

## CHAPTER 10

### CONSUMPTION

Kevin Dixon

#### *Chapter Highlights*

- From the late nineteenth century football has cultivated consumers.
- The multi-national adoption of neo-liberalism in the 1980's contributed towards the intensification of the consumer experience in football.
- Whilst there is no single consumption theory, there are a number of complimentary, overlapping and sometimes contradictory theoretical explanations that can be applied to football.
- Some theories emphasize the position of capitalist exploitation in football, whilst others place consumers as communicators and rational decision makers.

#### **Introduction**

I keep all that is related to Lens. I have Jerseys...like all supporters. I have the jersey of each season. I often go on Lens website. All the anthems we sing...our logo...everybody identifies with Lens... In addition we play with Lens equipment... [We wear] jerseys, shorts, socks, sweat shirts, tracksuits. We have everything...We identify a lot actually. We sing Lens anthems "La Lensoise". I have three CD's that have been issued. One Jersey costs about 50 euros; one tract suit is about the same price. Yes, that's all it costs! (Christophe, Lens fan [cited in Derbaix and Decrop, 2011, p. 271])

For Christophe and millions of others like him, consumption is inseparable from football culture: in fact, engaging in football culture means consuming. Let me explain - the purchasing of boots, shorts, socks and shirts; tickets; football paraphernalia; ephemera; related gifts; watching television shows; reading newspapers or books; listening to music; admiring art; playing computer games; acquiring match-day food and drink; travelling to the match; gambling; celebrating; commiserating;

communicating with others (online or otherwise) and many other actions besides, are all in the end, acts of consumption.

Whether experiencing football as a player, coach, or fan, consumption infiltrates every level of practice, so much so, that affiliation to football is impossible without it. As such, it becomes clear that consumption is more than an economic transaction; it is a way of thinking or being that emerges within people as a consequence of sub-cultural immersion. In order to process how such wide ranging actions can be perceived of as acts of consumption, the following definition from Alan Warde (2005) is helpful:

[Consumption is]...a process whereby agents engage in appropriation and appreciation, whether for utilitarian, expressive or contemplative purposes, of goods, services, performances, information or ambience, whether purchased or not, over which the agent has some degree of discretion (p.137).

Above, Warde recognizes the place and importance of the experiential component as a defining constituent of consumption. Here, his intention is not to downgrade or downplay the economic element, but rather to acknowledge that consumption has become so ingrained into routine actions of everyday life that people are not always fully conscious of the consumption acts (experiential or otherwise) of which they are engaged. This is because they are 'actually doing things like driving, eating, or playing' (Warde 2005, p.150). Thus, consumption speaks, not only a tough economic language, but it also sings to the soft, intricate levels of human existence – particularly to our identity, as expressed through routine communications. There is no doubt consumption has become an identifying feature of modern society; consuming is a central social activity – we all do it. Marketing, branding, and advertising creates interest, which turns to fascination then demand and so creates a market. In fact, the market is now global: everyone, everywhere is in some way involved in consuming products and services.

With this in mind, the following chapter contends with the consumption of football from three main perspectives. First, it briefly examines the history of football related consumption from the rise of leisure centered culture in the late nineteenth century until the 1980s. As a second feature, it discusses the post-1980 multi-national emergence of a neo-liberal political economy and its implications for football consumers. Finally, the chapter gives space to discuss complementary and competing theoretical explanations of football consumption. Let's begin with a chronological discussion relating to "the home of football", England - and the rise of leisure consumption.

### **The home of football and the rise of leisure consumption**

According to Zygmunt Bauman (2005, p.82), all human beings are, and always were consumers. With this, he explains that the human concern with consumption certainly precedes its contemporary infatuation, and yet, this position is not readily enforced in the football literature. For instance, Ed Horton (1997); David Conn (1997); Stephen Morrow (1999); Craig McGill (2001), amongst others – imply that consumption and the capitalist exploitation of football is a new phenomenon. Moreover, they write with nostalgia about an era where fans were not exploited as consumers. In this section, I argue that such logic is based on a popular misconception and that authors have not fully understood the continuity that exists across time and space in relation to consumption. Thus, below I argue that from the late nineteenth century onwards, football has cultivated consumers.

#### *Trade unions, legislation and the rise of leisure consumption*

The trade union movement in early nineteenth century Britain played an important role in the initial development of consumer culture. Indeed, Andy Bennett (2005) explains that representation and subsequent pressure of workers' unions led to the initiation of government statutes that were, in turn, crucial to the evolution of leisure in the United Kingdom. Those statutes that would set in motion the conditions from which future generations of working people would develop a taste for consumption include: The Factories Act of 1847 (also known as The Ten Hours Act), freeing workers on Saturdays for the pursuit of leisure; the Reform Acts of 1867 and 1884, extending this franchise to various

classes of working men and women; the Union Chargeability Act of 1865 allowing greater mobility of labour; the Labour Representation League of 1869, promoting working class members of parliament; and the Education Act of 1870 which sought to extend the educational franchise to the lower classes (Wigglesworth 1996; Taylor 2008).

Alongside a generic pay-increase for working people, perhaps the most important amendment to working conditions (from the perspective of the development of football cultures) was the establishment of a free Saturday afternoon (otherwise known as the Saturday half-holiday) for workers as a form of common practice in many trades by the 1870s (Holt, 1990; Brailsford, 1991; Cunningham, 1980). With disposable income and spare time to occupy, working people became willing consumers of the once elite, public school game that began to diffuse into the wider population (I will return to social issues of diffusion later in this chapter). As football teams were established through old boy's networks (former public school boys); industry teams; armed forces regiments; church groups; and pub teams - identities were constructed to reflect the character and the imagined communities of their founding locality / group (Williams, 1997; Croll, 2000; Beaven, 2005; Taylor 2008). According to Adam Brown (2008) identity, was consumed, in turn, through club symbolism such as club nicknames; badges; songs and ground locations that were used to evoke a sense of passion and group unity within the lives of football supporters (see chapter 3 for a discussion of Empire and the diffusion of football, and chapter 7 for an exploration of the power of football in generating individual and group identity).

Furthermore, local affiliations to specific teams helped to stimulate and nurture football rivalries, and subsequently this is thought to have had a direct effect on the aggregate of crowds attending football matches. For instance, when discussing the first Tyne and Wear derby between Sunderland AFC and Newcastle United, Anton Rippon (1981, p.52) reports that '30,000 supporters attended this match on Christmas Eve 1898'. The important point to note here is that the average attendance for Sunderland matches in the same season was '12,300' (Tabner 2002: 96). Likewise, Nicholas Fishwick (1989, p.52) has shown that local derbies between Wednesday and United in Sheffield would double the average gate. So, as matches played on public holidays were likely to attract a larger audience, they

often coincided with derby matches to add to the attractiveness, showcasing the commercial potential of spectator football.

*Professionalism, business, and the nascent consumer market*

Professionalism (being paid to play football) was prompted by local rivalries and according to Stefan Symanski and Tim Kuypers (1999, p.4), the beginnings of commercialization and professionalism were 'two sides of the same coin'. After all, the best players attracted the biggest crowd, and gate money paid for the best players. Steven Tischler (1981) adds to this when he argues that football clubs could not afford to be complacent on this issue. He states: 'the entrepreneur could not assume that his customers would continue to contribute to the gate if the team lost – or the quality of the play was poor'. As a consequence, he explains that those clubs that had embraced the commercial potential of football began to apply pressure on the Football Association (FA, established in 1863) in a galvanized movement to legalize professionalism. This was achieved in 1885.

The Football League was established in 1888 to ensure that competition was equally matched. This was thought important, not only to ensure a fair contest but also as a technique that would stimulate audience and demand (Wigglesworth 1996, p.35). However, despite this logic the Football League and clubs within it were not purely profit maximizers. In fact, Peter Sloane (1971) points out that any profit made from football was strictly regulated. For illustration, in 1889 the FA placed a 'limit of five per-cent of the paid up shared capital' as the maximum dividend that a member club could pay out (Holt 1990, p. 283). So, whilst there is evidence to reject the idea that football clubs were pure profit maximizers; it is also true that maximizing income did become critical for maintaining the club financially and this led to the introduction of established business methods into the operations of football clubs. Szymanski and Kuypers (1999, p.7) explain:

The basic elements of football business ... have been [present] since the earliest days of the professional game: A product (entertainment of the game) supplied by workers (players and coaching staff) using land (grounds), buildings (stadiums) and equipment (ball, boots, kit) for

a wage and sold to customers (supporters and other spectators) in competition and through co-operation with rivals.

Likewise, Tischler (1981, p. 69) argues that football resembled a microcosm of the larger business environment, dealing in sports in the same way that others traded in houses, food and pencils. 'The natural order of the workplace', he insists, 'found its extension in football'. Indeed, football and football cultures were supported by other stable and emergent forms of consumption. It is suggested that football's growing popularity was positively reinforced by communication technologies such as printing, the media and rising levels of literacy within the British population more generally (Wigglesworth 1996). The rise of the Saturday night *Sports Special* (newspaper, popular from late nineteenth century) cemented this relationship with the British public, uncovering the commercial demand for football and its place within British culture - with spectator sport becoming part of a wider system of entertainment. Other technological advancements such as the nationwide introduction of the railway system have also contributed to this movement by making travel accessible and relatively inexpensive for spectators and for tourism more generally. By the late 1920s "football special" trains were common occurrences as supporters began to travel in order to watch their teams away from home, especially in cup competitions.

It is important to note, however, that the safety and comfort of fans was not a priority for event organizers. Taylor (1992, p.11) points out that 'often the first improvements at football grounds were simply attempts to make sure spectators paid to watch'. With this, turnstiles; fencing; the construction of primitive stands; 'earth mounds and wagons for spectators to stand on' were all designed to control the movement of the crowd and 'to ensure that they paid for the privilege' (Mason 1980, p.140). Thus, as soon as football became a form of mass entertainment, facilities were required for supporters, and in turn those facilities demanded expenditure which had to be covered by entrance charges. In this capacity football was a business with entrepreneurs responding to the economic stimuli underpinning the growth of nineteenth century commercialized leisure (Szymanski and Kuypers 1999; Taylor 2008; Vamplew 1988). Unlike other pursuits that today we recognize as sports, football, as a commercial activity, was not considered comparable with, say cricket, rugby or athletics, all of which were

amateur and thus pure sports undefiled by the professionalism association football accepted since 1885.

Entrepreneurs in football were not exclusively club owners or board members. In fact, people from various walks of life were known to capitalize on the local football match. Taylor (1992, p.11) notes that 'if hills overlooked the pitch', as they did at the cup replay between Bolton and Notts County in 1884, 'four or five thousand supporters might gather in the farmers field ... though the farmer charged half price for admission'. Less surprisingly, industrialists too began to cater for the football audience. James Walvin (1994, p.64-6) notes that from the 1880s, football merchandise was produced by (for example) Lewis's of Manchester – offering for sale "knickerbockers" (knee length trousers, used and marketed as sports clothing) at 6s 9d (approximately 34 pence); jerseys for 3s 11d (approximately 20 pence); and hand sewn footballs for 10s 6d (approximately 53 pence). He notes that there was a market for manufacturers of durable turf, or even herbal and patient medicines for players with knocks, bruises and strains. He writes:

The economic spin-off from the game had, within thirty years of the establishment of the FA, become a sizable industry itself, and around football there have developed a cocoon ancillary trades and services all of which were made possible by the increasing amount of money made available for leisure. (Walvin 1994, p.66)

It is clear then, that catering for large urban populations of football fans could be reasonably lucrative, not only for football clubs but also for train companies; the media and manufacturers of football merchandise in the form of playing equipment; medicines; umbrellas; streamers; rattles; scarves and beer (Benson 1994). While other sports prided themselves on their amateur status, football – like professional boxing – saw nothing wrong with making a profit from its activities. So with clear opportunities for money to be made, the evolution of spectator football was such that by the early decades of the twentieth century, its importance had grown to the extent that it was considered to be a dominant aspect of leisure. By 1937-38 fourteen million people watched First Division matches, producing an average crowd per match of approximately thirty thousand (Jones 1986, p.38). Additionally, the weekly football results, were vital to the gambling industry and in the 1930s, via the

Football Pools alone, between ten and fifteen million people per week were 'sending off postal orders totaling £800,000 to the Football Pools company' (Clarke and Critcher 1985, p. 75).

In spite of the early popularity and commercial potential of football, levels of support could not be guaranteed in light of a growing leisure market that would offer new and novel ways for working men and women to "spend" their leisure time. Football audiences would also find themselves enticed by other attractions such as: cinema, music and dance cultures. In addition, the number of wireless licenses increased from '2,178,259 in 1926 to 9,082,666 in 1938' (Jones 1986, p.37) bringing a new form of leisure consumption into the home. The 1960s brought with it the mass consumption of television, with BBC and ITV channels in full operation by the mid-1950s (Horrie 2002; Horne 2006). Thus, in order to maintain its position as a dominate form of leisure consumption; football would require the implementation of a serious commercial strategy.

### **Neo-liberalism and the football consumer**

In his historical analysis of the football industry post-1940, Anthony King (1998) makes reference to Britain's gradual move to a post-Fordist leisure centred state, highlighting the importance of a consumer based economy. In the late twentieth century, this was propelled by a multi-national neo-liberal political movement that was beginning to gather momentum. To explain, neo-liberal economic philosophy is driven by policies (such as privatization, fiscal austerity, deregulation, free trade and reductions in government spending) that enhance the role of the private sector in the economy, under the guise that this is the best way to stimulate economic growth, and consequently, to benefit all citizens. (Post-Fordism is the theory that modern industrial production changes from large-scale mass production pioneered by the car manufacturer Henry Ford towards smaller, more flexible manufacturing units.)

It is worth noting here, that some scholars do not agree that neo-liberalism is the best economic policy, but they can't help but be impressed with its ideological dominance. As social theorist Pierre Bourdieu (2000) explains, neo-liberal policies are presented in the language of mathematics and this, he asserts, is partially responsible for its meteoric rise and acceptance within public consciousness. When presented in this way (and whilst there are other alternatives) Bourdieu argues that, neo-liberal



philosophy becomes detached from real life to give the impression of scientific credibility along with the power to argue for the inevitability of its proposals and solutions (Bourdieu, 2003). Neo-liberal relates to new forms of liberalism, the prefix *neo* meaning new or revived: typically liberalism involves respecting individual liberty, free trade and moderate political and social reform

In doing so, he argues that neo-liberalism can present itself as progressive, when in fact it is conservative and allows for forms of economic regression to be passed off as reform and revolution. Consequently then, despite the fact that this system greatly favours those who already own large amounts of economic capital (and associated symbolic capital), social agents are coerced into believing that the game is fair and that everyone profits from “free markets”. Bourdieu uses this as an example of the power of “misrecognition”, where certain individuals (largely rich capitalists) benefit without appearing to do so in the eyes of the repressed. This results in a situation of what he calls “symbolic violence”, in which the dominated are complicit in their-own subordination. Before providing an example of the potential negative consequences of neo-liberalism for consumers of football, it is first appropriate to point out how the free market has changed football.

#### *How the free market changed the game*

Allen Guttman (1986) points out how crowds for First Division football matches in 1940s England averaged forty-one thousand and three decades later they averaged only twelve thousand. Amongst other possible causes, lack of customer service (and competition from alternative leisure genres) was listed as a potential contributory factor towards this trend (Smith and Stewart, 2007). Moreover, protectionism and agendas of self-preservation (relating to leadership of English football) rather than forward thinking business strategies that could grow and sustain the game, were cast as potential millstones that would drag football towards financial ruin (King, 1998).

Gradually then, the acknowledgement that football could no longer support itself solely through its traditional means of gate revenue was becoming widely accepted. In turn, it was this issue that stimulated debate about the potential merits of jersey sponsorship for FL clubs. To recap slightly, in

1973 German football club Eintracht Braunschweig were the first football team in the world to present a sponsor logo *Jagermeister* on its jersey; and in 1976 Kettering Town FC (England) followed suit by displaying the sponsor *Kettering Tyres*. Both attempts at the time were denied by their respective football governing bodies and consequently both teams were forced to remove any signs of sponsorship (Unlucan, 2015). In 1983 this decision was dramatically reversed in England when the FL surrendered its position in relation to an ultimatum from big city teams who were beginning to realize the potential of their collective power.

The ultimatum was as follows. If the FL would not approve shirt advertisements, big city clubs would band together to sign an independent television contract. With nowhere to go (based on the fact that FL television revenue was dependent on the attraction of big city clubs) jersey advertisements were now made permissible. Soon after, and as a consequence of government inquiries into the Bradford fire (1985) and the Hillsborough disaster (1989), neo-liberal policy was promoted as a possible saviour of the English game. The promoted idea (that was rapidly gathering momentum) was to centralize fans as consumers of a safe, enjoyable, leisure pursuit and viable business (Poplewell 1986; Taylor 1989). On the latter point, television deals would play a crucial role in football's transformation.

According to Raymond Boyle and Richard Haynes (2004, p.20) media deregulation from the late 1980s onwards helped to accelerate the development of subscription based, cable, and digital televised networks, and free view customers were transformed into entertainment customers paying premiums. In Germany television money rose from DM 20 million with free to air stations in 1987 to DM 840 million in 2006-7. Likewise in Spain, club revenues increased dramatically as a result of the contracts which the Professional Football League and individual clubs signed with various television companies in the 1990s (Conejo, Banos-Pinto, Dominguez and Guerrero, 2007). The same can be said of Brazil, although Christopher Gaffney (2015, p.159) points out that the expansion of pay per-view and cable coverage has had negative impacts on stadium attendances, creating a situation where profits have increased with fewer fans in the stadiums.

Television deals in England began to change in 1988 when added competition from global broadcasters introduced a largely domestic English football industry to the rigors of the world market. In this instance, ITV paid £44 million for a four year deal; whereas a two year contract had cost only £4.5 million in 1983 (Cashmore, 2010). Following the formation of the Premier League in 1992 (when teams in the First Division broke away from the rest of the Football League in order to ensure that England's most successful teams would retain most of their television revenue) the deal was renegotiated and Sky (a commercial television network) won the TV rights paying £305 million for a five year contract. Since 1992 Sky has secured exclusive rights to televise a proportion of FA Premier League matches, and in turn those matches are sold to customers on a subscription and/or pay-per-view basis. In 2012, both Sky and British Telecom (BT) paid more than £3 billion between them for a three year deal (which are covered in chapter 8).

Notwithstanding the fact that satellite television was the catalyst that injected finance into the top tier of English football and thus stimulated the market, football clubs and other capitalist organizations also began to exploit new areas of consumer spending on an unprecedented scale. So, whilst it is plausible to suggest that a small proportion of football merchandise may have been sold to fans since the early part of the twentieth century, it was clear that by the century's end football-related merchandise was present everywhere – as journalist S. Winterburn (1998) describes:

... Christmas, a special time to gather among the Arsenal quilt sets and the Liverpool soap on a rope ... Someone somewhere might be generous enough to present you with a £179.99 Chelsea mobile phone, available in both home and away colors as is Blackpool's more realistically priced mug. At £2.95 each ... they can afford to keep one at home and take another on their travels ... Before they have even grown out of their nappies they have already been targeted as potential spenders. The tiny Barnsley fan can opt for a suit bearing "I'm a little Tyke" message for just £15.99, or a baby grow for £8.99. For those who have outgrown romper suits ... you may opt for the rather more subtle framed picture ... The Manchester United fan is well accommodated for with a signed print of the 1968 European Cup reunion, retailing at £270.

In order for the scope and depth of merchandising (above) to become a reality, football clubs initiated

marketing, sales and customer service departments to dream up new and innovative ways to sell merchandise and new experiences to earnest football fans (Smith and Stewart, 2010). I will return to the consumption of merchandise later in this chapter; but first by way of case study, I draw attention to a collection of historical examples relating to neo-liberal leadership and customer service at English football club, Newcastle United (NUFC).

*Neo-liberalism, market demand and the diminution of customer power: The case of NUFC*

In the post war period, the leaderships of many English football clubs resembled family dynasties that were handed down through generations of a small group of men. For example Gordon McKeag, was appointed to the board of NUFC in 1972 on the death of his father William McKeag and this situation was not unique to NUFC, or indeed to English football. Moorehouse (1994), for instance, has previously noted a similar issue in relation to Celtic FC, where the White and Kelly families (former board members and major shareholders at Celtic Rangers Football Club [CRFC]) were alleged to have referred to CRFC as a precious heirloom to be handed down from generation to generation. Moreover, because of this inevitable association between families and board members, fans were sceptical about the motives of any given football club leadership (beyond maintaining power through generations). Consequently football fans felt disconnected from the decision making processes at football clubs.

At NUFC the situation was as follows: After a period of stadium neglect in the 1970's and 80's, NUFC were forced to revamp the stadium in connection with government white papers. The West Stand had been condemned in 1986 in the aftermath of the Bradford fire and was in the process of being rebuilt and paid for. The board had declared a shortage of money to improve the football ground and consequently, star players: Chris Waddle, Peter Beardsley and Paul Gascoigne (all born in Newcastle Upon-Tyne) were sold to the highest bidder. Thus, when John Hall and the Magpie Group (a consortium of North East Businessmen) set out a proposal for new leadership at NUFC, fans reacted positively, not solely for the prospect of a change of personnel, but also to welcome a neo-liberal forward thinking business strategy for the club. Hall (now, Sir John Hall, MBE) is a self-made millionaire that arose to prominence as the mastermind behind the Newcastle and Gateshead Metro Centre, a purpose built shopping complex, which at the time of build, was Britain's largest (Goldblatt

2015). By 1988, Hall was able to sell his stake in this £270 million retail development at an estimated £50 million profit, freeing monies to invest in and potentially to revolutionize NUFC (Williams, 1997).

The proposal put forward by Hall and the Magpie Group laid down the following conditions. The group would revitalize the board. They would raise money by implementing a share issue for fans. They would inject five million pounds immediately, increase democracy by removing absolute power from a small minority of people, redevelop the ground and call a halt to selling players to rebalance the books (BBC North East News, 1988). Perhaps the most appealing aspect of this to fans was the “share” issue; the opportunity to buy a stake in the club and to have a say in future decisions. Consequently, fans were willing to take their place as “consumers”, under the guise that they could use this as a position of power to campaign for inclusion in club matters. After all, the free-market is dependent on consumers for successful trade and thus, fans were approaching interactions with cultural superiors (Hall and his board) not as passive subjects, but rather as important players in the destiny of the club.

However, over the period of John Hall’s reign as chairman (1991-1998) and as a partial consequence of Newcastle United’s relative success in the Premier League (finishing as one of the top three teams 1993-1997) demand increased for tickets. Supporters soon found themselves not as inclusive policy drivers for the club (as they had hoped), but as reactive to the impulses of the neo-liberal leadership agenda. In relation to match tickets, the chairman was able to put in place numerous schemes in order to encourage fans to consume by reminding them that they were fortunate to have a ticket at all, given the length of the waiting list. For instance the club introduced a bond scheme in 1994. This involved an option to pay £500 to secure first refusal on a specific seat for ten years. In addition, and to supplement executive boxes; in 1996 the club offered 300 season tickets for sale at £1500 under the title “1892 Club” (titled to signify the date of club genesis). This strategy allowed the club to bypass the lengthy season ticket waiting lists in order sell new tickets at a premium price.

Whilst fans understood that advances in revenue were good for the neo-liberal objectives of the new order, they were beginning to understand that it was money and not loyalty that was valued by the

neo-liberal leadership. In 1999 this strategy was difficult to ignore when 4000 fans with season tickets in the Millburn and Leazes end of St James Park received a letter from the club stating that unless they were willing to pay £1,350 or £995 respectively for the seat that they had occupied in previous seasons (making new tickets approximately £500 more expensive), they would be moved to alternative seats in the new upper tiers. This situation was made even more unpalatable for NUFC fans due to the fact that half of those affected by this situation, were bondholders who had recently paid £500 in 1994 in order to give them an option on a specific seat for ten years (Conn, 1999). Affected fans attempted to exercise their consumer rights by joining the activist group "Save Our Seats" (SOS) - with some contributors taking to the law courts to resist the set actions of the club leadership. However, after two high-court cases the club was allowed to move fans as they had proposed under an exceptional circumstances clause (BBC Sport, 2000). As a gesture of goodwill, the club did not pursue fans for legal costs awarded over their insured limit (Conn, 2006).

When multi-billionaire businessman, Mike Ashley (owner of company Sports Direct and, in 2015, the 22nd richest person in the UK), took over as owner of NUFC in 2007, similar patterns emerged. Business decisions were taken without fan consultation and those decisions often occurred at the expense of tradition. For instance, in 2009 Ashley sold the naming rights for St. James Park. This was simply another way to maximize revenues, and despite public objection, the historic stadium became known as [SportsDirect.com@St.JamesPark](http://SportsDirect.com@St.JamesPark). On the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2011, the name was changed to "The Sports Direct Arena", with no financial fee incurred by the named company. Ashley's aim was simply to showcase the sponsorship capabilities of the stadium. This was maintained until season 2012-13 when WONGA, took over the sponsorship deal paying approximately £6 million per season for the privilege and investing an additional £1.5 million into youth football (*The Metro*, 2013). In order to sweeten the blow dealt to fans (for advertising a morally questionable short term loan provider), WONGA agreed to reinstate St. James Park as the stadium name.

Using NUFC as our example, the following becomes clear. The same business-minded strengths responsible for turning the fortunes of the club had become associated with negative consequences for less affluent fans. Notwithstanding this, it is apparent that both the fan and the club epitomize the

success of neo-liberal philosophy, but they do so in very different ways. Club owners invest material resources (on a grand scale) into the club, with the long term aim of returning a profit. Indeed, at Newcastle United the Hall and Sheppard families managed to extract £145 million (over their tenure), despite the clubs miniscule profits and overall losses (Goldblatt 2015). Conversely, fans invest emotionally in the team and consequently they become regular consumers of match tickets, club merchandise (inadvertently advertising commercial sponsors), television and other forms of consumption; hence collectively upholding and reaffirming the ultimate triumph of neo-liberal leadership and consumer culture through their actions.

In the section that follows, I take a closer look at the theoretical approaches that attempt to explain the relationship between emotion, identity and consumption (as expressed above). It is important to note that there is no single consumption theory, but rather, there are a number of complimentary, overlapping and contradictory theoretical positions that characterize a continually developing field of scholarship (Cook, 2008). Some of those approaches are discussed below; starting with the idea that consumption is used primarily to emulate others.

### **Consumption as emulation**

In his 1899 book *Theory of the Leisure Class*, Thorstein Veblen provides an analysis of the spending patterns of the rich in the late nineteenth century and he makes a number of observations that may help to explain historical events (and perhaps some contemporary developments too) relating to the consumption of football. Let's look at the main tenants of his argument. First, he argues that all societies across time and space have a leisure class. That is to say within any society, there are a group of people that distance themselves from menial work (work that is lacking prestige). Of course, the definition of menial work can and does change across cultural contexts, but nonetheless Veblen argues that the Leisure Class always occupy the apex of the social system.

In the context of late nineteenth century America, he highlights the importance of conspicuous consumption as a means of demonstrating membership of the leisure class. By emphasizing that

consumption must be conspicuous, Veblen is explaining that it is not good enough to simply have wealth. Instead, one must be seen to be spending money - and the more frivolous the activity and its distance from menial labour – the more successful one is perceived to be. Indeed, it is important to remember that in the nineteenth century amateur sport played its part as form of conspicuous consumption because it was associated with wealthy people. Veblen (1899, reprinted 1953) explains how amateur forms of sporting practice were forms of conspicuous consumption in which those who occupy the apex of a system choose to express their social standing by distancing themselves completely from those activities that will in any way, resemble work.

Veblen, adds to this by explaining that the trickle down mechanism of emulation works in the following way. First, status goods are initially adopted by the wealthy and then eventually, they are mimicked by households further down the wealth distribution (Schor 2007, p.17). This means that, as the income of manual workers improves over time and cultural conditions allow, then high status luxuries or leisure pursuits become lower status necessities due to a cultural desire for emulation. Indeed, in the case of football (explained earlier) we can see how a high status game associated with social elite public school boys was eventually diffused into the mainstream of British society. Once this has occurred, Veblen explains that the social elite tend to distance themselves from this tainted form of consumption. Historically, we can see value in Veblen's theory when we examine the conflict between amateurs (often public school boys of high social standing that wanted to maintain the moral code of football by refusing to play for money) and those that campaigned for professionalism (often working class men that saw payment as a necessity for involvement). It is worth noting here that because amateurs did not require payment due to their financial position and social standing, the moral argument is universally thought to have been a smokescreen for wider social contestation and an attempt to maintain class segregation (Cleland, 2015; Dixon and Gibbons, 2014).

From a Veblenian perspective then, consumption is carried out purely for its social value (relying on a commonly recognized set of consensual status symbols) rather than intrinsic benefits, or personal reasons. It should be noted however, that Veblen's claim has been highly criticized in recent years for overstating and ignoring reverse emulation of popular culture by the elite classes. For instance, one



must not assume that the stable traditional structures (observed by Veblen in 1899) remain the same across time. As such, contemporary scholarly work must take into account the ambiguity and instability that exists at every stage of late modern development. The commodification of social meanings, the break-up of traditional class groupings, the increasing mobility and globalization of communities, the malleability of personal identities – must all be considered when evaluating emulation through lifestyle consumption (Binkley, 2007).

For this reason, Veblen is seldom used in late modern discussions of the sociology of football consumption; but with modifications (to allow for inevitable social evolution) there may be grounds for application in the case of contemporary football stars or celebrities. After all, football stars, in the contemporary setting are (in the public perception, at least) set apart from the social processes of production. Moreover, as Matthias Varul (2007) argues, sport celebrities act as commodity culture innovators and serve as role models whose consumption, style, and behaviour are emulated. They are indirectly financed by their audiences and act out vicarious leisure for the on-looking society. Furthermore, because of the mixed social background of the members of this new leisure class (predominantly working and middle class), Varul implies that trickle up effects are at least as important as trickle down effects in the production of consumer trends to emulate. Chapter 9 considers the ways in which celebrity athletes are used for marketing, how they are turned into brands and whether those brands are damaged by transgressions.

### **Consumption as distinction**

No doubt influenced by Veblen, Pierre Bourdieu discusses consumption as a form of identity and status. He argues that we consume according to who we are; that is to say our identity is signposted through our consumption of goods, services, and practices. So, our expressions of “taste” (types of associated consumption that project social stigma or reward according to the critical onlooker) he explains, will provide reliable clues about our social status, including social class. Writing about sport and social class in 1978, Bourdieu raised the following rhetorical question: ...according to what principles do agents choose between the different sports activities or entertainments which in any given time are offered to them as being possible? (p.820). He answers this question, in part, with

reference to hidden entry requirements. In the following quotation, Bourdieu is making reference to what he considers to be bourgeois sports (that is, sports associated with upper class people):

[entry requirements are derived from]... family tradition and early training, and also the obligatory clothing, bearing and techniques of sociability which keep these sports closed to the working classes and to individuals rising from the lower-middle and even upper-middle classes; and secondly because economic constraints define the field of possibilities and impossibilities (p. 838).

Here, Bourdieu pays attention to the ways in which lifestyles are enacted via everyday consumption choices and constraints. Moreover, he insists that those choices to act in one way or another occur semi-consciously, because all actions are learned and then naturalized within dispositions that reflect not only us as individuals, but our social position too. Using evidence collected in 1978 (the date is emphasized in order to stress that this example is frozen in time and its relevance should not be taken out of this context) he argues that middle - upper class people tend to avoid and express disdain for spectator football due to its mass popularization. He writes: 'the probability of watching one of the reputedly most popular sporting spectacles, such as football or rugby on television declines markedly as one rises in the social hierarchy'. Here, Bourdieu insists that sport, like any other form of consumption can be used as an expression of distinction (rather than attempting to emulate another group of higher social status, as Veblen conceives) to fulfil a sense of togetherness with ones in-group, and distinction between those thought to be different, for whatever reason.

Whilst Bourdieu's theory is often criticized for being deterministic in the sense that individualistic actions are thought to conceal wider cultural norms (thus, giving the impression of cultural stagnation) some scholars suggest that this aspect of his work has been misunderstood. (Determinism is the theoretical approach that all human action is ultimately determined by causes that are external to the will; for some scholars, this implies that humans have no freewill and are purely products rather than producers; the opposite viewpoint is called voluntarism, which holds that human freewill is the dominant factor in social life.) Tony Rees, Tom Gibbons and Kevin Dixon (2014) argue that on closer inspection it is clear that Bourdieu recognizes that cultural conditions are, in fact, dynamic. After all,

he acknowledges that a range of practices can be produced, reproduced, altered and transformed across time by agents immersed in any given sub-cultural context (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). So for instance, whilst social life is in part habitual (where dispositions and ways of thinking and acting are passed between succeeding generations in an active and reciprocal manner); it is also true that when confronted with new technology, new information, or when contemporary conditions allow for agents to mix with others with diverse tastes and with different levels of affluence, then people have the capacity to “reflect” on and change behaviours. In other words, as social life has evolved across time, reflexivity has become internalized by most people as part of their habitus (a set of semi-conscious rules and dispositions that are learned through teachings and life experience). When investigating distinction in more recent times, Richard Peterson was able to uphold and accentuate this logic when he revealed:

...to our great surprise, those in high status occupations were...more likely than others to report being involved in a wide range of lower status activities (Peterson 2005: 259).

With this Peterson implies that agents holding high social status are not averse to participating in consumption practices associated with lower orders. In fact, he suggests that we are in an era of “cultural omnivores” in the sense that people tend to have a taste for everything and this has replaced the old arrangement where elite status was associated with snobbery. Thus, it is now widely conceived that people are reflexive beings and one outcome of this has been that diversity is now valued by most people. Consequently, the cultural omnivore appears to be more suited to the late modern world with less boundaries and a global inclusivity which is respectful of diversities (Warde and Gayo-Cal 2009; Peterson 2005; Widdop, Cutts, and Jarvie 2014). An omnivore is an animal, including human animal that consumes a variety of foods.

Again, it is important to stress that this does not mean that people no longer affiliate themselves with social groups (socio-economic or otherwise), however it does mean that contemporary conditions (economic, technological, social, political) have increased ones sense of reflexivity beyond traditional class groups and associated consumption. Moreover it is important to note here, that distinction

functions within as well as between social groups, and in either instance it is perceptions of consumer activity that tend to be the driving force from which distinction judgements are made (Richardson 2004). I was able to evidence this in 2014 when football fans (participants of a study that were interviewed about their life experiences as fans of the same team) identified a proportion of fans that they considered to be fake (Dixon, 2014). Such judgements were taken on the basis of consumption rituals that were duly disparaged. As William Miller (1997, p.218) explains distinction 'needs images of bad taste...to articulate the judgements that it asserts' and those judgements, in turn, rely on consumption and its lateral surveillance.

Theories of communication (like those expressed by Bourdieu and Veblen) can of course, only ever tell half of the consumption story. After all, it is important to remember (and I have highlighted this in earlier discussions of neo-liberalism) that objects and experiences of consumption will inevitably conceal corporate values. Thus, in what follows I draw attention to theoretical ideas that discuss the impact of global corporate values on the everyday life of football consumers.

### **Consumers and corporate values**

Within the sociology of consumption, scholars frequently debate whether people consume with free will (sometimes referred to as agency) or as a consequence of tuition, corporate manipulation, or perhaps a combination of all of the above. So, whilst Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1972) describe hapless consumers, manipulated by producers; Stuart Hall (1980), Henry Jenkins (1992), Kathy Davis (1995), and others talk about the "agentic" consumer. In terms of football, Steve Redhead (1997) provides examples of agentic consumers that tend to include, fanzine producers, members of football fan organizations and more generally consumers that emphasize the importance of choice, control, and power in their relationship with football clubs, advertisers and transnational corporations. This is a more voluntaristic approach than Bourdieu's, stressing the role of human agency i.e. the power of the individual to bring about change. But whilst Redhead and others are right to point out this development, it is important not to overstate the case for the agentic consumer. After all, the agency perspective downplays the power of producers and the relationship between individual choice and predictable market outcomes (Schor, 2007, p.24). In fact, it may be reasonable to suggest

that agency (or the idea of agency, at least) is constructed by producers, rather than being deployed against them. In the example below Umberto Eco (1986, p.148) explains how branding in the 1970s has been used to sell dreams and lifestyles to consumers ever since:

A firm produces polo shirts with an alligator logo. A generation begin to wear the polo shirts. Each consumer advertises via the alligator on his chest. A TV broadcast sees some young people wearing the alligator polo shirt. The young and the old buy the polo shirt because they have the young look.

So, whilst it is true that consumers have gained a form of power (freedom to choose, awareness of statutory rights, ability to resist, to hold producers to account etc.) they cannot reject consumption as a way of life, and as such, it is reasonable to suggest that they are under the spell of commercial marketing strategists (Bauman, 2007; Edwards, 2014). On this point, Ann Pegoraro, Steven Ayer and Norman O'Reilly (2010) make reference to the role of advertising on television and the internet for nurturing materialism and inventing consumer wants or even needs. For example, those that consume football via television are bombarded with advertisements, not only during the advertisement break, but also on billboards, team shirts, advertisement hoardings, stands, not to mention commentary from sports presenters that plug associate sponsors at every opportunity. Viewing via online streaming yields similar results, with the consumption of football broadcasts just one click away from a sponsor's website where purchases can be made.

Moreover, clubs send messages directly to fans in various other ways too: through match-day programmes, television and internet channels (e.g MUTV, a channel dedicated to Manchester United Football Club), radio and television interviews, official and unofficial websites, newsletters, posters and via any other means of promotion (Harris and Ogbonna 2008, p.388). The retro-fitting of football stadiums with wireless technologies is the latest technique being used to communicate with customers and to encourage match attendees to buy services during games (*The Telegraph*, May 13, 2015). It is clear then, that the business of football marketing is constantly evolving. In fact such is the knowledge of marketing experts, that they can actually encourage consumption even before a product

has been brought to market. Here, by way of example, I am referring to the initiation of Japan's J-League in 1993. In this instance, even before a ball had been kicked, football teams and associated sponsors began to make money through aggressive marketing techniques; and so, in its inaugural year it made US\$1.6 billion in sales and the league's official sponsor *Sony Creative Products* opened 100 stores nationwide and sold over US\$300 million dollars' worth of hats, jackets, and other merchandise stamped with the J-League logo (Edwards 2014, p.437).

To explain the omnipresence of seemingly generic (but successful) marketing strategies, it is worth briefly drawing on the work of Alan Bryman (2004). As an example he uses the template of Disney theme parks to demonstrate how a series of increasingly common marketing procedures are used (in every business throughout the world [not exclusive to Disney]) to ensure the satisfaction of consumers, offering new strategies for selling in post-Fordist times (Horne 2006, p.38). Coining the word Disneyization, he discussed the importance of four components that encourage variety, choice and differentiation; and in doing so he insists that they provide the ingredients that encourage people to consume. Those components include: (1) Theming: referring to an experience with a distinct theme (such as a Mexican restaurant) or a brand and its expression. (2) Hybrid Consumption: purposefully entangled forms of consumption associated with different institutional spheres. (3) Emotional Performative Labour: the fostering of emotion that satisfies the needs of consumers. (4) Merchandizing: denoting the promotion of goods and services bearing copyright images and logos. Each can be evidenced through football and they are briefly discussed below.

#### *Disneyization: Theming and Hybrid Consumption*

Theming and hybrid consumption are interlinked. The theme "football" and its various permutations (the club, the cup competition, the league etc.) is clear, but it is the presence of multiple forms of consumption (or hybrid consumption) that has transformed the experience for football consumers in late modern life. This is clearly expressed by Cornel Sandvoss (with particular reference to the Bayer Leverkusen football stadium) in the opening paragraphs of the 2003 book, *A Game of Two Halves: Football, Television and Globalization*:

In August 1998 I arrived at the BayArena, home of German first division side Bayer Leverkusen. The name of the ground had been changed at the beginning of the season to promote the teams sponsor and owner – the pharmaceutical multinational Bayer. I had bought a season ticket for the largest section of the redeveloped ground, namely “Family Street”...Fathers with their sons and daughters, mothers and their children slowly took up their seats and avidly followed the pre-entertainment on the newly installed giant video screens...At half time, hordes of fans, often driven by their children fought their way to a newly built onsite McDonalds restaurant. (p.1).

As Bryman would conceive it, the themed “Family Street” section and the multiple forms of consumption on display (in the example above) are thought to create an atmosphere conducive to consumption. Moreover, whether in Germany or anywhere else in the world, the refurbishment or relocation of football stadiums in or near city centres has become part of urban revitalization efforts. Public – private partnerships between cities and teams help to position the football stadium as an anchor or main attraction around which, shopping, restaurants, new transit hubs and entertainment districts can arise. The stadiums themselves have become sites of entertainment outside of providing seating to view a sports contest; with pubs, betting shops, food establishments, museums, club shops, ATM machines, pre-match entertainment, corporate experiences, and more besides – all integrated into the match-day space. Moreover, it is also worth noting that on any regular day, football clubs maintain their status as service providers. They are known to offer for consumption: stadium tours, consumer “experience” packages to observe the day to day activities of the club; and more generally, facilities can be booked for corporate events, birthdays or even weddings (Cook 2007; Dixon 2011).

Such options are now commonplace in many countries, though Ingar Mehus and Guy Osborn (2010) credit England as the catalyst that began to alter the dynamics of world football. With specific reference to Norway, they insist that despite cultural differences (between Norway and England) football has become a product that is to be sold. Thus, there appears to be no limit to

commercialization and hybrid forms of consumption entangled with football. Even art galleries (particularly during international football tournaments) are known to have become affiliated to football. Examples include: Euro 96 in England when Manchester City Art Gallery opened *Offside! Contemporary artists and football*; World Cup 2002 in Korea and Japan brought the *Football through Art exhibition* to Chosun Ilbo Art Museum; for the 2006 World Cup in Germany, Harald Szeemann (international curator) prepared the exhibition on football and art *Rundlederwelten. Eine Internationale Ausstellung zum Thema Kunst and Fussball*; and in 2010, the World Cup in South Africa included an exhibition at the Standard Bank Gallery, named *Halakasha!* (Strozek, 2015, p.1).

Moreover, whilst themed mega events (such as Fifa World Cup competitions) are the stimulus for forms of cultural consumption (such as art festivals), they also rouse major economic interest elsewhere. Writing in relation to South African and Brazilian societies, Barbara Schausteck de Almeida, Chris Bolsmann, Wanderley Marchi Junior and Juliano de Souza (2015, p.266) speak of the business opportunities that mega events can provide. The Fifa World Cup, they suggest, is used to justify accelerated infrastructural investments and to offer valuable promotional opportunities in which Brazil, South Africa and other countries are showcased to global audiences, helping to attract tourism and outside investment.

#### *Disneyization: Merchandizing and Emotional labour*

The latter two components of Disneyization, “merchandizing” and “emotional labour” can be observed through the marketing and sales of merchandise and the emotional appropriation of these commodities. Take for instance the following quote from Lens fan, Veronique:

The scarf means everything. It is brandished during the *Lensoise*, the *Marseillaise* from Lens [i.e. the French National anthem adapted to Lens]. Believe me when I say that the one who doesn't have his scarf looks a bit silly hanging his arms [without it]. (Derbaix and Decrop, 2011 p.277)



Consumption (such as the purchasing of the scarf, above) is sustained, it seems; through the perceived emotional congruence that exists between the fan, market products and the club. Consequently, corporate sponsors are able to use the emotional connection between the consumer and the football club to their advantage. As Hans Bauer, Nichola Sauer and Philipp Schmitt (2005) assert, familiarity with club sponsors tends to increase the likelihood that fans will purchase products and services associated with this sponsor. Moreover it allows businesses to connect with millions of people around the world on a deep, emotional level and offers an opportunity to drive sales and make a lasting impression with the connected consumer through traditional routes or non-traditional areas such as social media.

Consequently, companies which operate in different industries such as finance, gambling and betting, real estate, oil and gas, food and beverages, airlines and more besides are willing to sponsor football. With respect to the sponsorship of club shirts (or jerseys), Manchester United and General Motors agreed a deal to display *Chevrolet* on team shirts from season 2014-15. The club will earn £51 million per year from this contract. FC Barcelona receives approximately £25 million per year from its association with *Qatar Foundation*; Bayern Munich FC grosses £23.5 million from *Deutsche Telekom*, and AC Milain earns approximately £10 million annually through partnership with *Emirates Airlines* (Unlucan, 2015, p.45).

Another advantage for business's associated with football is that football fans, coaches and players are self-regulating consumers. By this, I mean that they consume, not only for themselves but they also use football gifts to reinforce friendships or to stimulate football consumption in a new generation of youths. So consumption is a source of solidarity and self-identity: how we spend our money and on what extent defines who we are and our membership of social groups. Grant McCracken (1986, p.78) refers to the purchasing of gifts as a process of exchange rituals, where a gift is offered because it possesses meaningful properties (often bound by emotion) that the giver wishes to see transferred to the receiver. From bibs, cots, and clothes; to wall paper, posters, and computer games; to match tickets, season tickets and away trips - fans punctuate all experiences with consumption. Thus, with a similar outcome to that described by Jean Baudrillard (1998) when he observes a system of obligatory

consumption that ultimately fails to produce pleasure for the consumer; it seems that consumers of football are seduced by the creations of the market that cater for the supported team.

Speaking with reference to Spanish football club Real Madrid, Jesus Rodriguez-Pomeda, Fernando Casani and Mar Alonso-Almedida (2014, p.4) bring to attention the deliberate attempts by the club to evoke emotion and pride in its fans. This manufactured process, they assert, plays on the knowledge that emotions bring communities together because it is those communities that support commercial markets. Indeed, even when fulfilling corporate social responsibility initiatives, football clubs (led by this logic) are focused on stimulating emotive tendencies in people. For instance, when investigating such initiatives in the German Bundesliga, Danyel Reiche (2014) draws attention to the social projects that focus on children. After all, positive association with various youth groups could ensure a lifelong commitment to the club as a consumer.

Of course, football clubs and commercial associates have known for a long time that football fans are not typical consumers. For instance, a report by the English Football Task Force (FTF), submitted to the Minister for Sport in 1999, states that 'football is not a normal customer business relationship, but an expression of loyalty to a football club...Fans of English clubs are not customers that will move to a different team if theirs is unsuccessful'. In a paper written by Jamie Cleland and I (2014), this point was further emphasized by a football fan in the following way:

It has got an emotional attachment, its right in our souls, its part of our identity, it's what we are...we are treated worse than consumers because the owner knows that we will never support anyone else. (p.547)

Consequently then, even when dissatisfied with the club or performances of the team, fans still have an overriding, compelling desire to consume based on an inelastic emotional commitment to the team. Furthermore, purchasing of an item of merchandise is only the beginning of a utilitarian or emotional relationship with the commodified product. On appropriation, material goods (emblazoned

with the club badge) become infused with meaning beyond their economic or use value. On this note, Christian Derbaix and Alain Decrop (2011) discuss instances where French football fans travel to away matches and collect souvenirs, displaying them at home in a bespoke manner to “make memories”. The authors also report instances where items (such as the scarf) were modified in order that its meaning was even more specific to individual consumers. Such examples are illustrations of what Paul Willis (1990) has coined “grounded aesthetics” in the sense that affective and innovative attachments are made to material goods. As he explains, capitalist culture has unwittingly provided tools for further symbolic expression given that commodities have rapidly become a symbolic aspect of everyday life. Thus, when appropriated in creative ways, the emotional connection to commodities is accentuated and this further intensifies the cyclical relationship between emotion and sustained material consumption.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter I have argued that consumption is more than economic exchange, it is a way of thinking or being that emerges within people as a consequence of sub-cultural immersion. The development of the consumer mind-set has been evidenced via a chronological assessment of football and its relationship to consumption. It has revealed that, since the foundation of the FA in 1863, a nascent consumer market for football began to emerge. Workforce legislation (including the Saturday half-holiday); higher earnings; communities in search of identity; ticket sales and the development of football grounds; legalization of professionalism; expansion of the railways; the reporting of popular football in the press, connections with alcohol and gambling, equipment required to play the game; and merchandising to symbolize support and identity – have been highlighted as factors that have gradually combined to provide the conditions for footballs consumer market to grow.

Whilst football consumption has always been present, it was not until the 1980s that the widespread adoption of neo-liberal political philosophy began to evoke a more serious, long term strategy for football as a business and industry. Consequently, football clubs have attracted sponsorship, lucrative television deals, initiated marketing, sales and customer services departments to find new and innovative ways to sell merchandise and experiences to the consumer. This trend has continued to

advance in late modern life and theoretical perspectives are split about whether the advance of consumer culture is a good or a bad thing. On one hand consumption gives us the platform to communicate things about ourselves. We can consume to emulate a group that we would like to belong to; to affirm our identity as part of a group or as an individual; and we can consume to uphold distinction between “us” and “them”. On the other hand, we can be manipulated to consume. That is to say, we can be seduced into wanting the latest football strip, renewing season tickets; merchandise and other experiences when we don’t really need any of it. After all, in football the emotional connection to the game, the team, the club and the perceived loyalty to likeminded people past and present, stimulates an unquenchable desire for continued consumption.

### **Research in Action**

Examining the relationship between brand emotion and brand extension among supporters of professional football clubs, by Ibrahim Abosag, Stuart Roper, and Daniel Hind (2010).

#### ***What were the goals of the research?***

This project set out to examine the relationship between supporter’s emotional attachment to what they perceive as club tradition and their strength of support for brand extension in Norwegian football. Brand extension, in this instance refers to the strategies that football clubs use to look for new sources of revenue, often through the introduction of new products or services.

#### ***Why was the research relevant?***

The research is relevant as it tests dominant arguments of consumption by placing exploration outside of the “big five” most commonly researched countries (England, France, Germany, Italy and Spain). Consequently, this paper examines perceptions of branding in a smaller European market – Norway.

#### ***What are the main methods used?***

A mixed methods approach was used (i.e. quantitative as well as qualitative methods) with the later informing the former. The sample consisted of employees and fans of professional clubs in the Norwegian domestic league, otherwise known as *Tippeligaen*. Two clubs were chosen (as

recommended by Miles and Huberman 1994, p.28) to reflect distinct cases; that is two clubs with different: on field sporting success, geographical location, market size, competitive pressures, business format and structure. The clubs were: (1) *Tromsø idrettslag*, established in 1920 and located in the eighth largest city in Norway, Tromsø. (2) *Valerenga Idrettsforening*, established in 1913 and located in the capital city of Norway, Oslo.

### *Research design*

Prior to the development of the quantitative element, the authors conducted semi-structured interviews with managers, directors of marketing, and directors of media relations at both clubs (N=3 per club). Those interviews were focussed on experiences and perceptions of the club, its values, its relevance and the role of branding and brand management. They lasted between 55-80 minutes, were audio recorded and then later, transcribed.

Following this, the research team then interviewed lower level employees (N=6 per-club), players (N=3 per-club) and fans (N=6 per-club), totalling thirty-six interviews for this project. Again, interviews were semi-structured and the topic remained the same, but this time the duration was shorter (between 10- 30 minutes). A key objective at this stage, was to investigate whether or not participants perceived the club as a commercial brand and the extent to which branding had been recognized and accepted by supporters.

Content analysis was then performed on the interview transcripts using data software *n-Vivo* (a computer system that systematically codes or organizes qualitative data, based on key words phrases or passages). The outcome of the content analysis was then used to inform stage two of the research strategy; the quantitative component.

Having been designed and then pre-tested on a small sample (N=8) to check face validity; a questionnaire consisting of nineteen statements (based on the detailed information gleaned at stage one, and measured on a 5 point Likert-scale) was used to focus on fans attitudes towards the

supported club as a commercial brand. The questionnaire was displayed and advertised by each of the professional football clubs, both providing a direct link from their websites. As a secondary technique, the web address was emailed to a group of fans (known to the authors) and they were encouraged to forward this link to other fans. This technique is known as snowballing. Approximately 900 questionnaires were returned.

### ***What were the main arguments?***

Both quantitative and qualitative data complimented each other and conversely the findings stood in contrast to some of the literature within the field. For instance, Chadwick and Beech (2007) and Chadwick and Holt (2006) warned that supporters do not like to think of their club being sullied by commercialism and that many are appalled by the thought of their club being reduced to a brand, due in part, to the tight fit between the football club and the individual's identity. However, results demonstrate that this Norwegian sample were prepared to accept their position as consumers given that they now understand and accept the financial challenges faced by football clubs (to stay competitive) and recognize their social responsibility as supporters to consume for the sake of the club. As a second feature, the authors revealed that if fans are convinced that increased consumption and extended commercial strategies from the club lead to increase on-field success, this will reinforce and actively encourage continued consumption.

As a third feature, the authors point out that history and heritage is still important to fans (and the club can use its heritage and history to boost sales) but this seems to be outweighed by their concern for future success. After all, heritage and history are only kept alive as long as the club survives. Consequently, supporters appear to accept that greater "professionalism" and commercialism is needed to extend and export the brand into Europe and beyond.

### ***And the conclusions or key findings?***

This study has challenged the accepted argument that supporters of football clubs are likely to disapprove of or reject the thought of their favourite club as a brand. In this instance, quite the opposite was found. That is to say, supporters were supportive of brand extension and moreover they were proud of the brand that they have helped to create. However, the authors did offer a word of caution. They argued that although most fans appear to support brand extension, it must be carefully

designed by the club to ensure that the right blend is achieved between tradition, heritage (for current consumers) and modifications to brand image that will help to attract new supporters without ostracizing others. Overall though, they conclude that smaller nations can apply brand building strategies without sacrificing proximity to their existing supporters.

### **What are the strengths of the research?**

The methods of the work, whilst relatively uncommon, are a strength of this study. To explain: there is contested debate about the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative research, and yet, a combination of methodologies (as used by Abosag *et al*) can focus on the strengths of both broad approaches. In this instance, the qualitative element was used to allow the researchers to develop an overall picture of the subject under investigation by guiding the initial phases of the research. This is important because it allows the issues that are central to those people directly implicated (in this instance employees and fans of football clubs) to be raised without the need for presumption on behalf of the researcher. Consequently, it allows for unexpected developments to present themselves – helping to create an authentic representation of the population under investigation.

However, whilst findings gleaned from qualitative research (stage one) have much value for unveiling in-depth explanation of the subject under study, the authors realized that those explanations were limited to the confines of a small sample. Recognizing that this is the case, in stage two, the authors created a survey instrument to quantify the pervasiveness of stage one findings across a larger sample. In other words, quantitative research was used to confirm or disconfirm any apparent significant trends that emerged from the qualitative analysis.

### **Do you think there are any weaknesses?**

The work offers a good assessment of the perceptions of brand extension from the perspective of a group of Norwegian fans and club employees. As such, it is extremely valuable, especially because its findings challenge existing trends. The parameters of work could be extended, however, to include a fuller engagement with social theory in order to help explain, more fully, the trends identified and the cross cultural differences evident between this study and the those relating to Europe's "big five" leagues. The theoretical and empirical argument could also be extended to ask and attempt to answer

some more fundamental questions, such as: What exactly is 'brand emotion'? Are consumers actually emotionally engaged by commodities? If so, do they consume because of marketing techniques, or simply because products are available to buy? If marketing procedures are a crucial factor, then how do advertiser hook us in this way? If we consume irrespective of marketing techniques, why? Moreover, are companies wasting their money on marketing?