the question as to whether self-monitoring affects or influences fans to *any* degree in determining the depth or longevity of their loyalties towards particular soccer teams.

Conclusion

One possible conclusion, given the above findings, is that self-monitoring is simply not a factor in determining fan loyalty. Certainly Irish fans, both high and low self-monitors, display remarkably strong loyalty towards their chosen teams, with almost 70 per cent of respondents never having supported any other team, and the average duration of support being over 14 years. Even the minority who engage in team-switching apparently only do so as children, settling on and remaining loyal to one particular team prior to adolescence (Figure 1).

An alternative and far more compelling conclusion is possible, however. Given that one of the needs that sports fandom satisfies is social approval, high self-monitors may in fact have a greater inclination towards participation in fandom, precisely because of their greater sensitivity towards social approval than low self-monitors.

Furthermore, the tendency to engage in self-monitoring suggests that only a small number of football team brands could possibly be considered for selection by aspiring football fans. Only a small number of FA Premiership teams can enjoy reasonable expectations of regular success, and attract or retain the services of the highly paid stars that endow a club with a glamorous and socially attractive image. This would help to explain the relatively small subset of Premiership clubs that can claim Irish support. We must also consider the possibility that in an Irish or UK context, attempts at team-switching by football fans would attract social ridicule and loss of credibility – this would suggest that high self-monitors would therefore be more inclined to remain loyal to the first team chosen, and avoid team-switching altogether, as it would result in social disapproval. Even in the absence of any preliminary conclusions as to whether football fans constitute a subculture of consumption or, alternatively, make up

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brand communities, group dynamics and values would arguably act as social exit barriers, making team brand switching socially difficult if not impossible (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). These factors (a finite number of socially acceptable clubs to choose from, and social disapproval for team-switching) would explain both the relatively small number of clubs that Irish fans seem to support, and the longevity of that support.

Together they illustrate that self-monitoring may in fact be highly significant, not only in sustaining loyalty towards the fan's chosen team, but also in restricting the number of clubs and football team brands that could hope to be initially considered as socially acceptable choices by the individual fan.

There is also another way in which self-monitoring may be important. Fans may seek to downplay their links to a team if it is not doing well, but they may be more likely to 'bask in reflected glory' should the team enjoy a successful spell. By basking in reflected glory is meant the tendency to publicise a connection with another person or team who has been successful, so as to earn greater social approval or acceptance (Cialdini et al., 1976).

In the case of football fans, basking in reflected glory is manifested through the tendency to wear team-related apparel more frequently, and in social interaction (i.e. day-to-day conversation) not only to refer to the team, but to do so in the first person plural, and so on. It is highly plausible that the tendency to engage in such behaviour is closely related to the tendency to self-monitor, and for high self-monitors, it is also influenced by the relative success of the team.

One final but equally important point is that, contrary to the findings of Mahony et al. (1999), high self-monitors do not seem to be motivated by a need for association or identification with the currently most successful team. They would seem if anything to be more highly motivated to remain loyal to their originally chosen team, although further research would be needed to confirm this, and to confirm the suggestion that such loyalty is dependent on the team brand retaining an acceptable level of social attractiveness.

Implications for Sports Marketers

Clearly the most significant and arguably the most reassuring finding for sports marketers (i.e. for marketers of the leading team brands) is that football fans are, as anecdotal evidence suggests, tenaciously loyal to their teams. The above conclusions also suggest that self-monitoring may have an impact on fans' spending on team branded merchandise, including replica jerseys, the wearing of which facilitates the 'basking in reflected glory' process. That in turn implies that sports marketers should consider self-monitoring as a possible basis for segmentation of their fan base, as high self-monitors would apparently represent a more ready market for replica jerseys and other merchandise. Thus finite marketing budgets currently devoted to large scale distribution of expensively produced colour catalogues might be far better targeted towards the high self-monitors among the fan base.

The findings also suggest that English clubs that wish to target the Irish market (i.e. cultivate or sustain an Irish support base) should firstly be aware that attempts to persuade consumers to effectively switch brands are a waste of marketing resources, with the possible exception of younger consumers i.e. under ten years of age.

While the findings also suggest that the smaller Premiership clubs should focus primarily on cultivating local support (marketing expenditures in the Irish market would seem to be a complete waste of resources, as these clubs are highly unlikely to attract significant numbers of fans), they do not imply that the larger clubs can afford to be complacent in their approach. The behaviour of high self-monitors is likely to fluctuate depending very much on what is considered to be socially attractive. The revenues of many clubs are heavily dependent on sales of not only match tickets but also team merchandise. Should the negative perception expressed by the Manchester United 'lads' towards replica shirts ever become more socially prevalent among other fans, high self-monitors would be very quick to cease purchasing these products. On a more positive note, sports marketers whose teams are not performing successfully on the field need not worry too much about a collapse in sales, but they should consider monitoring the perceived level of social attractiveness of their brands, and take steps to counteract

any fall in this with appropriate marketing communications aimed at high self-monitors.

A related final implication for marketers at a club level would be the need to stress social benefits in marketing communications. Marketing messages could focus on a theme of social inclusion and implied approval – 'be part of the team' and so on. This would become even more important should the team suffer a sustained period of failure to win trophies, which would diminish the tendency to bask in reflected glory through purchasing and wearing merchandise.

Limitations

The above conclusions, while doubtless both useful and accurate, can only be described as tentative in the absence of specific findings confirming that self-monitoring does play some role in determining fan loyalty and related consumer behaviour. The current study, to a certain extent, would appear to have been concerned with the wrong questions. The methodology focused very much on attempting to establish whether or not high self-monitoring was positively correlated to team-switching, for example. It is now apparent that team-switching is not the issue of concern, but we are still uncertain as to the role of self-monitoring. The question also arises as to whether or not focusing on one factor alone (such as self-monitoring) was the most appropriate approach to take in studying fan loyalty. The most likely answer is that it was not. Future research should therefore take a different approach to the study of football fan loyalty.

Implications for further research

The dynamics that drive consumption of football vary in a pronounced manner depending strongly on the context in which an individual consumes. If the consumer is a traditional 'lad', the context in which he consumes, and the values and prac-

tices associated with that context, are very different to those of the 'new consumer' (King, 1997). It seems obvious that further research must of necessity take this into account. A further implication relating to future research on football fans is that survey-based research may not be an appropriate methodology to utilise, where the research objective is to derive a more comprehensive understanding of the nature and meaning of football fan loyalty. The results of this study in relation to loyalty and self-monitoring may have been inconclusive, yet self-monitoring would very much appear to have some role to play in sustaining fan loyalty to particular teams, and fan consumption of team-related merchandise.

Rather than future research focusing on self-monitoring, however, it is suggested that research of a more exploratory nature be carried out. It is readily apparent that group dynamics and social relationships play a key part in football fandom as consumption.

An ethnographic approach would appear to be the most suitable form of methodology, given its prevalence in the literature on communal and specifically fan-related consumption (Kozinets, 2001; King, 1995; Holt, 1995; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). In addition to ethnographic interviews with fans, both participant and non-participant observation opportunities are readily available, at such research sites as football matches, club retail outlets, and internet football discussion forums, to name but three. Such an approach is more suited to identifying and explaining the underlying determinants of football fan loyalty than a narrowly defined study focused on single factors such as self-monitoring. Finally, such a study could also address other interesting questions, such as identification of factors that contributed towards fans' original choice of football team.

Authors

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Questions 1–18 measured respondents' self-monitoring tendencies, employing a five-point Likert scale which included the following options:

Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree	Undecided	Slightly agree	Strongly agree

1	In a group of people I am rarely the centre of attention.
2	I find it hard to imitate the behaviour of other people.
3	At parties and social gatherings, I do not attempt to do or say things that others will like.
4	I can only argue for ideas that I already believe.
5	I can make impromptu speeches on topics about which I have almost no information.
6	Sometimes I put on a show to impress or entertain others.
7	I would probably make a good actor.
8	In different situations and with different people, I often act like very different persons.
9	I am not particularly good at making people like me.
10	I'm not always the person I appear to be.
11	I would not change my opinions (or the way I do things) in order to please someone or win their favour.
12	I have considered being an entertainer.
13	I have never been good at games like charades or improvisational acting.
14	I have trouble changing my behaviour to suit different people and different situations.
15	At a party I let others keep the jokes and stories going.
16	I feel a bit awkward in public and do not show up quite as well as I should.
17	I can look anyone in the eye and tell a lie with a straight face (if for a right end).
18	I may deceive people by being friendly when I really dislike them.

The next set of questions attempted to measure levels of interest in football and the number of teams supported:

19 How strongly do you consider yourself a football fan (please tick ✔)?

Not at all a fan

I only watch football if there is nothing else on TV

I watch some football but don't really have a favourite team

I have a favourite team, but don't really pay much attention to them a lot of the time

I am enough of a fan to hold a discussion about my favourite team with another fan

I watch as many of my favourite team's games on TV as I can

I watch all the matches on TV, own football merchandise and have attended a Premiership match (or probably will soon)

Very much a fan(atic) and would attend a Premiership game as often as possible

Questions 20–23 did not require any form of scale:

20 How long have you been a fan of your favourite Premiership team?
21 Which Premiership team is currently your favourite?
22 Which team was your favourite when you first began watching football?
23 List any other Premiership teams that were your favourite team at some point of your life.

Questions 24–29 measured obligational commitment on a seven-point Likert scale:

Completely disagree	Strongly disagree	Mildly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mildly agree	Strongly agree	Completely agree

24	I do not feel any obligation to remain as a supporter of my current favourite team.
25	Even if it were to my advantage (psychologically, financially or otherwise) I do not feel it would be right to abandon my favourite team.
26	I would feel guilty if I switched teams now.
27	This team deserves my loyal support.
28	I would not change teams right now because I have a sense of obligation to it.
29	I owe a great deal to my favourite football team.

(Questions 30 and 31 were simply to establish age and gender)