

**Facebook and Twitter in the context of customer-based
brand equity**

**Analyzing Liverpool FC's posts and comparing the
perceptions of UK and Greek fan clubs**

Submitted for the Doctor in Business Administration degree

Petros Parganas BSc, MBA, PMP
Edinburgh Business School
Heriot-Watt University

April, 2015

Abstract

The growth and penetration of social media provide professional sport clubs with a powerful tool to communicate their brand to a worldwide fan base. This study aimed to provide an understanding of how Liverpool FC uses Facebook and Twitter in terms of communication tools and brand attributes and how its fan base engages to this usage in terms of key responding features of Facebook and Twitter. In addition, it aimed to analyze and compare UK and Greek fan clubs in terms of engagement, perceived brand benefits and effects in their consumption behavior.

A mixed method case study design has been applied using content analysis, online questionnaires as well as focus group and one to one interviews.

The research confirms the literature models of sports brand image in terms of identified product and non-product related brand attributes and brand benefits and enhances the literature on customer-based brand equity of sport clubs by taking a combined view of the usage of Facebook and Twitter by a professional football club as well as its fans in this context.

From a practical standpoint, the study offers an evaluation of the clubs' social media presence by its fans, providing valuable insights as far as the design of the most appropriate marketing strategy is concerned. In addition, the study confirms the existence of a positive relationship between social media usage and professional football club revenues either through the impact of brand attributes on sport consumer buying behavior or through increased sponsorship value.

Acknowledgements

“Some people believe football is a matter of life and death, I am very disappointed with that attitude. I can assure you it is much, much more important than that.”

I don't know if Bill Shankly, the iconic Liverpool FC manager was joking when he made this statement, but I know for certain that football raises strong emotions. Those who know me best know that football is a great passion of my life and consequently fuelled my enthusiasm for this study.

Of course, passion alone wouldn't be enough. A DBA is a long journey during which certain individuals played an important role for taking me to the final destination. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to thank:

- Professor Steven Carter, my mentor, and Dr. John Temperley, my supervisor, for their guidance and assistance during the study
- The Liverpool FC fan club members of Thessaloniki, Athens, London, Caldigot & Gloucester and Glasgow, for their time to share their thoughts with me
- Ms. Jane Kavanagh, Mr. Paul Rogers and Mr. Fernando Maisonnave from Liverpool FC, for their assistance and valuable input
- Mr. Adrian Carberry from the Edinburgh Business School, for his administrative support

On a more personal note, my deepest appreciation goes to those closest to me: You are not only a large part of my life but also of the document you now hold in your hands.

I would like to close this section with the words of the Gerry and the Pacemakers' classic song that became synonymous to Liverpool FC and its fans. To my view however, these words contain a message with a universal meaning and resonance:

You'll Never Walk Alone!

ACADEMIC REGISTRY
Research Thesis Submission



Name:	PETROS PARGANAS		
School/PGI:	EDINBURGH BUSINESS SCHOOL		
Version: <i>(i.e. First, Resubmission, Final)</i>	FINAL	Degree Sought (Award and Subject area)	DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (DBA)

Declaration

In accordance with the appropriate regulations I hereby submit my thesis and I declare that:

- 1) the thesis embodies the results of my own work and has been composed by myself
- 2) where appropriate, I have made acknowledgement of the work of others and have made reference to work carried out in collaboration with other persons
- 3) the thesis is the correct version of the thesis for submission and is the same version as any electronic versions submitted*.
- 4) my thesis for the award referred to, deposited in the Heriot-Watt University Library, should be made available for loan or photocopying and be available via the Institutional Repository, subject to such conditions as the Librarian may require
- 5) I understand that as a student of the University I am required to abide by the Regulations of the University and to conform to its discipline.

* *Please note that it is the responsibility of the candidate to ensure that the correct version of the thesis is submitted.*

Signature of Candidate:	<i>Petros Parganas</i>	Date:	15/04/2015
-------------------------	------------------------	-------	------------

Submission

Submitted By <i>(name in capitals)</i> :	
Signature of Individual Submitting:	
Date Submitted:	

For Completion in the Student Service Centre (SSC)

Received in the SSC by <i>(name in capitals)</i> :			
<i>Method of Submission</i> <i>(Handed in to SSC; posted through internal/external mail):</i>			
<i>E-thesis Submitted (mandatory for final theses)</i>			
Signature:		Date:	

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	i
List of Figures	v
List of Tables.....	vii
Glossary and List of Abbreviations.....	x
Definition of Terms.....	xi
Word Cloud.....	xiv
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
1.1 Background to the Research	1
1.2 Justification of the Research	3
1.3 Focus of the Research: The Case of Liverpool FC	4
1.4 Outline of the Thesis.....	7
Chapter 2. Literature Review	9
2.1 Social Media	9
2.1.1 Definition	9
2.1.2 Social media communication.....	10
2.1.3 Opportunities for social media in the sport industry	11
2.1.4 Facebook and team sport.....	13
2.1.5 Twitter and team sport	15
2.1.6 Current trends of social media usage by football clubs.....	17
2.1.7 Social media challenges	19
2.1.8 Summary	21
2.2 Brands and Brand Equity	22
2.2.1 Customer-based brand equity.....	23
2.2.2 Service branding	28
2.2.3 Brand equity criticism.....	29
2.2.4 Summary	30
2.3 Brand Equity in Team Sports.....	32
2.3.1 Team sport	32
2.3.2 Team sport customers	33
2.3.3 Conceptual frameworks of brand equity in team sports.....	36
2.3.4 Operationalization of brand equity in team sports	41
2.3.5 Summary	47
Chapter 3. Literature Synthesis.....	48
3.1 Social Media, Brand Equity and Sport Teams: How it All Fits Together.....	48
3.2 Identification of Research Gap	50
3.3 The Adopted Customer-based Brand Equity Model.....	51

3.3.1 Brand attributes	52
3.3.2 Brand benefits	56
3.3.3 How to apply the customer-based brand equity model	57
Chapter 4. Research Questions, Aims and Objectives.....	59
Chapter 5. Research Methodology.....	62
5.1 Research Approach	62
5.2 Research Strategy	62
5.2.1 Case selection	64
5.2.2 Selection of Facebook and Twitter	64
5.2.3 Selection of Liverpool FC.....	66
5.2.4 Selection of fan clubs.....	69
5.3 Research Methods.....	70
5.3.1 Content analysis	72
5.3.2 Interviews.....	75
5.3.3 Questionnaire	76
5.3.4 Sampling	77
5.4 Summary.....	78
Chapter 6. Reliability, Validity and Ethical Considerations.....	79
6.1 Reliability	79
6.2 Validity	80
6.3 Ethical Considerations	80
Chapter 7. Pilot Study.....	82
7.1 Introduction.....	82
7.2 Subject Details.....	82
7.2.1 Thessaloniki fan club	82
7.3 Methodology.....	82
7.3.1 Content analysis	83
7.3.2 Focus group interview.....	85
7.3.3 Questionnaire	86
7.4 Results	86
7.4.1 Content analysis results.....	86
7.4.2 Focus group interview results	92
7.4.3 Questionnaire results.....	97
7.5 Analysis	103
7.6 Limitations.....	107
7.7 Evaluation of the Pilot Study and Implications to the Main Study	108
Chapter 8. Data Collection.....	110
8.1 Content Analysis.....	111
8.2 Focus Group Interviews	113
8.2.1 Athens fan club	114
8.2.2 London fan club	115

8.2.3 Caldicot & Gloucester fan club.....	115
8.2.4 Glasgow fan club	116
8.3 Questionnaire.....	117
8.4 One to One Interviews	117
Chapter 9. Data Analysis	119
9.1 Content Analysis.....	120
9.1.1 Types of communication tools - Facebook	121
9.1.2 Types of communication tools - Twitter	121
9.1.3 Brand attributes - Facebook	122
9.1.4 Brand attributes - Twitter.....	123
9.1.5 Fan engagement - Facebook	124
9.1.6 Fan engagement - Twitter	125
9.1.7 Summary of content analysis results	127
9.2 Focus Group Interviews	128
9.2.1 UK fan clubs	129
9.2.2 Greek fan clubs	136
9.2.3 Summary of focus group interviews findings	143
9.3 Questionnaire.....	144
9.3.1 UK fan clubs	144
9.3.2 Greek fan clubs	153
9.3.3 Summary of questionnaire results.....	161
9.4 Comparison of UK and Greek Fan Clubs	161
9.4.1 Summary of comparison of UK and Greek fan clubs	172
9.5 One to One Interviews	174
9.5.1 Paul Rogers, Head of International Digital Development.....	174
9.5.2 Fernando Maisonnave, Digital Engagement Coordinator	176
9.5.3 Summary of one to one interviews findings.....	178
9.6 Synthesis and Triangulation of Results.....	179
Chapter 10. Conclusions	182
10.1 Answering the Research Questions.....	182
10.1.1 How does Liverpool FC use Facebook and Twitter in the context of customer-based brand equity?.....	182
10.1.2 How do UK and Greek fan clubs perceive Liverpool FC's usage of Facebook and Twitter?.....	184
10.2 Main Conclusions	186
10.3 Discussion.....	187
10.3.1 Social media communication and Liverpool FC.....	187
10.3.2 Customer-based brand equity model and Liverpool FC	188
10.3.3 Fan clubs and Liverpool FC.....	190
10.4 Research Contribution	191
10.4.1 Contribution to the research community.....	192
10.4.2 Contribution to the business community.....	192

10.4.3 Generalisability of the outcomes.....	193
10.5 Research Limitations	194
10.6 Directions for Future Research	195
Chapter 11. References and Bibliography	196
Chapter 12. Appendices	217
12.1 Appendix A - Letter to Fan Clubs.....	Σφάλμα! Δεν έχει οριστεί σελιδοδείκτης.
12.2 Appendix B – Focus Group Interview Guide	Σφάλμα! Δεν έχει οριστεί σελιδοδείκτης.
12.3 Appendix C – Focus Group Interview Transcript Coding (Pilot Study)	Σφάλμα! Δεν έχει οριστεί σελιδοδείκτης.
12.4 Appendix D - Questionnaire	Σφάλμα! Δεν έχει οριστεί σελιδοδείκτης.
12.5 Appendix E – Focus Group Interview Transcript Coding (Main Study)	Σφάλμα! Δεν έχει οριστεί σελιδοδείκτης.
12.6 Appendix F – One to One Interview Guide	Σφάλμα! Δεν έχει οριστεί σελιδοδείκτης.

List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Conceptualization of brand equity (Aaker, 1991).....	24
Figure 2.2: Customer-based brand equity model (Keller, 1993)	25
Figure 2.3: A service branding model (Berry, 2000)	29
Figure 2.4: Conceptual framework of professional sport team brand equity (Gladden & Milne, 1999)....	37
Figure 2.5: Conceptual framework of brand equity among satellite fans (Kerr & Gladden, 2008)	38
Figure 2.6: Spectator-Based Brand Equity (SBBE) model (Ross, 2006)	39
Figure 2.7: Viewer Based Brand Equity (VBBE) conceptual framework (Naik & Gupta, 2013).....	40
Figure 5.1: Methodological approach and contribution to research questions (source: Author).....	71
Figure 5.2: Methodological approach and triangulation of results (source: Author)	72
Figure 5.3: Twitter content item example (Liverpool FC’s Twitter account)	73
Figure 5.4: Facebook content item example (Liverpool FC’s Facebook account).....	73
Figure 7.1: Type of communication tools in Twitter (source: Author)	87
Figure 7.2: Type of communication tools in Facebook (source: Author)	90
Figure 7.3: Attraction to communication tools of the Thessaloniki fan club members (source: Author)	101
Figure 7.4: Altered buying intentions of match tickets - Thessaloniki fan club (source: Author)	102
Figure 7.5: Altered buying intentions of memorabilia - Thessaloniki fan club (source: Author)	102
Figure 9.1: Reasons for following Liverpool FC in Facebook - UK fan club members (source: Author)	146
Figure 9.2: Reasons for following Liverpool FC in Twitter - UK fan club members (source: Author)...	146
Figure 9.3: Responses to Facebook posts - UK fan club members (source: Author)	147
Figure 9.4: Responses to tweets - UK fan club members (source: Author)	147
Figure 9.5: Changes in buying behavior - UK fan club members (source: Author).....	152
Figure 9.6: Satisfaction regarding the content in Facebook and Twitter - UK fan club members (source: Author)	152
Figure 9.7: Reasons for following Liverpool FC in Facebook - Greek fan club members (source: Author)	154
Figure 9.8: Reasons for following Liverpool FC in Twitter - Greek fan club members (source: Author)	154
Figure 9.9: Responses to Facebook posts - Greek fan club members (source: Author)	155
Figure 9.10: Responses to tweets - Greek fan club members (source: Author)	155
Figure 9.11: Changes in buying behavior - Greek fan club members (source: Author).....	160
Figure 9.12: Satisfaction regarding the content in Facebook and Twitter - Greek fan club members (source: Author)	160
Figure 9.13: Communication tools in Liverpool FC’s Facebook and Twitter posts to which UK fans mostly respond to (source: Author).....	164
Figure 9.14: Communication tools in Liverpool FC’s Facebook and Twitter posts to which Greek fans mostly respond to (source: Author).....	164
Figure 9.15: Brand attributes in Liverpool FC’s Facebook posts to which UK fans mostly respond to (source: Author)	166
Figure 9.16: Brand attributes in Liverpool FC’s Facebook posts to which Greek fans mostly respond to (source: Author)	166
Figure 9.17: Brand attributes in Liverpool FC’s tweets to which UK fans mostly respond to (source: Author)	167

Figure 9.18: Brand attributes in Liverpool FC's tweets to which Greek fans mostly respond to (source: Author) 167

List of Tables

Table 1.1: The most popular clubs amongst European fans (source: Author, adapted from Sport+Markt, 2010)	5
Table 1.2: Top-5 EPL clubs in terms of Facebook and Twitter followers (source: Author, adapted from Socialbakers, 2014)	6
Table 2.1: Top-10 football clubs in terms of Facebook fans (source: Author, adapted from Socialbakers, 2014)	14
Table 2.2: Countries with the most Facebook fans of EPL clubs (source: Author, adapted from Football Industry, 2013)	15
Table 2.3: Top-10 football clubs in terms of Twitter followers (source: Author, adapted from Socialbakers, 2014)	16
Table 2.4: The Team Association Model (TAM) (Gladden & Funk, 2002)	41
Table 2.5: The Brand Equity model in Team Sport (BETS) (Bauer et al., 2005)	42
Table 2.6: The Team Brand Association Scale (TBAS) (Ross et al., 2006)	43
Table 2.7: Operationalization of brand image (Bauer et al., 2008)	44
Table 2.8: Operationalization of brand image (Kaynak et al., 2008)	45
Table 2.9: Measurement model for SBBE (Ross et al., 2008)	46
Table 2.10: SBBE model adapted to the European professional football context (Biscaia et al., 2013)	46
Table 3.1: Applied customer-based brand equity model (source: Author, adapted from Bauer et al., 2008; Biscaia et al., 2013; Kaynak et al., 2008; Ross et al., 2001)	58
Table 5.1: EPL clubs of the season 2013/2014 and their social media offerings (source: Author)	65
Table 5.2: Top-3 social media tools used by EPL teams (source: Author)	66
Table 5.3: Top six EPL clubs in terms of Facebook and Twitter followers (source: Author, adapted from Socialbakers, 2014)	66
Table 5.4: UK based Facebook fans of EPL clubs (source: Author, adapted from Socialbakers, 2014)	67
Table 5.5: Degree of internationalization of EPL clubs (source: Author, adapted from Football Industry, 2013)	67
Table 5.6: Top-10 football clubs of Facebook fans living in Greece (source: Author, adapted from Socialbakers, 2014)	68
Table 5.7: Pool of case study candidates (source: Author)	68
Table 5.8: Selection and participation of fan clubs during the research (source: Author)	69
Table 5.9: Coding categories content analysis (source: Author)	74
Table 5.10: Pretest intercoder reliability (source: Author)	75
Table 6.1: Intercoder reliability (source: Author)	79
Table 7.1: Types of communication tools in Facebook and Twitter (source: Author)	84
Table 7.2: Overview of the interviewees (source: Author)	85
Table 7.3: Identified brand attributes in Twitter (source: Author)	88
Table 7.4: Daily engagement in the official Liverpool FC Twitter account (source: Author)	88
Table 7.5: Engagement in the official Liverpool FC Twitter account in terms of brand attributes (source: Author)	89
Table 7.6: Identified brand attributes in Facebook (source: Author)	91
Table 7.7: Daily engagement in the official Liverpool FC Facebook account (source: Author)	91

Table 7.8: Engagement in the official Liverpool FC Facebook account in terms of brand attributes (source: Author)	92
Table 7.9: Pilot study questionnaire response rate (source: Author)	97
Table 7.10: Thessaloniki fan club responses to Facebook posts (source: Author)	98
Table 7.11: Thessaloniki fan club responses to Twitter posts (source: Author)	98
Table 7.12: Frequency of responses to brand attributes by the Thessaloniki fan club members (source: Author)	99
Table 7.13: Perceived brand benefits of the Thessaloniki fan club members in Facebook (source: Author)	99
Table 7.14: Perceived brand benefits of the Thessaloniki fan club members in Twitter (source: Author)	100
Table 7.15: Likelihood of Thessaloniki fan club members to invite others to follow Liverpool FC in social media (source: Author)	103
Table 7.16: Summary of content analysis – Pilot study (source: Author)	104
Table 7.17: Engagement of fans - Pilot study (source: Author)	105
Table 7.18: Thessaloniki fan club responses to brand attributes (source: Author)	106
Table 7.19: Identified customer-based brand equity model - Pilot study (source: Author)	107
Table 8.1: Data collection tools and contribution to research objectives (source: Author)	110
Table 8.2: Types of communication tools (source: Author)	112
Table 8.3: Example of organizing the collected Facebook posts (source: Author)	113
Table 8.4: Athens fan club interviewees (source: Author)	114
Table 8.5: London fan club interviewees (source: Author)	115
Table 8.6: Caldicot & Gloucester fan club interviewees (source: Author)	116
Table 8.7: Glasgow fan club interviewees (source: Author)	116
Table 9.1: Overview of collected data (source: Author)	119
Table 9.2: Types of communication tools used in Liverpool FC’s Facebook posts (source: Author)	121
Table 9.3: Types of communication tools used in Liverpool FC’s tweets (source: Author)	122
Table 9.4: Brand attributes of Liverpool FC’s Facebook posts (source: Author)	122
Table 9.5: Brand attributes of Liverpool FC’s tweets (source: Author)	124
Table 9.6: Fan engagement in Facebook (source: Author)	124
Table 9.7: Statistical analysis of fan engagement across time periods in Facebook (source: Author)	125
Table 9.8: Statistical analysis of fan engagement in terms of brand attributes in Facebook (source: Author)	125
Table 9.9: Fan engagement in Twitter (source: Author)	126
Table 9.10: Statistical analysis of fan engagement across time periods in Twitter (source: Author)	126
Table 9.11: Statistical analysis of fan engagement in terms of brand attributes in Twitter (source: Author)	127
Table 9.12: Identified communication tools during content analysis (source: Author)	127
Table 9.13: Juxtaposition of brand attributes from the adopted customer-based brand equity model and from the content analysis of the study (source: Author)	128
Table 9.14: Focus group interviews – participating fan clubs and interviewees (source: Author)	129
Table 9.15: Engagement as expressed by UK fan club interviewees (source: Author)	130

Table 9.16: Preferred type of communication tools of UK fan club interviewees (source: Author)	131
Table 9.17: Preferred brand attributes of UK fan club interviewees (source: Author).....	132
Table 9.18: Perceived brand benefits of UK fan club interviewees (source: Author).....	134
Table 9.19: Alterations in buying intentions of UK fan club interviewees (source: Author).....	135
Table 9.20: Engagement as expressed by Greek fan club interviewees (source: Author).....	137
Table 9.21: Preferred type of communication tools by Greek fan club interviewees (source: Author) ...	138
Table 9.22: Preferred brand attributes of Greek fan club interviewees (source: Author).....	138
Table 9.23: Perceived brand benefits of Greek fan club interviewees (source: Author)	141
Table 9.24: Alterations in buying intentions of Greek fan club interviewees (source: Author).....	142
Table 9.25: Juxtaposition of brand benefits from the adopted customer-based brand equity model and from the interviews of the study (source: Author)	143
Table 9.26: Questionnaire response rates (source: Author)	144
Table 9.27: Demographics of UK fan club members (source: Author).....	145
Table 9.28: Attraction to communication tools - UK fan club members (source: Author)	148
Table 9.29: Attraction to brand attributes in Facebook - UK fan club members (source: Author)	149
Table 9.30: Attraction to brand attributes in Twitter - UK fan club members (source: Author).....	149
Table 9.31: Perceived brand benefits in Facebook - UK fan club members (source: Author).....	150
Table 9.32: Perceived brand benefits in Twitter - UK fan club members (source: Author).....	151
Table 9.33: Demographics of Greek fan club members (source: Author).....	153
Table 9.34: Attraction to communication tools - Greek fan club members (source: Author)	156
Table 9.35: Attraction to brand attributes in Facebook - Greek fan club members (source: Author)	157
Table 9.36: Attraction to brand attributes in Twitter - Greek club members (source: Author)	157
Table 9.37: Perceived brand benefits in Facebook - Greek fan club members (source: Author).....	158
Table 9.38: Perceived brand benefits in Twitter - Greek fan club members (source: Author).....	159
Table 9.39: Loyalty as a reason to follow Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter - Comparison of UK and Greek fan clubs (source: Author)	162
Table 9.40: Comparison of UK and Greek fan clubs in terms of Facebook responses (source: Author).	163
Table: 9.41: Comparison of UK and Greek fan clubs in terms of Twitter responses (source: Author) ...	163
Table 9.42: Comparison of UK and Greek fan clubs in terms of perceived brand benefits in Facebook (source: Author)	169
Table 9.43: Comparison of UK and Greek fan clubs in terms of perceived brand benefits in Twitter (source: Author)	170
Table 9.44: Comparison of UK and Greek fan clubs in terms of alterations in their consumption behavior (source: Author)	171
Table 9.45: Comparison of UK and Greek fan clubs in terms of degree of satisfaction in Facebook and Twitter (source: Author).....	172
Table 10.1: Identified brand attributes during the research (source: Author).....	183
Table 10.2: Identified brand benefits in the research (source: Author)	185

Glossary and List of Abbreviations

BETS	Brand Equity model in Team Sports
BIRG	Basking In Reflected Glory
CBBE	Customer-based Brand Equity
CL	Champions League
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
DJ	Double Jeopardy
EPL	English Premier League
eWOM	Electronic Word Of Mouth
FA	(English) Football Association
FB	Facebook
FC	Football Club
FIFA	Federation Internationale de Football Association
MLB	Major League Baseball (USA and Canada)
MLS	Major League Soccer (USA and Canada)
NBA	National Basketball Association (USA and Canada)
NFL	National Football League (USA)
NHL	National Hockey League (USA)
ROI	Return On Investment
SBBE	Spectator Based Brand Equity
TAM	Team Association Model
TBAS	Team Brand Association Scale
UEFA	Union of European Football Associations
UGC	User Generated Content
UK	United Kingdom
VBBE	Viewer Based Brand Equity
WiFi	Wireless local area network
WOM	Word Of Mouth

Definition of Terms

Definitions related to sport

Champions League	An annual continental club football competition organized by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA). It is one of the most prestigious tournaments in the world and the most prestigious club competition in European football.
Football (soccer)	A form of team sport involving kicking (and in some cases handling) a ball. Called soccer in the USA and Canada and football in the rest of the world. Regarded as the most popular sport in the world, due to the large number of people who play it, watch it and express an interest in it (Bauer et al., 2008; Blumrodt et al., 2012; Chadwick & Holt, 2008; Ventura & Dedeoglu, 2013)
Sport fan	An individual who is interested in and follow a sport, team and/or athlete (Wann et al., 2001, p.2)
Sport spectator	Individuals who actively witness a sporting event in person or through some form of media (radio, television, etc.) (Wann et al., 2001, p.2)

Definitions related to social media

Social media	<p>A set of technologies and channels targeted at forming and enabling a potentially massive community of participants to productively collaborate (Bradley, 2010)</p> <p>The tools, platforms, and applications that enable consumers to connect, communicate, and collaborate with others (Williams & Chinn, 2010, p.422)</p>
Facebook	<p>A social media (networking) website founded in 2004 with over 1 billion current users (Facebook, 2012)</p> <p>A simply laid-out website that allows users to share information about themselves with other users they are connected with (Weinberg, 2009, p.151)</p>
Twitter	<p>A social media (microblogging) tool with over 270 million active users (Twitter, 2014)</p> <p>A free micro-blogging service that allows users to communicate with one another using short text-based messages, or ‘tweets,’ that can be a maximum of 140 characters in length (Weinberg, 2009, p.125)</p>

Content item	In this study, any form of communication uploaded to the public news feed of a Facebook (Twitter) account
Facebook post	A content item uploaded in a Facebook account
Tweet	A content item uploaded in a Twitter account
Like	A type of Facebook interaction which indicates that a user likes a content item posted by another Facebook user
Comment	A type of Facebook interaction which allows users to comment on uploaded content items of other users
Share	A type of Facebook interaction which allows users to share uploaded content items with other users
Reply	A type of Twitter interaction which allows users to respond to content items of other users
Retweet	A type of Twitter interaction which allows users to forward a content item of a user to other users, usually including the letters “RT” to indicate that the tweet belongs to another person
Favorite	A type of Twitter interaction which allows individual Twitter users to indicate that they like a content item posted by another Twitter user
Hashtag	Hashtags are a community-driven convention for adding groupings on Twitter. A hashtag is created by prefixing a word with a hash symbol: “#.”
Instagram	A photo and video-sharing social media tool that enables its users to take pictures and videos, and share them on a variety of other social networking platforms.
Pinterest	An online application that offers a visual discovery, collection, sharing, and storage tool of media content in the form of online bookmarks
Youtube	A video-sharing website which allows users to upload their videos
Word Cloud	A visual representation of words to summarize the content of web pages, research papers and other documents. The frequency (keyword density) of the words is used as the weight, with each word's frequency correlated with font size (Barth et al., 2014)

Definitions related to brand equity

Brand	A name, term, symbol, or design, or combination which is used to distinguish the sellers' goods and services and to differentiate them from competitors (American Marketing Association)
-------	--

Brand equity	A set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service (Aaker, 1991, p.15)
Brand associations	Anything linked in memory to a brand (Aaker, 1991, p.109)
Brand awareness	The ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category (Aaker, 1991, p.61)
Customer-based brand equity	The differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand (Keller, 1993, p.8)

Word Cloud

The below word cloud depicts the most frequently utilized words in the study, edited by the author to exclude common English words, references and numbers.



Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Research

Michel Platini, in one of his first interviews as the newly elected President of UEFA said: *“30 years ago clubs from the big cities dominated football, in the past 10 years it has been the clubs with the best television agreements and in 10 years it will be the clubs who are best able to exploit the opportunities presented by the Internet”* (Michel Platini, January 2008 in Yukio & Moeller, 2008, p.5).

Football is frequently referred to as “the global game”, the most popular sport in the world, due to the large number of people who play it, watch it and express an interest in it (Bauer et al., 2008; Blumrodt et al., 2012; Chadwick & Holt, 2008; Ventura & Dedeoglu, 2013). Football has been firstly practiced in Great Britain and the British isles of the 19th century until, following the internationalization of British companies, it expanded in other countries (Dolles & Soderman, 2005/1). The high uncertainty of the outcome of the game (Dolles & Soderman, 2005/5; Mason, 1999; Tapp, 2004) as well as the irrelevancy of gender, ethnic, social and economic background to its practice (Dolles & Soderman, 2005/1), contributed heavily to the reputation of football. It is interesting to look at how the game has changed over time by examining how the purposes of international club tours have evolved over time: They started aiming to teach others about the game and building friendships among nations and evolved to heal post-war wounds, to make money, and most recently, to market and establish a club’s brand (Martin, 2005). Richelieu & Pons (2006) claimed that the globalization of a sports brand is limited to the sport’s worldwide acceptance and popularity. Given the popularity of football, it becomes apparent why football teams are better situated to increase their brand value and to become global brands.

Football nowadays is viewed as part of the wider entertainment industry (Avgerinou, 2007; Bauer et al., 2005; Bauer et al., 2008; Buehler et al., 2006; Dolles & Soderman, 2005/1; 2005/5; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Kerr, 2009; Piipponen, 2011; Richelieu, 2004; Schilhaneck, 2008). As such, marketing strategies of sport teams have adapted accordingly and marketing concepts such as brands and brand equity have been introduced to the sports industry. Sport clubs have started to be viewed as brands (Bodet & Chanavat, 2009; Richelieu, 2004; Ross et al., 2007; Schade et al., 2011), the value of which has been considered as their most important asset, even more important than athletic success (Bauer et al., 2005). Therefore, leveraging the value of their teams’ brand has become a major goal for sport marketers during the last years.

The value of a brand is often referred to as brand equity. Brand equity exists when the consumer is familiar with the brand and perceives an added value buying a particular product or service of that brand (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). That is, brand equity exists primarily in the minds of the customers (customer-based brand equity) and is influenced by the meaning customers attach to it (Keller, 1993). Accordingly, if professional sport clubs are treated as brands, their brand equity is derived from the meaning sport consumers attach to them (Gladden & Milne, 1999). Thus, the views and perceptions of the consumers regarding a brand are of high importance towards brand equity development (Aaker, 1996; Hoeffler & Keller, 2003; Tuominen, 2000).

Fans of sport clubs, whether local or international, are the most essential part of sport consumers (Dolles & Soderman, 2005/1; Dolles & Soderman, 2005/5; Piipponen, 2011). Fans are a major stream of revenues for the sport club by attending games and purchasing team-related merchandise. What is more, without fans there would be no demand to show matches on TV and therefore no reason to pay the high broadcasting rights. This in turn would also affect the sponsorship value in many ways. High media exposure allows sport clubs to build a worldwide reputation and therefore become important partners for those multinational companies which want to expand their brands around in foreign markets, as is the case of Manchester United and Vodafone or Chelsea and Samsung (Ginesta, 2013). In addition, sports fans express higher levels of loyalty towards those sponsors that financially support their favorite team (Kerr, 2008), offering a further incentive for companies to become sponsors of sport clubs. Thus, fans form the most imperative base for a team's growth, competitive advantage (Bauer et al., 2008) and maintenance of brand equity (Villarejo-Ramos & Martin-Velicia, 2007). Recognizing their importance, Gladden et al. (2001), at the beginning of the century, suggested that professional sport teams need to enhance their relationships with and understanding of their fans by adopting strategies that allow for increased interactions between them and the brand.

At about the same time, a new set of online tools began to attract millions of users worldwide, including fans. Social media, and their tremendous proliferation turned the online environment into the most prominent place where consumers meet and exchange information (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008; Cooper, 2010; Hanna et al., 2011; Keller, 2009; Yan, 2011) and substantially impacted their way of thinking, acting and communicating (Constantinides et al., 2008; Wallace et al., 2011). Facebook, perhaps the most popular member of the social media family, announced on October 2012 that it passed the one billion mark of active users and reported on June, 2014 over 1.32 billion

users (Facebook, 2014). Similarly, Twitter, a famous microblogging tool, announced that up to June 2014, over 270 million users were active, producing over 500 million tweets per day (Twitter, 2014). Social media are software-independent, user-friendly, inexpensive and scalable internet technologies, which offer users a complete new way of social interactions (Fischer & Reuber, 2011). As their name implies, social media are directly addressing peoples' social needs, although in an online environment: Entertainment needs, socialization needs, staying in touch with friends but also creating and exchanging information, sharing of content and publishing opinions (Pitta & Fowler, 2005). The incomparable levels of passion and loyalty of fans (Richelieu, 2004) made involvement in online discussions around their club more likely to occur. By monitoring or starting new conversations periodically, clubs can gain valuable information of what fans are talking about as well as how often and in what ways they are talking about the club (Kietzmann et al., 2011). This provides sports marketers with an increased understanding of fans and enables them to adjust their marketing strategies accordingly (Simmons, 2007). Social media has therefore given sport fans a unique opportunity to engage in interactions with their favorite sport club regardless their location (Gibbons & Dixon, 2010).

1.2 Justification of the Research

Football is big business. The latest report into football finance shows that the cumulative revenue of the "big five" European leagues (the top tier leagues of England, Spain, Germany, Italy and France) for the 2012-2013 season grew 5% to €9.8 billion (Deloitte, 2013). The English Premier League (EPL) alone accounted for €2.9 billion. Football clubs have strong fan bases, which contribute to their success through brand support and commercial transactions. Football-related content is a major driver in the growth of online discussion: 500 million users engage with such content each month in Facebook (Stoll, 2014). There are several industry reports which suggest that social media positively impacts the affiliation of fans towards their club and have implications to the revenues of the club (Broughton, 2010; 2011; 2012). In addition, researchers are increasingly calling to address the impact of social media in the sport industry (Brody et al., 2010; Gibbons & Dixon, 2010) and to investigate how marketing concepts such as brand equity can be implemented in the sport context (Coyle, 2010). However, literature in the broader area of sports brand equity and social media is scarce, while more specific studies would be very helpful to add to the knowledge base and assist sport

marketers alike. This study therefore seeks to address this need and examines how a professional football club uses Facebook and Twitter to communicate its brand image, what particular brand benefits are perceived by its fan base and how are its revenues affected.

1.3 Focus of the Research: The Case of Liverpool FC

The research focuses on Liverpool FC, one of the premier brands of professional football worldwide, with a global and passionate fan base, a rich history and a huge number of fans and followers in Facebook and Twitter respectively.

Liverpool FC was founded 1892 in Merseyside, Liverpool. Ever since, the club plays at Anfield, a historic stadium and one of the league's original grounds (www.liverpoolfc.com). Liverpool FC is one of the most successful clubs in the history of English football and the most successful English representative in Europe. Liverpool FC won several times all domestic titles (although the most recent championship title came in 1990, before the introduction of the English Premier League) as well as 5 times the European Champions title. Besides success, the club has a sad history of tragedies too: The Heysel Stadium disaster in 1985 and the 1989 Hillsborough disaster.

The club has a global fan base which several studies and reports suggest to be between 28 and 100 million fans. Liverpool FC itself, for example, reported a few years ago that it has 28 million registered fans worldwide (Rice-Oxley, 2007). Estridge (2007) puts Liverpool FC's fan base to 100 million. A survey, conducted on behalf of the EPL showed that Liverpool FC has 71 million supporters (Bascombe, 2012). Such numbers have been backed up by the existence of over 200 officially recognized fan clubs in over 50 countries worldwide and over 6 million unique visitors each month of the club's web site (www.liverpoolfc.com). Liverpool FC is one of the highest shirt-selling clubs in the world (Miller, 2010) while Liverpool FC's matches have been watched by over 400 million people worldwide during the 2011/2012 season (www.liverpoolfc.com).

In addition, according to another study, Liverpool FC is placed in the top-5 clubs in terms of foreign supporters, that is fans who follow a football team outside of their home country (called "fans without borders"), along with FC Barcelona, Real Madrid, Manchester United and Chelsea FC (Soccerlens, 2012). Similarly, the sport consulting firm Sport+Markt, trying to identify the most popular football clubs among European fans came out with the results of the following table (Table 1.1). Liverpool FC is again placed amongst the top ten football clubs with the most European fans (Sport+Markt,

2010). Sport+Markt's methodology has been to identify the 20 most popular football clubs in 17 European countries (Germany, France, the UK, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, Greece, Poland, Croatia, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Czech Republic and Russia) interviewing over 10,200 fans between the ages of 16 to 69.

Rank	Football club	Estimated number of fans (millions)
1	FC Barcelona (Spain)	57.8
2	Real Madrid (Spain)	31.3
3	Manchester United (UK)	30.6
4	Chelsea FC (UK)	21.4
5	FC Bayern Munich (Germany)	20.7
6	Arsenal FC (UK)	20.3
7	AC Milan (Italy)	18.4
8	Internationale Milan (Italy)	17.5
9	Liverpool FC (UK)	16.4
10	Juventus Turin (Italy)	13.1

Table 1.1: The most popular clubs amongst European fans (source: Author, adapted from Sport+Markt, 2010)

In order to address its worldwide fan base, Liverpool FC, along with other big EPL and European football clubs (Manchester United, Chelsea FC, Real Madrid, Barcelona FC), is turning to the Far East markets to attract new fans playing pre-season tournaments, apparently with huge success: Steven Gerrard, Liverpool FC's current star player and captain, tweeted on the 2nd of August, 2013 immediately after the Asian and Australian summer tour of the club: *"We've just played in front of nearly a quarter million people in 10 days on tour. That shows size of #Liverpool FC"*. During the same time, Simon Mignolet, Liverpool FC's goalkeeper is quoted in the club's official web site: *"We went to Australia, Thailand and Indonesia, and there was huge excitement wherever we went. The fame of Liverpool stretches far beyond Europe"*. The club itself tweeted: *"A big thanks to the 320,000-plus supporters who've backed us in stadiums around the globe this pre-season. Best fans in the world #YNWA #LFC"*. Liverpool FC operates a fully functional multi-language web-site environment (English, Chinese, Indonesian, and Thai) and offers Facebook and Twitter in more than 20 different languages (www.liverpoolfc.com). Liverpool FC's official Twitter feed (@LFC) has been voted

the world's best by a sports team at the Shorty Awards (known as the “*Grammys and Oscars of social media*”) in the USA (McLaren, 2012). The club also supports highly popular social media tools of the Chinese market like Weibo and Weixin. Such actions have a huge impact on the Asian market and Liverpool FC is placed in the top-5 football clubs worldwide in terms of Asian based Facebook and Twitter followers (Mailman Group, 2013). What is more important, the same study highlights the very high engagement rates of the posts of Liverpool FC in this market. Liverpool FC operates its own YouTube channel and has an official presence in other social media such as Instagram and Pinterest. Liverpool FC also became the first Premier League club to offer full WiFi access to their fans on a matchday as well as an in-match application to help improve the matchday experience.

In terms of online followers, the Merseyside club has over 15 million Facebook fans and over 2 million Twitter followers (Socialbakers, 2014). Such numbers place Liverpool FC in the top five EPL clubs in terms of social media (Facebook and Twitter) followers (Table 1.2).

Rank	Football club	Facebook + Twitter followers (millions)
1	Manchester United	41.8
2	Chelsea FC	24.8
3	Arsenal FC	23.0
4	Liverpool FC	17.9
5	Manchester City	9.7

Table 1.2: Top-5 EPL clubs in terms of Facebook and Twitter followers (source: Author, adapted from Socialbakers, 2014)

Although the above numbers of fans and social media followers lack consistency in their methodology as well as their wording (i.e. what is the difference between fans, supporters and followers) it is undoubtedly that Liverpool FC is one of the biggest football brands with a huge worldwide fan base (Kerr, 2009). In terms of the value of the club's brand, Liverpool FC ranked 12th in Deloitte's last year annual report for the season 2012/2013 with total revenues adding up to €240.6 million (Deloitte, 2013). Although Liverpool FC fell from the 9th place it took in last year's report, it is still a remarkable achievement as it was the only club in the top 10 that was not in the highly lucrative UEFA Champions League competition for that season. This demonstrates the

strength and reach of Liverpool FC as a global brand that remains highly attractive to fans and commercial partners alike.

1.4 Outline of the Thesis

The remaining chapters of this thesis give an overview of the relevant literature background, describe the research methodology and present and discuss the results of the study. In particular:

Chapter two outlines and reviews the relevant literature regarding brand equity, social media and professional sport. It places particular emphasis to Keller's customer-based brand equity model and identifies a number of sport brand equity frameworks and models. The social media phenomenon is explored and the role of social media as marketing and branding tools highlighted. The characteristics of the professional sport industry are explained, stressing out that, in a competitive marketplace, professional teams become brands and are in need of tools to maintain and strengthen their brand equity.

Chapter three draws together the various subject areas which have been described previously and identifies the research gap which the study addresses.

Chapter four explicitly states the research questions as well as the aims and objectives of the study which guided the study throughout its development and served as an evaluation benchmark.

Chapter five addresses the research methodology which has been used both during the pilot study as well as during the main research. It describes in detail the research approach and provides a justification for the selection of Liverpool FC and Facebook and Twitter as appropriate cases. In addition, it describes the selection procedure of the UK and Greek fan clubs and explains how the research makes use of a mixed method research design in order to address triangulation issues.

Chapter six addresses any reliability and validation issues and states the ethical considerations which underpinned the study.

Chapter seven provides a detailed description of the pilot study during which the main themes and outcomes emerging from the literature have been applied and the suitability of the proposed methodology has been assessed.

Chapter eight describes the actual data collection process, providing a detailed description of the quantitative and qualitative data gathered using interviews, questionnaires and content analysis.

Chapter nine presents and analyzes the empirical findings of the research and particularly the identified customer-based brand equity model, draws the comparisons between time periods (onseason and offseason) as well as between fan clubs in UK and Greece and shows how the different research tools contribute towards the triangulation of the results.

Chapter ten shows how the findings answer the research questions, provides the main conclusions, discusses the research findings in relation to the literature theories, shows how the study contributes to the academic and business community, identifies its limitations and gives directions for future research.

The thesis ends with a number of appendices, which include the introductory letter sent to fan clubs, interview guides (focus group and one to one interviews), the questionnaire and the analysis of the coding procedure.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Media

2.1.1 Definition

Social media are becoming increasingly popular in a way not known before. In a matter of a few years, social media sites (tools) have attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated them into their daily practices. Having a conversation in Facebook, making a statement in Twitter or watching a video in YouTube has become part of the daily practices of millions of people worldwide. According to Alexa, a leading provider of web analytics, three social media sites made it to the top-10 of web sites in terms of traffic (visitors) during January 2013 resulting in billions of individual visits (Alexa, 2013).

Social media encompasses a wide range of online, word-of-mouth forums including blogs and microblogs, company-sponsored discussion boards and social networking websites (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009) and are often viewed as part of the so called Web 2.0 family (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008; Martin, 2012). The term Web 2.0 has been introduced by O'Reilly in 2005 and has been described as a concept that uses the internet for information sharing, interoperability, user-centered design and collaboration (O'Reilly, 2009). Others see Web 2.0 as the technological platform for the development of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) or focus on the social aspects of Web 2.0 such as communication and sharing of ideas (Birdsall, 2007; Flinck, 2011; iCrossing, 2008). Depending on which view is adopted, social media have been defined by various researchers and marketing insiders: Richter & Koch (2007, p.7) define social media as "*online applications, platforms and media which aim to facilitate interactions, collaborations and the sharing of content*" while Williams & Chinn (2010, p.422) define them as "*the tools, platforms, and applications that enable consumers to connect, communicate, and collaborate with others*". Eisenberg (2008) describes social media as "*platforms for interaction and relationship building, not for content and advertisements*", Weinberg (2009, p.1) as "*the sharing of information, experiences, and perspectives throughout community-oriented websites*" and Bradley (2010) as "*a set of technologies and channels targeted at forming and enabling a potentially massive community of participants to productively collaborate*". The common denominator of all definitions is that social media can be viewed as a set of online tools, which facilitate two-way communication amongst users, allowing people to interact and share information with each other as well as with organizations.

2.1.2 Social media communication

The proliferation of social media tools has significantly affected the way people communicate, get informed and make decisions (Qualman, 2009). The online interactive environment has become the most prominent place where consumers can meet and exchange information (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008; Cooper, 2010; Hanna et al., 2011; Keller, 2009; Yan, 2011). Park et al. (2009) contends that entertainment, information gathering and the need of socialization are the primary driving forces for individuals to join a social network site. A market study estimates that by the end of 2017, almost 3 billion people worldwide will use social media (Anon, 2013). What is more, market research studies suggest that the majority of consumers trust peer recommendations rather than traditional mass marketing tactics (Ernst & Young, 2011; Nielsen, 2009) and several authors suggest that the online environment is the place where brands should seek for their changing audience (Kapferer, 2008, p.147; Keller, 2009; Yan, 2011).

Indeed, several companies from different economic sectors have integrated social media into their business model as part of their marketing strategy (Blaszka, 2011; Clavio, 2011; Constantinides et al., 2008; Hambrick et al., 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Martin, 2012; Pegoraro, 2010). Companies are recognizing the huge opportunities and are coming up with ingenious ideas to promote themselves via online tools: The Home Depot uses YouTube to share demonstrations of do-it-yourself examples of home projects. Blendtec, a company that manufactures blenders, produced a whole series of online videos called “*Will It Blend?*“, which turned out to be a huge success with millions of viewers, starting with a marketing budget of only \$50 (Constantinides, 2008; Flinck, 2011; Weinberg, 2009). Hewlett Packard makes an effort to stay in touch with its target audience through numerous executive blogs on industry-related topics. Blackberry and Apple are examples of successful brand presence utilizing social media (Harrigan, 2011). Steve Jobs, the former CEO of Apple Computers, as well as McDonald’s Vice President Bob Langert, post regularly on blogs, encouraging customers to interact and freely express their comments about the company and its products (Constantinides, 2008; Constantinides et al., 2008). T-mobile in Germany, Shirtcity in Barcelona, Ohmynews in Korea and Domino’s Pizza from the US, all have integrated social media into their business model (Constantinides et al., 2008). Comparing statistical data from 2008 and forth, Barnes et al. (2012) found that Fortune 500 companies are also increasingly embracing social media tools. According to Socialbakers (2014), there are over 85.000 brand pages on Facebook other than sport-

related, while 85 of them have each more than 10 million fans, as of January, 2014. Coca-Cola is the brand with the most fans in Facebook, counting over 65 million “Like” in its page, while Samsung and Starbucks Coffee are amongst the most popular brands in Twitter, each counting over 5 million followers. The potential audience for brands however is much bigger, considering that online friends of these fans (followers) typically represent a much larger set of consumers, which in several cases can be up to 34 times larger (Lipsman et al., 2012).

Social media have become extremely popular amongst organizations and consumers because they facilitate the development of online communities. In particular, several researchers agree that through online brand communities, social media usage can lead to stronger and more authentic relationships with the brand (Ballouli, 2010; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Richelieu et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2011). Online brand communities, also called e-tribes (Kozinets, 1999) or virtual communities (Kozinets, 1999; Simmons, 2007), are communities build around a brand and assist the brand in providing guidance and assistance to its online members, sharing information and brand stories, retaining history and culture of the brand and exert influence and pressure to its members to remain loyal to the brand (Mc Alexander et al., 2002; Solomon et al., 2006). Online communities are also heavily used by consumers as a source of information, social interaction and relationship building (Kozinets et al., 2010; McWilliam, 2000; Tan, 2012; Wallace et al., 2011; Williams & Chinn, 2010; Yan, 2011).

The academic community took also notice of the proliferation of social media. Several industry sectors have been investigated, such as the fashion industry by Kim & Ko (2011), magazine brands by Babac (2011) or the food sector by Dholakia & Durham (2010) and Tan (2012), with an aim to increase our understanding on the use of social media as communication tools and their impact on revenues, consumer behavior and brand building. All studies converge in that social media play nowadays a significant communication role and affect positively the revenue streams of the brands. Bruhn at al. (2012), comparing traditional with social media communications concluded that social media communications have an impact on both dimensions of brand equity, the impact being stronger on brand image.

2.1.3 Opportunities for social media in the sport industry

The sport industry in particular is ideally positioned to use social media in order to reach and engage with fans and to establish and foster an interactive and long-term

relationship (Ballouli, 2010; Blaszk, 2011; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Larson, 2009; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Martin, 2012; Wallace et al., 2011; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Sport attracts billions of people and sport teams are amongst the most popular brands worldwide.

According to Socialbakers (2014), there are over 3.000 sport-related brand pages on Facebook (either sport teams or sport organizations or athletes), while 20 of them have a following of over 10 million fans. In Twitter, the EPL has a massive fan base of over 3 million followers, just like other sport leagues such as NBA (National Basketball Association) or organizations such as the Champions League. Glenn Miller, Head of Media Strategic Partnerships EMEA at Facebook, during his recent presentation at the International Football Arena (IFA) conference in Berlin on October, 2014 revealed that football as a sport is five times bigger than the next sport (basketball) on Facebook. He further implied that 500 million users engage with football on Facebook each month (Stoll, 2014), while 26 million people had 67 million Facebook interactions related to the Champions League final 2014 in Lisbon (UEFA, 2014). At the same conference, Paul Keuter (Head of Sports Germany at Twitter), revealed that 41% of tweets are about sports (Stoll, 2014). The number of followers of the [@ChampionsLeague](#) Twitter account doubled to 4.6 million during the season while 8.4 million tweets referring to the final (where Real Madrid played against Atletico Madrid), the teams and the players from 60 minutes before kick-off until after the trophy lift, with a peak of 209.594 tweets per minute after Real Madrid went 2-1 in front. European football clubs like FC Barcelona, Real Madrid, Bayern Munich, but also the big EPL clubs such as Manchester United, Chelsea FC or Arsenal FC have a multi-million followers base (Socialbakers, 2014). Nowadays, every football team of the top tier European leagues maintains a presence in Facebook while many of them expand in other social media tools as well (Twitter, YouTube etc.).

The geographical barriers of traditional media outlets do not apply to social media tools and hence engagement with fans can be established in a worldwide basis. Social networks such as Facebook and Twitter are widely used amongst sport teams and athletes and have become the most commonly used media for disseminating sports related news (Hambrick et al., 2010; Ozsoy, 2011). Cova & Cova (2002) suggest that social media have become the perfect toolset for brands to collaborate with their most loyal consumers and co-produce “*linking value*” (e.g. value which is jointly created by the brand and its consumers) for the brand, which is the sport club itself.

Moreover, fans are beginning to expect their favorite team to communicate and engage with them directly through social media platforms (Ballouli, 2010; Broughton, 2010). In team sport, where huge amounts of loyalty and affiliation to the club are already in place, fans engage in social media seeking for entertainment and access to team information (Blaszka, 2011; Broughton, 2012; Global Sports Media Consumption Report, 2012; Martin, 2012). Online brand communities, have become therefore very popular in team sport, where fans can share experiences and opinions about their object of interest, which is the club (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Schilhaneck, 2008). Of particular application to sport are the common features of a brand community: shared consciousness, rituals, history and traditions and a sense of moral responsibility (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Cova & Cova (2002) state that brand communities could be viewed as tribes organized around the same passion, which in the case of team sport is the club itself. This in turn provides clubs with additional opportunities to reach their audience in such communities and to encourage consumer interactions with the sport product, with athletes, and with team personnel (Wallace et al., 2011). Moreover, clubs can use online communities to get access to a very large worldwide fan base, which consists not only of their actual fans, but includes also their online friends (Global Sports Media Consumption Report, 2012; Lipsman et al., 2012).

2.1.4 Facebook and team sport

Facebook (www.facebook.com) is a social network service launched in February 2004 in Massachusetts, USA. Facebook is a simply laid-out website that allows users to share information about themselves with other users they are connected with (Weinberg, 2009, p.151). In Facebook, users can upload information using a variety of communication tools such as text, pictures, videos and links. Moreover, users can design contests and share specific applications (Facebook applications). Using Facebook is free and users can respond and engage to posts (called status updates) of their connections using the "Like", "Share" and "Comment" features (Garst, 2014). Facebook's page and group facilities enable businesses and individuals to form online communities and share their news to their fans (members). Facebook, currently available in several languages worldwide, is the dominant platform for following a brand and the platform that influences buying behavior at most (Edison Research, 2012). On October 2012, Facebook announced that it passed the one billion mark of active users, after only eight years of existence (Facebook, 2012).

Facebook can now be accessed through a variety of devices other than a traditional computer (e.g. handheld phones and tablets with Internet access) and is widely spread amongst sport organizations, clubs and athletes. As of January, 2014, over 3000 sports teams worldwide had a Facebook brand presence (Socialbakers, 2014), many of which are amongst the most popular brands worldwide in terms of online followers. The table below (Table 2.1) presents the top-10 list of football clubs in terms of Facebook fans.

It becomes evident from the table that big EPL teams make extensive use of Facebook, as four of them are included in the top-10 list. Up to the 15th of June 2013, the total reach for all 20 Premier League clubs of the 2012-2013 season in terms of Facebook fans stood at nearly 95 million (fcbusiness, 2013). About six months later, on January, 2014, the number reached nearly 115 million (Socialbakers, 2014), well above England's total population of just over 50 million people.

	Club	Country	Facebook fans
1	FC Barcelona	Spain	52.191.566
2	Real Madrid	Spain	48.932.917
3	Manchester United	UK	39.338.095
4	FC Chelsea	UK	21.556.812
5	AC Milan	Italy	19.210.831
6	Arsenal FC	UK	18.890.025
7	Liverpool FC	UK	15.703.896
8	Bayern Munich	Germany	11.527.147
9	Juventus Turin	Italy	9.383.589
10	Galatasaray Istanbul	Turkey	9.356.947

Table 2.1: Top-10 football clubs in terms of Facebook fans (source: Author, adapted from Socialbakers, 2014)

EPL clubs are extremely popular on a worldwide basis. The next table (Table 2.2) has been adapted from Football Industry's (2013) analysis regarding the geographic location of Facebook fans of the 2012/2013 EPL clubs and shows the top-10 countries with the most fans of EPL clubs as well as the comparison, as a percentage, between this value and the total number of Facebook users in that country. The data has been collected during February, 2013 and although Facebook users (particularly foreign fans of English football clubs) may be fans of more than one club (*polygamists*, as cited in Kuper & Szymanski, 2009), the numbers remain impressive.

	Country	Facebook Fans of some EPL club	% of Facebook users of the country
1	Indonesia	9.253.851	19,62%
2	UK	5.497.270	17,09%
3	Mexico	4.599.604	11,51%
4	India	4.438.657	7,22%
5	Malaysia	4.116.747	31,46%
6	USA	3.772.363	2,31%
7	Thailand	3.101.328	17,04%
8	Egypt	2.450.794	18,84%
9	France	1.944.850	7,68%
10	Argentina	1.868.013	9,16%

Table 2.2: Countries with the most Facebook fans of EPL clubs (source: Author, adapted from Football Industry, 2013)

Big EPL clubs have their vast majority of Facebook fans located outside UK (Football Industry, 2013). Only a total of about 5.5 million fans are living in UK. Indonesia is the country with the most EPL clubs fans despite the fact that until July, 2013, not even one EPL club has ever visited that country. As the China-based consulting agency Mailman Group suggests, Asian fans (Chinese fans in particular) are more likely to be influenced in their choice to follow a particular team by the presence of star players in the team or on the pitch success of the team (Mailman Group, 2013).

2.1.5 Twitter and team sport

Twitter (www.twitter.com) has been launched 2006 in San Francisco, USA. Twitter is one of the most popular social networking and communication technologies at the present time, counting over 270 million active users (Twitter, 2014). Twitter is ranked third on the list of the most valuable social media brands with an estimated brand value of \$ 23.656 billion (SyncForce, 2013). In terms of social networking sites awareness, 90% of people have heard the term Twitter, placing it in the second place in the corresponding survey (Edison Research, 2012).

Twitter “*is a free micro-blogging service that allows users to communicate with one another using short text-based messages, or ‘tweets,’ that can be a maximum of 140 characters in length*” (Weinberg, 2009, p.125). Users sign up for an account and then select individuals or brands to “follow”. Following enables a Twitter user to see what

other users tweet about and gives them the opportunity to engage in conversations either by “Reply”, “Retweet” or adding the tweet to their “Favorite” (Garst, 2014). Although originally intended as a communication tool for individuals, Twitter has become a valuable tool for marketers to tweet about their products, events, and news. Twitter is the second mostly used platform for brand-following behavior (Edison research, 2012). As in Facebook, Twitter users can upload information using a variety of communication tools such as text, pictures, videos and links and is used by football clubs as a promotional tool and publishing platform.

The growth of Twitter, combined with the increasing number of consumers who follow, learn about and review brands, makes it an attractive medium for brand marketers (Martin, 2012). Twitter is particularly prominent in the sport context as well, as media, clubs and athletes are increasingly using it as a means to communicate with fans (Blaszka, 2011). With specific regard to team sport, a core difference to Facebook is that Twitter’s utility as a micro-blogging platform is exploited to offer more frequent and disposable updates, including running commentaries on games (Price et al., 2013). In December 2011, there were 1.127 clubs on Twitter with a combined following of 17.199.600 followers. One year later, an additional of 424 clubs signed up to Twitter, while the number of followers absolutely sky rocketed to 45.047.845 (Walsh, 2012). The table below gives an overview of the top-10 football teams worldwide in terms of Twitter followers (Table 2.3).

	Club	Country	Twitter followers
1	FC Barcelona	Spain	10.916.729
2	Real Madrid	Spain	9.898.420
3	Galatasaray Istanbul	Turkey	3.471.186
4	Arsenal FC	UK	3.339.078
5	FC Chelsea	UK	3.239.599
6	Fenerbahce SK	Turkey	2.657.857
7	Liverpool FC	UK	2.261.621
8	Manchester United	UK	1.703.711
9	AC Milan	Italy	1.703.176
10	Corinthians	Brazil	1.461.724

Table 2.3: Top-10 football clubs in terms of Twitter followers (source: Author, adapted from Socialbakers, 2014)

2.1.6 Current trends of social media usage by football clubs

Football clubs are increasingly looking for ways to transform the huge numbers of online followers and interactions into revenues (Nicholson, 2014). In doing so, marketing executives and social media managers of college and professional sport teams come up with different approaches. College sport teams are looking to directly increase match attendance figures and are focusing on the use of Facebook and Twitter to increase ticket sales. Examples are the University of Tennessee or the University of Texas which are using Facebook and Twitter respectively to promote ticket sales by asking the followers to simply “Like” a post or participate in a contest (Maddox, 2013). Another case in point is the football team of the Michigan University which uses Facebook as a ticket sales promotion platform, apparently with great results (Renbarger, 2014).

Professional clubs of lower English football divisions use similar approaches to boost their revenues through ticket sales. Portsmouth FC for instance introduced a new ticketing system that uses a module to book tickets through Facebook and invite friends to join (Kelk, 2013). Ticket sales increase is also the goal of several EPL clubs such as West Ham, Fulham and Crystal Palace which, in cooperation with Groupon (a deal-of-the-day website that features discounted gift certificates usable at local or national companies), tried to offer cut price deals through Facebook and Twitter in order to attract new audience to their matches (Taylor, 2012).

However, bigger football clubs try to find other ways to monetize the relationship with their online followers. The German football club Borussia Dortmund is using social media for creating brand awareness. David Gorges, Head of New Media and CRM at Borussia Dortmund, said: *"Connecting our stadium to our wider fans we see as a major opportunity ... We must now transport that intense Borussia Dortmund experience outside the stadium."* Taking the club experience beyond the stadium via digital platforms is a goal for every big sport club. With the expansion on social platforms new opportunities arise for clubs to increase revenues in the form of very lucrative sponsorship deals as in the case of Manchester United and Vodafone or Chelsea and Samsung (Ginesta, 2013; McLaren, 09/2013).

What is more, clubs start to realize that there is a significant difference between huge following and successful engagement. As such, clubs aim for increased engagement by trying to get fans involved in social media conversations, sign up for online memberships and newsletters and install club mobile applications (Nicholson, 2014). Others come up with fresh ideas, as the case of the French top club Olympique de

Marseille which invited its fans to co-design the kit for the season 2012-2013, resulting in the submission of over 65.000 designs, of which finally one has been selected (Taylor, 2012). Similarly, EPL club Arsenal FC asked their fans to design a Facebook banner to celebrate the clubs' 125 anniversary (McLaren, 2011), while Liverpool FC asked their online Twitter followers for their artistic Hillsborough tributes (McLaren, 04/2013).

Everton FC tries to engage fans by providing social media content in the form of pictures which, according to a survey they undertook, leads to more likes and engagement (McLaren, 03/2013). Delivering high quality content seems to be a key for success. During the Leaders Conference, on October 2014 in London, there was broad agreement that the clubs who have invested in quality content and have integrated the digital platform across their business will increase fan engagement and become therefore early money winners (Nicholson, 2014). Michael Leavey, Media and Marketing Director at Arsenal FC and key speaker of the conference suggested that it is great content that leads to engagement. Digital consultant Craig Howe, Head of Digital and Social Media at the San Francisco 49ers and the Chicago Bulls is cited during the same conference: "*First you have to look at how we create great content.*" (Nicholson, 2014).

Manchester United's Social Media Manager Nick Coppack in a recent interview also highlights the importance of content: "*In our minds, content is key and we take pride in tailoring each post to our Facebook audience. On an ongoing basis we track and refine the style, tone and approach we take – driven by the feedback and responses we get.*" (McLaren, 10/2014). Ian Eyre, Liverpool's Managing Director, outlined the long-term strategic plan of the club to grow its digital platforms. At The Nolan Partners Sport Industry Breakfast Club he said: "*Liverpool FC is a Premier League pioneer for innovation, brand development and international fan engagement. Central to our international brand strategy is the club's revolutionized digital output, which is interactive, inclusive and localized to individual territories – delivering content which is tailored to specific markets and accessible in local languages...[Fans] are the foundation of Liverpool FC and we need to engage with them by embracing new technology and creating appealing and exciting digital content*" (McLaren, 09/2013).

Finally, speakers at the recent International Football Arena (IFA) conference on October, 2014 in Berlin also agreed that clubs need to know their fans and the key to do so is engagement through authentic and original content. As emerged during the speech of Glenn Miller (Head of Media Strategic Partnerships EMEA at Facebook), Facebook

knows more about clubs' fans than the clubs know about them. In order to change that, big professional sport clubs are starting to invest in content which leads to high engagement from their online fans and which in turn will provide the clubs with useful information about their fans using Customer Relationship Management (CRM) techniques. According to Stefan Mennerich, Director of New Media, Media Rights and IT of German football club FC Bayern Munich, with the help of their new software partner SAP, the club started to rearrange its CRM infrastructure in order reach the next level in the further professionalization of fan engagement and services (Stoll, 2014). In addition, Dr. Henning Stiegenroth, Vice President Sports Marketing at Deutsche Telekom, the main sponsor of FC Bayern Munich, introduced their plans for a connected stadium, a feature that is already offered by EPL clubs such as Liverpool FC and Manchester City. Among the opportunities that fans will gain in the stadium will be the opportunity to access a selection of camera angles, watch replays and highlights and order merchandise, all accessible via smartphones (Stoll, 2014).

2.1.7 Social media challenges

Despite the tremendous opportunities offered by social media, there are some challenges which brands must effectively address when designing their social media marketing strategy. Perhaps the most prevalent challenge deals with the lack of control of brand-related information (Bolotaeva & Cata, 2011). Content generated by users or even brand followers in closed online communities are not always positive towards the brand. This can be due to negative experiences with the brand or even false rumors (Flinck, 2011). In addition, there is evidence that users of social media sites do not always welcome input from businesses, viewing this as commercial intrusion into their social space (boyd & Ellison, 2008).

With specific regard to football, as the use of social media by both professional athletes (footballers) and football teams is rising, problems may occur. Recent years have shown that footballers' status updates or tweets can be made in the heat of the moment and might be therefore, intentionally or not, inappropriate. Such inappropriate use reach the millions of footballers' online fans immediately, affecting thereby the image of the club they play for (Stoll, 2014; Woodgate, 12/2012). Football clubs are slowly beginning to realize the power of tools like Facebook and Twitter and the need to address how it is used by their employees (Woodgate, 11/2012). Clubs can respond by creating a social media policy or a social media monitoring platform, both of which however adds

significant workload (Premierleague, 2012; Price et al., 2013; Walsh, 2013; Woodgate, 01/2013). Some club managers even took more radical measures and have banned their players from using social media platforms (Price et al., 2013).

Additionally, not every social media tool can be used for every goal the brand aims to achieve (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Related to this is the fact that, although brands have online followers around the globe, a social media campaign might work for one culture but not for another (Flinck, 2011). Since social media go across national borders, the message may change on the way and the firm may not be able to prevent this or have an influence on it during this process. What is more, the message can go across cultural borders changing the meaning dramatically (Kozinets et al., 2010). This may be particularly the case for football clubs, especially those who address a global audience but also those who employ footballers coming from different countries around the world. EPL clubs such as Liverpool FC and Manchester United have recognized these issues and are therefore trying to upload content which is culture and language specific (McLaren, 09/2013; 10/2014). Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) further mention that a social media presence should be unprofessional and honest, meaning that brands should not forget that social media users are people who understand that things do not always go smoothly.

With regard to online followers, despite the importance of a high number of brand “fans”, the growing number of a brand’s social community is not always a meaningful measure of success. In practice, this would mean that a brand may have an impressive number of Facebook fans (e.g. users who have “liked” a brand’s page) but if the interactivity between the brand and its fans is very limited or even non-existing, it can harm the brand’s image (Yan, 2011). In order to make better use of their followers, brands, and particularly sport teams are starting to recognize the need to offer authentic content and features that increases engagement (Nicholson, 2014; Stoll, 2014; Taylor, 2012). Another problem that may occur is the misuse of social media by followers of athletes and teams. That is, amongst the huge quantity of online fans there are some who use social media to express racist comments or even death threats to athletes or coaches (Price et al., 2013; Rookie.com, 2014). In this case, clubs face another problem, namely how to protect their players.

The very notion of direct communication between athletes and fans as well as sport teams and fans offers a new challenge for the profession of journalism. In many ways, the emergence of social media and Twitter in particular, is a double-edged sword for journalists as they face increased competition from official sources, i.e. clubs and the

players themselves. While it opens up another window on players' lives or another opportunity to comment on inappropriate tweets, it removes some of the exclusive access which was traditionally the currency of many sports reporters. The challenge for journalists is to find where they can add value in this new world (Price et al., 2013).

From a technological point of view, the issue of fake identities must be addressed (Yan, 2011). In every social media platform, there are users who claim to be someone they are not. Famous people are often victims of false identities. In the sport context, several sites claim to be the official social media presence of athletes or clubs, the true owners sometimes lagging behind in terms followers.

2.1.8 Summary

Social media facilitate the cooperation and two way interaction amongst organizations and internet users of different platforms and through any device (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008; Williams & Chinn, 2010). On social media sites, people engage in conversations for all sorts of reasons and are able to create, exchange and discuss information using a variety of communication tools (e.g. text, pictures, links etc.) and without the interference of corporations (Constantinides et al., 2008; Hanna et al., 2011; Kietzmann et al., 2011). The proliferation of social media tools provide an excellent opportunity for sport clubs to enhance engagement and relationship building with fans (McLaren, 09/2013; McLaren, 10/2014; Nicholson, 2014; Stoll, 2014) as well as an additional and very promising tool in their arsenal to increase their revenues (Williams & Chinn, 2010). EPL clubs are increasingly using social media tools to access their worldwide fan base, starting to provide content which is tailored to the culture and language characteristics of each country (Nicholson, 2014; Stoll, 2014; Taylor, 2012). However, problems may occur by abuses of social media by professional athletes and fans which can harm the clubs' image (Flinck, 2011; Price et al., 2013; Rookie.com, 2014; Walsh, 2013).

2.2 Brands and Brand Equity

The word brand has its origin in the North Germanic language, where the term “*brandr*” meant “*to burn*”. The term has been used to describe the actions of producers burning their mark onto their products to indicate its owner (Healey, 2008; Kapferer, 1992; 2008), an activity also known from the ancient civilizations of Egypt and Greece, where potters and brick-makers placed symbols on their goods to identify their work (Farquhar, 1989). According to the American Marketing Association, “*brand is a name, term, symbol, or design, or combination which is used to distinguish the sellers’ goods and services and to differentiate them from competitors*” (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p.241). A brand can be anything from a product or a service to organizations or even people. A brand enhances the value of a product beyond its functional purpose and is a powerful means of differentiation (Kapferer, 1992; Keller, 2003). Brands represent enormously valuable pieces of legal property and are thought to be the most valuable intangible assets of firms (Kapferer, 1992; 2008; Keller & Lehmann, 2003; Tuominen, 1999).

Depending on which perspective is considered, the brand can have added value to the firm, the trade, or the consumer (Farquhar, 1989; Kapferer, 2008; Tuominen, 2000). Brands perform valuable functions for firms such as creating greater customer loyalty, larger profit margins, inelasticity of consumer response to price increases, increased marketing communication effectiveness, brand extension opportunities and preventing competitors to enter the market (Aaker, 1991; Balaji, 2011; Hoeffler & Keller, 2003; Kapferer, 2008; Keller, 2003; 2009; Kotler & Keller, 2012; Thrassou et al., 2012; Tuominen, 2000). Brands facilitate trade and guarantee supply as they encapsulate a number of product or service information in a name or a symbol (Kapferer, 1992). Consumers also benefit from strong brands as it reduces the perceived risk of a branded product or service, minimizes information search costs and creates favorable attribute perceptions (Balaji, 2011; Davis, 2007; Kapferer, 1992; 2008; Kotler & Keller, 2012; Tuominen, 2000).

The value of a brand is often referred to as brand equity. Brand equity as a concept evolved in the late 80’s and has become one of the most important marketing concepts in recent times (Aaker, 1991; Farquhar, 1989; Keller, 1993; 2003; 2009). Farquhar (1989, p.7) defines brand equity as “*the added value a given brand endows a product*” and contends that brand equity allows for premium pricing for a product. Others define brand equity as “*the value of a company and brand names*” (Lamb et al., 1996 as cited in Kaynak et al., 2008, p.339). A well known definition has been given by Aaker (1991,

p.15) who defines brand equity as "*a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers*".

Previous research has approached brand equity from two perspectives (Balaji, 2011; Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010; Christodoulides et al., 2006; Farquhar, 1989; Tuominen, 1999):

- Firm-based brand equity
- Customer-based brand equity

The first perspective discusses brand equity from a financial point of view. For decades the value of a firm has been measured in terms of tangible assets such as real estate, plants and equipment. In other words, the firm-based brand equity is the added value it creates to the firm for accounting or merger and acquisition purposes (Keller, 1993; Tuominen, 1999) or the current financial value of the flow of future profits attached to the brand itself (Kapferer, 2008, p.143).

Nowadays, researchers and practitioners agree that the value of brands lies outside of the business itself (Kapferer, 2008; Tuominen, 2000). Taking into account that customers (either individuals or organizations), through their responses to the brand, are primarily responsible for the financial welfare of a firm in terms of market share and profitability, the second perspective identifies the marketing value of the brand. Conceptualizing brand equity from the customers' point of view has the advantage that it assists managers in developing marketing strategies and enables them to evaluate their marketing efforts towards the improvement of the brand (Tuominen, 1999). Therefore, from a customer perspective, brand equity has been described as the establishment of a long-term relationship with customers (Wood, 2000). According to this view, marketers should understand consumer behavior in order to design more efficient marketing strategies. Thus, the views and perceptions of the customers regarding a brand are of high importance towards brand equity development (Aaker, 1996; Hoeffler & Keller, 2003; Tuominen, 2000). It is this view that will be adopted in this thesis.

2.2.1 Customer-based brand equity

From the customer perspective, Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) proposed two of the most cited models for conceptualizing brand equity in the marketing literature. Aaker

(1991) was the first to propose the existence of the relationship between customers' perceptions and thoughts and brand equity. He conceptualized brand equity as consisting of five dimensions of brand assets (Figure 2.1):

- Brand awareness - described as the ability of the customer to recognize and recall a brand and is the starting point in developing equity
- Brand associations - described as the thoughts and perceptions of the customer towards a particular brand
- Brand loyalty - described as the ability of the brand to attract and retain a great degree of customers
- Perceived quality - described as the judgments of the customers regarding the overall excellence of the product relative to its intended purpose
- Other proprietary brand assets - patents, trademarks etc.

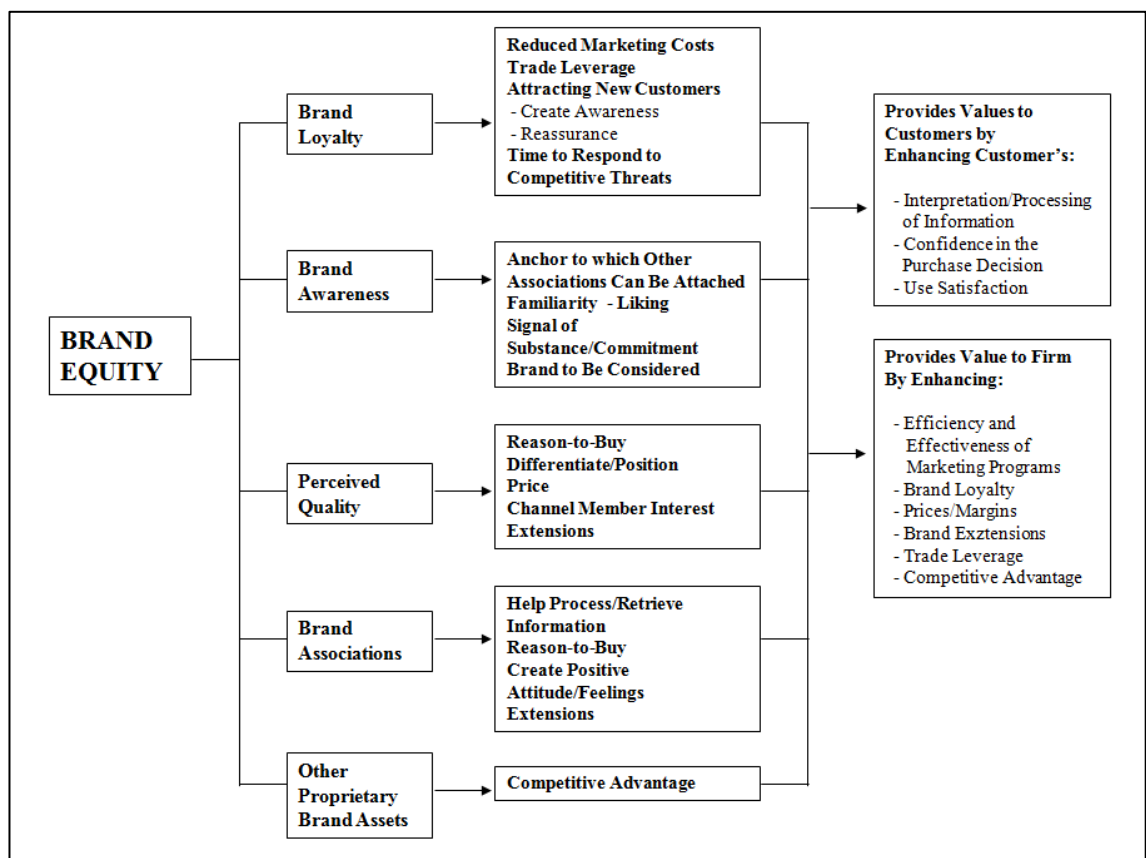


Figure 2.1: Conceptualization of brand equity (Aaker, 1991)

Aaker proposed the first notable theory in which the brand equity concept was discussed. However, he did not suggest a specific measure of brand equity but rather contended that the five dimensions could directly create brand equity. In response to the lack of a specific operationalization of brand equity measure, Keller (1993) carried the work of Aaker one step further and proposed that a multidimensional construct of brand knowledge is a determinant of brand equity. Keller (1993, p.8) introduced the customer-based brand equity (CBBE) concept by defining brand equity as "*the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing*". Keller argued that brand equity is ultimately derived from the words and actions of consumers. Favorable consumer response, in turn, can lead to enhanced revenues, lower costs, and greater profits for the firm.

Customer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer has to some degree a familiarity with the brand and holds some positive brand associations in memory. As the ultimate goal of every marketing program is to increase sales, it must first develop a positive attitude of the consumer towards the brand. This can be achieved by forming favorable knowledge structures for the brand in the mind of the customer (Keller, 1993). Brand knowledge can be therefore seen as the main source for customer-based brand equity and can be conceptualized as consisting "*of a brand node in memory to which a variety of associations are linked*" (Keller, 1993, p.3). According to Keller, brand knowledge consists of two main components (Figure 2.2):

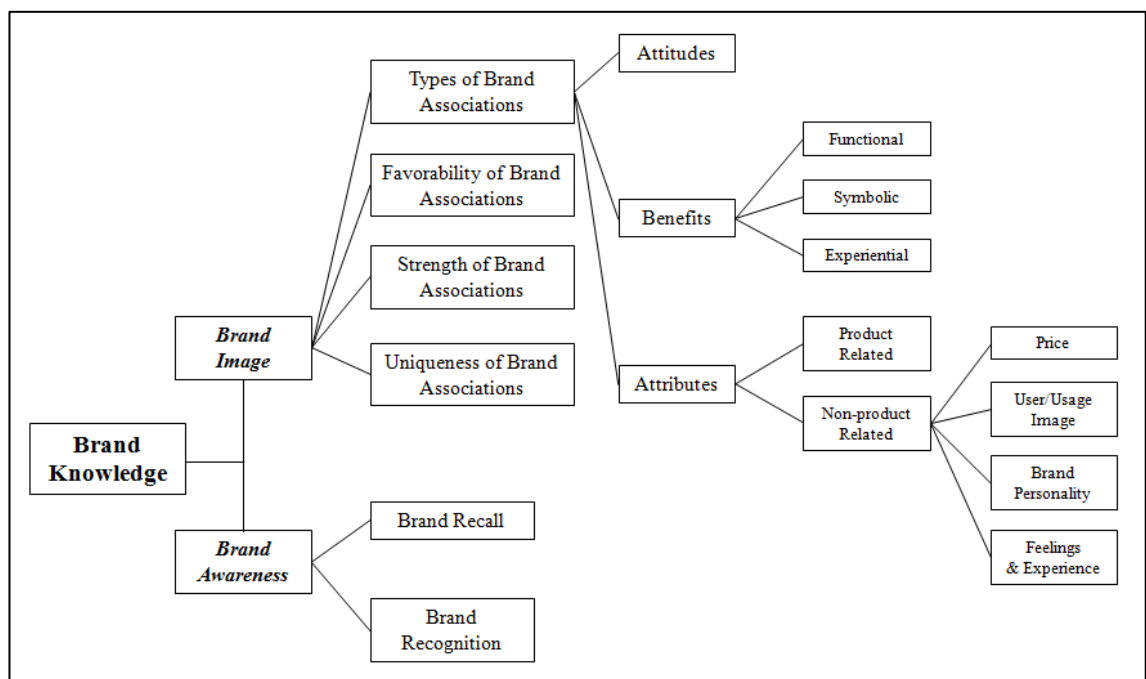


Figure 2.2: Customer-based brand equity model (Keller, 1993)

- Brand awareness, which is the consumers ability to recognize and recall the brand (similar to Aaker's brand awareness) and
- Brand image, which is the consumers' perceptions of and associations for the brand (similar to Aaker's brand associations)

Brand awareness is according to Keller the consumers' ability to identify the brand under different conditions (Keller, 1993). Putting it differently, it stands for the likelihood that a brand name will come to mind as well as the ease it does so. Brand awareness consists of brand recognition and brand recall. Brand recognition reflects the ability of consumers to confirm prior exposure to the brand. Brand recall reflects the ability of consumers to retrieve the brand, when given the product category, the needs fulfilled by the category, or some other type probe as a cue. Brand awareness can be characterized according to depth and breadth. The depth of brand awareness concerns the likelihood that the brand can be recognized or recalled and the breadth of brand awareness relates to the variety of purchase and consumption situations in which the brand comes to mind (Kaynak et al., 2008; Keller 1993). Brand awareness plays an important role in consumer decision making for several reasons. Raising brand awareness not only increases the likelihood that the brand will be at least considered in a purchase situation but also that it will affect the buying decision as consumers tend to correlate positive quality value to a familiar rather than to an unfamiliar brand (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2008; Keller, 1993). In addition, brand awareness precedes the formation of brand associations (Aaker, 1991; Balaji, 2011), influences their strength and is therefore a necessary condition for the creation of brand image (Keller, 1993).

Brand image is called the sum of all brand associations that consumers hold in their memory e.g. the sum of all tangible and intangible perceptions, impressions, inferences and beliefs about a brand that consumers hold in their memory (Balaji, 2011; Keller, 1993; Tuominen, 2000). Brand associations contain the meaning of the brand for consumers and come in many different types, including product related and non-product related attributes, functional, symbolic or experiential benefits and attitudes. For customer-based brand equity to occur, some of these brand associations must be strong, favorable and unique. The strength of associations is a function of both the quality and the quantity of processing the information of a brand receives in the mind of the consumer (Keller, 1993). In other words, the strength of an association depends on how and how much a person thinks of the brand. Favorable brand associations occur when consumers believe that the brand possesses attributes and benefits that satisfy their

needs and wants. In terms of uniqueness, brand associations may or may not be shared with other competing brands. The strength, favorability and uniqueness of brand associations play an important role in determining the differential response that makes up customer-based brand equity (Keller, 1993).

The first type of brand associations, brand attributes, are those features that (the consumer thinks) characterize a product or service. Attributes can be classified into product-related and non-product-related (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010; Keller 1993). Product-related attributes are necessary for performing the primary product or service function sought by consumers (Keller, 1993). Non-product-related attributes are defined as “*external aspects of the product or service that relate to its purchase or consumption*” but do not relate directly to the product performance or service function (Keller, 1993, p.4). The four main types of non-product-related attributes are price information, packaging or product appearance information, user imagery (what kind of a person uses the product or service) and usage imagery (when and where the product or service is used).

The second type of brand associations are brand benefits. Brand benefits are the personal value and meaning that consumers attach to the product or service. Benefits can be functional, experiential or symbolic. Functional benefits are the more intrinsic advantages of product or service consumption and usually correspond to the product-related attributes. These benefits often are linked to basic motivations, such as physiological and safety needs. Experiential benefits relate to what is felt when the product or service is used and they usually correspond to both product-related attributes as well as to non-product-related attributes such as usage imagery. Finally, symbolic benefits are the more extrinsic advantages of product or service consumption usually correspond to non-product-related attributes and relate to underlying needs for social approval or personal expression (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010; Keller, 1993). The third type of brand associations are brand attitudes. Brand attitudes are the most abstract type of brand associations and are defined in terms of consumers’ overall evaluations of a brand. Consumers’ brand attitudes generally depend on specific considerations concerning the strength and favorability of attributes and benefits of the brand (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010; Keller, 1993).

Aaker’s and Keller’s models differ in several ways. The most salient difference is that while Aaker sees brand loyalty and perceived quality as two dimensions of brand equity, these are absent from Keller’s conceptualization. Keller considers perceived quality as a product-related association and brand loyalty as a manifestation of brand

equity. The two models however have two components in common, namely brand awareness and brand associations (brand image), although Keller is far more specific about brand image and the corresponded structures in the minds of consumers.

2.2.2 Service branding

The concepts of brand and brand equity presented so far, although applicable to both products and services, have been mainly expressed in the context of goods-type products. The huge growth of the service sector (e.g. entertainment and sport industry, banking industry etc.) in recent decades – which now accounts for almost two thirds of GDP in developed economies (Davis, 2007) - required an updated view. In the context of service branding, an appropriate interpretation of brands is provided by de Chernatony (2009, p.104) who define brand as “*a cluster of functional and emotional values that enables organizations to make a promise about a unique and welcomed experience*”. Service branding involves the interaction of consumers with a number of stakeholders of which the staff of the service provider is probably the most important one, as it is heavily involved in those interactions (Berry, 2000; de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2001; de Chernatony et al., 2006; Kapferer, 2008, p.53; McDonald et al., 2001). Thus, the experiences of customers with the service provider (e.g. the service performance) play the most significant role in building brand equity. Customers view the whole service organization as the provider of the service and hence the service company becomes its own brand (Berry, 2000). In addition, strong service brands are built by making an emotional connection with their audience (Underwood et al., 2001). Berry (2000) analyzed the strategies of fourteen mature high-performance service companies with a view to produce a service branding model of brand equity (Figure 2.3).

The service branding model of Berry differs in degree, not kind, from Keller’s model. It goes however one step further to propose that the company’s marketing strategies (he uses the term “*company’s presented brand*”), external brand communications and the experience a customer has with a brand should be thought as antecedents to brand awareness and brand meaning. The presented brand is the brand message a company conceptualizes and disseminates. External brand communications refers to information customers absorb about the company and is generally beyond the control of the company. Word-of-mouth (WOM), and increasingly electronic-WOM (eWOM) through the internet and social media settings, are common due to the intangible nature of the

services. Both brand awareness and brand meaning (which refers to the customers' perceptions of the brand e.g. what immediately comes to the mind of a customer when thinking about the brand, similar to Keller's brand associations) contribute to brand equity but not to the same degree (the dashed arrows in Figure 2.3 represent a lesser degree).

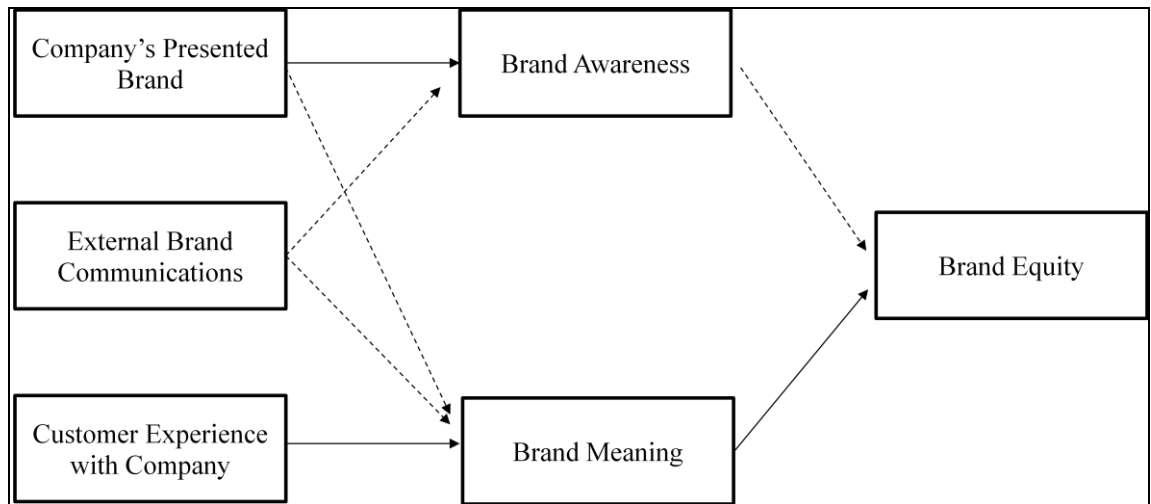


Figure 2.3: A service branding model (Berry, 2000)

Despite the peculiarities of service brands, there is no legal difference between product and service brand (Kapferer, 2008, p.103) and several scholars suggest that, at the conceptual level, the branding models could be applied to both products and services while the execution of the marketing strategies needs to be adapted to address the different needs (de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2001; McDonald et al., 2001; Zeithalm et al., 1985).

2.2.3 Brand equity criticism

While many scholars highlighted the importance of brand equity (Aaker, 1992; Bauer et al., 2008; Berry, 2000; Joachimsthaler & Aaker, 1997; Keller, 1993; Ross et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2000), other researchers have challenged its usefulness (Ehrenberg et al., 1990; Ehrenberg, 1997; Ehrenberg & Goodhardt, 2002). In particular, Ehrenberg et al. (1990) proposed the law of Double Jeopardy (DJ) which states that smaller brands have not only fewer buyers but also that these fewer buyers tend to be less loyal. They further argue that penetration of brand share is more indicative of a brand's value since repeat

buying is rather directly related to market share than to high brand equity: Purchasers of the larger brand are more likely to find their preferred brand because of its wide availability in a number of distribution channels, while the purchasers of the smaller brand face difficulties to do so and may therefore switch to the bigger brand (Ehrenberg et al., 1990; Sharp et al., 2011). In the sport team industry, this would suggest that sport teams that frequently sell out games and generate a large number of followers through media exposure will also have the highest brand equity. Gladden & Funk (2001) discussed the concept of double jeopardy in their work and, although acknowledging that it may be a useful way to examine market share differences among sport teams and their followers, commented that it does not apply in the sport context. The sport industry is unique (Braunstein & Ross, 2010) and the finite resources as compared to other markets contradict the double jeopardy concept. At first, the supply for tickets can be only as large as the stadium capacity. Thus, if stadium attendance were used to define the customer interest in a sport organization, this would not be an accurate measure since it would not measure overall consumer interest in a professional sport club (Gladden & Funk, 2001). Ross et al. (2008) agrees with this notion and argues that this situation is common to service organizations where the market is infinite in theory (e.g. seats of an airplane). Another reason why sport teams may be immune to DJ is the emotional connection between fans and clubs, which is higher than in any other industry, making the switch to other brands very unlikely (Bauer et al., 2008; Mason, 1999; Richelieu, 2004). Additionally, the huge majority of sport teams are geographically restricted in their operations and utilizing market share indicators in the corresponded geographic areas might not result in rational results regarding brand equity. Of course, several leagues and teams are now in the process of becoming international brands, but this does not mean that their ticket market becomes infinite. What is more, new technologies such as the internet and social media may even cancel out the DJ's argument of scarcity as fans can easily follow a team regardless of their place of living. Finally, brand equity has been conceptualized and operationalized in the sports setting and its components have been subject to empirical validation by various researchers in the team sport business.

2.2.4 Summary

A brand can be anything from a product or a service to organizations or even people and is a powerful means of differentiation (Kapferer, 1992; Keller, 2003). Building strong

brands has become a priority for many firms as it offers a number of advantages (Aaker, 1991; Balaji, 2011; Hoeffler & Keller, 2003; Kapferer, 2008; Keller, 2003; 2009; Thrassou et al., 2012; Tuominen, 2000). Brand equity, the value of a brand, has been defined in a number of different ways and for many different purposes (Aaker, 1991; Farquhar, 1989; Keller, 1993). Keller (1993) introduced the customer-based brand equity (CBBE) model and argued that brand equity is ultimately derived from the words and actions of consumers. CBBE occurs when the consumer's brand knowledge (brand awareness and brand associations) can be increased. Berry (2000) introduced a service branding model in order to address the peculiarities of the service industry sector and argued that communications and experiences outside the control of the brand (word of mouth and customers shared experiences) are very important for the perceptions of the customers about the brand.

2.3 Brand Equity in Team Sports

The sport industry is nowadays viewed as part of the wider entertainment industry (Avgerinou, 2007; Bauer et al., 2005; Bauer et al., 2008; Buehler et al., 2006; Dolles & Soderman, 2005/1; 2005/5; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Kerr, 2009; Piipponen, 2011; Richelieu, 2004; Schilhaneck, 2008). As such, the concepts of brand and brand equity gained increased interest in the sports setting (Kerr & Gladden, 2008). In the team sport industry, the customers are the fans and the brand is the sport club (Bauer et al., 2005; Berry, 2000; Ferrand & Pages, 1999; Villarejo-Ramos & Martin-Velicia, 2007). Accordingly, and in line with Aaker's definition of brand equity, the brand equity of professional sport teams is derived from the meaning fans attach to the name and logo of their favorite sports team (Gladden & Milne, 1999). Professional sport managers are beginning to realize the importance of viewing their properties as brands to be managed (Bodet & Chanavat, 2009; Richelieu, 2004; Richelieu et al., 2011; Ross et al., 2007; Schade et al., 2011). In doing so however, they must face the peculiar characteristics of the team sport industry, as explained next.

2.3.1 Team sport

Sport clubs in general and football clubs in particular are seen as “*service providers*”, the primary offering (the core sport product) of which is the actual football game (Bauer et al., 2005; Buehler et al., 2006) while secondary offerings, such as stadium visits, media rights, sponsorships and merchandizing are considered brand extensions (Bauer et al., 2005).

The core sport product can be further divided into participant sport and spectator sport, the latter being the focus of this research. Spectator sports is the bigger part of the sports industry with billions of people worldwide following sport events either live or on television (Buehler et al., 2006; Dolles & Soderman, 2005/1) or increasingly through the internet (Kerr & Gladden, 2008). The core product, the actual football game, bears the simultaneity and heterogeneity characteristics of the service industry (Mullin et al., 2007; Zeithalm et al., 1985). That is, as a football game is being played (produced), the spectators in the stadium are concurrently watching (consuming) the event. The heterogeneous nature of the football game lies in that professional sport marketers cannot control the ability of the team to win on a given match day, not to speak for guarantying that the team will win all its matches (Buehler et al., 2006; Gladden & Milne, 1999; Piipponen, 2011; Ross, 2006). While on-field performance and success

remains important for the development of brand equity, sport clubs must aim to build strong brands in order to overcome potential performance fluctuations (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005; Gil-Lafuente, 2007). A case in point from the professional baseball league are the Boston Red Sox, who despite their poor athletic performance for a number of consecutive years, enjoys huge success operating in other realms such as merchandizing and ticket sales (Gladden & Funk, 2001). Professional sport organizations face an additional problem of maintaining a certain level of quality: at least two organizations must be involved in a sporting event for the generation of the product (Bauer et al., 2005; Schilhaneck, 2008). The difficulty for the management is that the quality of the opposing team cannot be controlled.

Describing the nature of a football brand, a Manchester United executive explained: *“The brand is the team, its logo, the red shirt, the players, the story; it is everything related to Manchester United. It is a precious asset in developing the business”* (Richelieu, 2004, p.4). In the same wavelength, Dolles & Soderman (2005/5) claim that the brand stands for everything about a (football) club: The team and its players, the name and related identifiers like jerseys and logo marks. Thus, football clubs can be seen as *“true products”*, in that they are composed of tangible dimensions (result, merchandising) and intangible benefits (emotions, stadium experiences, feelings of pride) (Richelieu et al., 2011). Intangibility is yet another characteristic of service products. Services cannot be seen, felt, tasted, or touched in the same manner in which goods can be sensed (Kapferer, 2008, p.104). Therefore, service brands need to be tangibilized using as many physical elements as possible that can be associated with the brand (Kapferer, 2008, p.105; McDonald et al., 2001). In the context of professional team sports, there are several aspects which may be considered. These include jerseys and all kinds of merchandise, branding of reference objects such as tickets and all sorts of printed material, as well as the design of the infrastructure such as the stadium, offices and shops (Guenzi, 2007; Schilhaneck, 2008).

2.3.2 Team sport customers

Mason (1999) differentiates between four distinct groups of customers of professional sport teams: Fans, television and other media, communities which build facilities and support local clubs and sponsors. This research focuses on the first group of customers, the fans. Fans of sport teams, whether local or international, form a major group of buying customers for the team sport product (Bauer et al., 2008; Dolles & Soderman,

2005/1; 2005/5; Piipponen, 2011) and are vitally important for the brand equity of the team (Gladden et al., 2001; Kerr & Gladden, 2008; Naik & Gupta, 2013). Besides their obvious impact on ticket sales and merchandising, fans have a large impact on the other streams of incomes such as sponsorship and media (Gladden et al., 2001; Piipponen, 2011). This interrelation has been described as the virtuous cycle of revenue generation or the sport-media complex (Cherubini 2007; Helland, 2007; Santomier, 2008). Without fans there would be no demand to show matches on TV and therefore no reason to pay the high broadcasting rights. This in turn would have an additional negative effect on the sponsorship value, impacting therefore the revenues of the sport teams.

Sport fans are high-involvement fans (Underwood et al., 2001), a “*creature tied for life to the club he first fell for as a child*” (Kuper & Szymanski, 2009, p.203). Sport club fans see their team as an extension of themselves (Richelieu et al., 2011), become loyal at an early age and rarely change their loyalty in order to support a competitor team (Beech & Chadwick, 2007). Fans are more passionate than ordinary consumers and their purchase decisions are rarely made by financial and rational criteria (Buehler et al., 2006; Dolles & Soderman, 2005/1; 2005/5; Richelieu, 2004). As O’Hara (2004) explained, “*Sports consumers are fans; Microsoft consumers are, well, consumers. Sports fans are loyal and passionate. They invest more than money; they invest emotion and time over much of their lives*”.

Several authors, based on the level of loyalty that fans show to their club, proposed different types of fans’ categorization. Hunt et al. (1999) suggest five different types of fans, ranging from “fanatical” (the most loyal) to “temporary” (least loyal), while Tapp & Clowes (2002) distinguished among fanatics, regular supporters and casual supporters. Others divide the fan base into die-hard fans (supporters) and spectators (Bodet & Chanavat, 2010) or fans and spectators (Richelieu & Pons, 2005). Wann et al. (2001, p.2) defines a sports spectator as “*individuals who actively witness a sporting event in person or through some form of media (radio, television, etc.)*” while a sports fan is “*an individual who is interested in and follow a sport, team and/or athlete*”. In all cases, fans are thought to be the more enthusiastic and loyal followers of a team while spectators are more focusing on the entertainment side of the event. That is, fans are at the same time spectators, but not all spectators are fans (Moutinho et al., 2007).

Tapp’s research on fan behavior concluded that sports supporter loyalties are very complex and several factors, such as behavioural, demographic and attitudinal must be considered (Tapp, 2004). People from all sectors of the society and across all age groups come together in support of their team in ways not seen in other areas of

consumer activity. EPL's review report of the 2012-2013 season shows that the "*football nation*" is a microcosm of modern Britain consisting of all types of fans, and almost perfectly reflecting the general population in terms of lifestyles and patterns of consumption (Premierleague, 2013). According to the same report, around 32% of the adult population state that they are actively engaged with the England's top tier league. Match attendance figures from the same season reveal that, with a few exceptions, every stadium reached almost full capacity with a cumulative stadium attendance of nearly 14 million people (The Stadium Guide, 2013), while the same holds true for the season 2013-2014 (Premierleague, 2014). From this perspective, sport fans exert "tribal" behavior and are not just consumers but also advocates of the team (brand) (Dionisio et al., 2008; Meir, 2009). A tribe is a network of heterogeneous persons in terms of gender, age, gender and income, who are linked by a shared passion or emotion (Dionisio et al., 2008). In football, the link which the tribe shares is the club – the love for the club and the team is where these collective and passionate behavioral patterns originate.

In addition to local fans, of particular interest to this study are fans that live abroad and support a team of a foreign country. Giulianotti (2002) argued that with the increased televised consumption of sport, spectators can be divided into traditional spectators, which either support a club that represents their community or via electronic media support a range of clubs that represent one of their different identities and into consumer spectator, which experience the club, its traditions, its star players and fellow spectators. The advances in communication technologies (satellite television, internet) have allowed millions of fans to support a foreign based club (Kerr, 2009, p.14). Foreign based supporters, also called satellite supporters in the literature (Kerr & Gladden, 2008), form brand communities (whether offline or online), connect to webcasts, watch the team play over satellite TV or the internet, retrieve information regarding the club by following it to the social media sites and consume large amounts of merchandise and brand related information (Blatzka, 2011; Kapferer, 2008, p.162). Kerr & Emery (2011) suggest that there is no difference between satellite supporters and local fandom in terms of identification, behavior and consumption patterns, although their research is limited to Liverpool FC. Gibbons & Dixon (2010) also argue that fans exhibit social and cultural attachment to clubs, which is increasingly common on a global scale as internet growth continues to shape fandom. In addition, Ben-Porat (2000), examining the fans of EPL clubs living in Israel, also concludes that for these fans the club is an "*oversees sweetheart*" to which they are highly committed. Finally, Nash (2000), examining

Liverpool FC Scandinavian supporters also concludes that high levels of fan identification can be found in supporters of foreign countries.

The above discussion shows the different terminology used to describe the phenomenon of a sports team fan. It is clear that individuals differ in the degree they identify with the team, where identification means affiliation with something desirable (Gladden & Funk, 2002). The terms fan, spectator, supporter and follower are used differently in the literature, where most of the time the term fan describes the more loyal and enthusiastic part and the other terms are more neutral (Bodet & Chanavat, 2010; Kerr, 2009; Richelieu & Pons, 2005). An additional problem is caused by the terminology used by social media platforms where friends of a sport brand are called fans in Facebook and followers in Twitter. For instance, although Liverpool FC counts over 15 million Facebook fans (Socialbakers, 2014), it can be safely assumed that not all of these individuals are fans, in the strict form of the term. Fans of fan clubs on the other side, regardless country of origin, can be assumed to have a higher degree of affiliation and attachment towards the club, expressed in higher match attendance, higher consumption of merchandise and generally higher motivation to interact with and support the clubs' sport and social activities, which is the meaning of the establishment of fan clubs anyway.

2.3.3 Conceptual frameworks of brand equity in team sports

In the sport context, Keller's conceptualization of brand equity has been proved to be very useful as sport marketing researchers find it more analytical particularly as far as the various elements of consumers' knowledge structures is concerned. In addition, Berry's service brand equity model proved to be very useful as it addresses the service characteristics of the sport product. Building on these models, several researchers tried to fill the gap of sport-specific research on how to guide sport managers in design and execute brand management strategies.

Gladden et al. (1998) came up with the first conceptual framework for evaluating brand equity in the Division I college athletics setting. This framework has been slightly updated by **Gladden & Milne (1999)** in order to address issues in the professional team sport context (Figure 2.4).

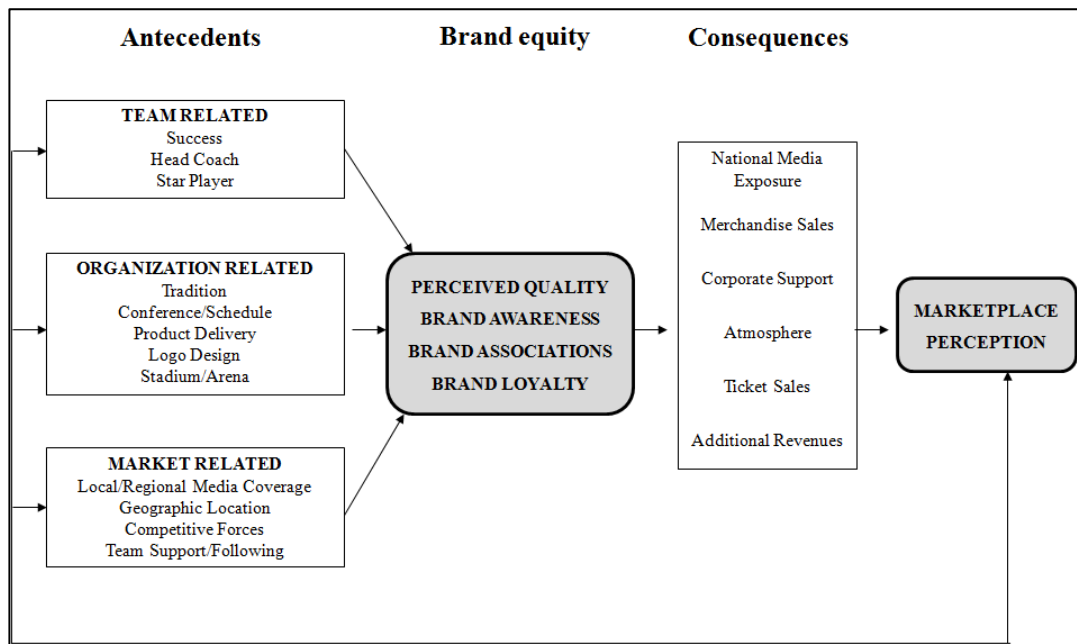


Figure 2.4: Conceptual framework of professional sport team brand equity (Gladden & Milne, 1999)

Gladden & Milne suggested three categories of antecedents of brand equity: Team related, organization related and market related. Each of these antecedents affects some or all the components of brand equity. The team’s brand equity results in six forms of marketplace consequences (national media exposure, merchandise sales, corporate support, atmosphere, ticket sales and additional revenues). Antecedents, brand equity and consequences create a marketplace perception of the brand. Additionally, the authors contend that through continual feedback loops, marketplace perceptions impact antecedents as well as brand equity (brand awareness, brand associations, brand loyalty and perceived quality). Thus, brand equity is developed and impacted over time which is in line with Aaker’s view of having a long-term vision when building brand equity (Aaker, 1991). In an effort to assess the framework in the NBA, NHL and MLB professional leagues, Gladden & Milne (1999) selected merchandize sales as a market outcome and tested the impact of brand equity as compared to sporting success in the realization of the outcome. The results suggested that both brand equity and success are positively related to merchandize sales and thus, expanding the focus of strategic marketing to include brand equity components, leads to improved marketplace consequences.

Kerr & Gladden (2008), recognizing that professional sport clubs have millions of fans worldwide, took the work of Gladden et al. (1998) and Gladden & Milne (1999) one

step further to explain the development of brand equity across domestic boundaries (Figure 2.5).

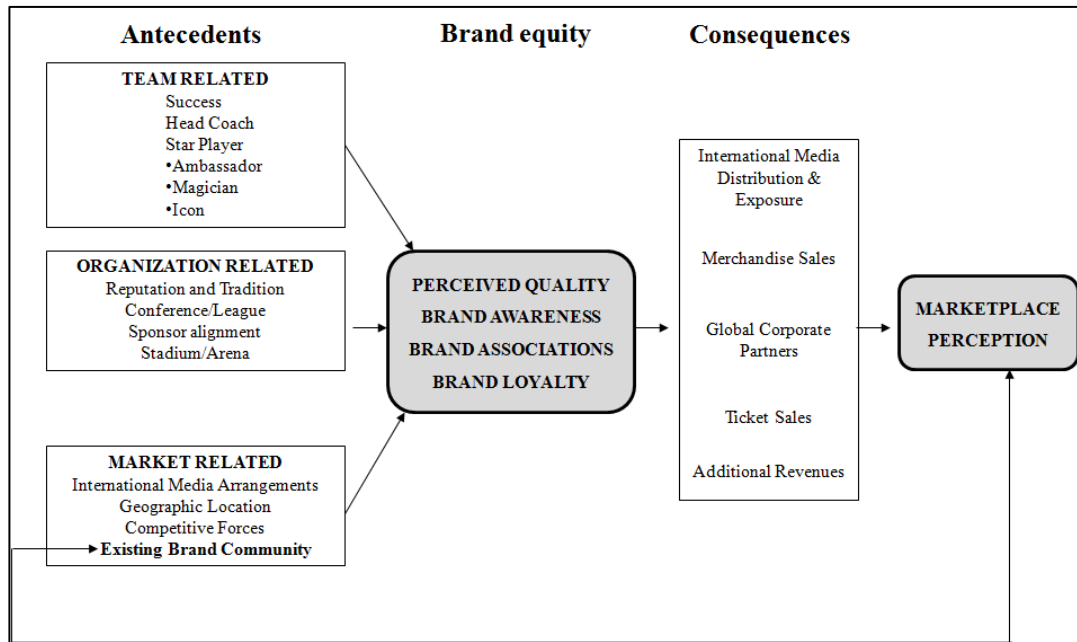


Figure 2.5: Conceptual framework of brand equity among satellite fans (Kerr & Gladden, 2008)

In their work, they addressed the phenomenon of “*satellite fans*” or “*satellite supporters*”, i.e. fans that form emotional bonds with teams of other countries. Due to the increase of communication technologies fans have now unprecedented access to their favorite team and players regardless of geographic location. Kerr & Gladden (2008) encourage professional sport clubs to build their brand across domestic markets in order to ensure long-term viability. The researchers place special attention to the issue of brand communities, which, through the use of online tools have an even more severe impact on brand equity. According to the model, the feedback loop feeds into the brand community. That is, when brand equity is developed and positive consequences realized, this serves to enhance the brand community associated with the particular team. That in turn impacts the development of brand equity (Kerr & Gladden, 2008).

Ross (2006) identified some limitations of Gladden & Milne’s framework. According to Ross, a framework which has its roots in the manufactured goods industry and does not take into account the consumers’ actual experience, could not applied as such in the sport industry. Accordingly, he proposed the Spectator-Based Brand Equity (**SBBE**) model, taking into account the distinctive nature of services in professional sports. His framework is similar to the conceptualization of Berry’s service brand equity model and

is depicted next (Figure 2.6). According to Ross, three dimensions of antecedents contribute to the creation of brand equity: Organization induced antecedents, market induced antecedents and experience induced antecedents.

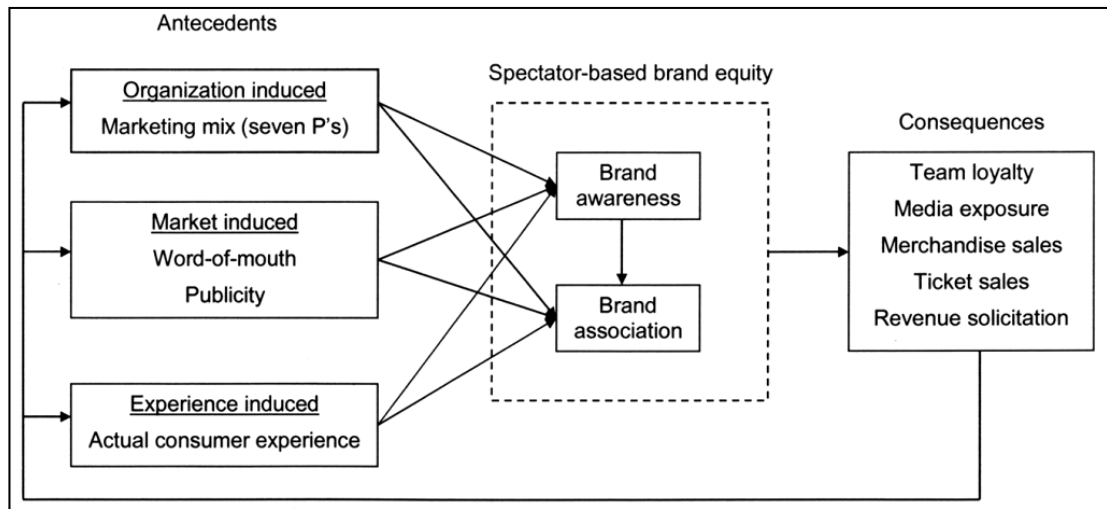


Figure 2.6: Spectator-Based Brand Equity (SBBE) model (Ross, 2006)

Organization induced antecedents are elements produced by the organization and therefore controlled by the management. These variables, referred to as the marketing mix, consist of the traditional tangible goods marketing mix (product, price, promotion, place) as well as the three additional elements of service marketing, namely participants, physical evidence and service process. All these elements contribute directly to brand equity (Ross, 2006; Yoo et al., 2000). As the output and the perceived quality of the football game is uncontrollable these variables are extremely important for the management and branding should be focused on areas external to team performance.

Market induced antecedents refer to such sources of brand information that are uncontrolled by the organization itself. The most notable examples are word-of-mouth communications (WOM) and publicity (Berry, 2000). Consumers might obtain information (awareness) and develop images about a brand from other forms of communication than paid advertising. WOM is even claimed to be more reliable and more influential on consumer behavior than paid advertising (Klouman & Beljulji, 2012).

Experience induced antecedents involves the experience of the actual service provided. As the actual game is difficult to control, sport marketers should focus their efforts on building memorable experiences around the team performance. According to Berry

(2000), if customer experiences differ from organization and market induced communications, customers will trust their experiences. Experience induced antecedents in Ross's model however have a direct influence on brand awareness, in contrast to Berry's model. The framework places a considerable emphasis on the experiences of sport consumers in addition to the more common organization- and market-related antecedents.

Based on Ross (2006), and similar to the work of Kerr & Gladden (2008), **Naik & Gupta (2013)** developed the Viewer-Based Brand Equity Model (VBBE) (Figure 2.7).

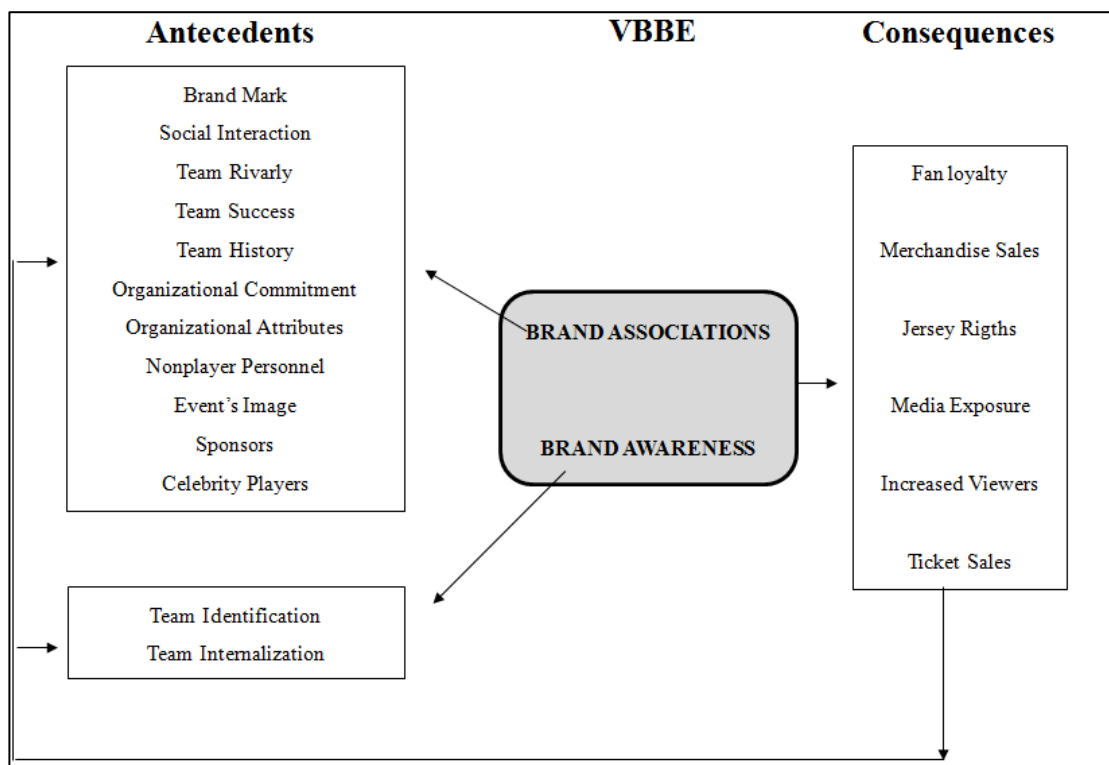


Figure 2.7: Viewer Based Brand Equity (VBBE) conceptual framework (Naik & Gupta, 2013)

The VBBE framework includes individuals who watch sport events on TV or online. The authors suggest that brand awareness and brand associations act as antecedents to VBBE of a sports team and that VBBE results in a number of consequences. They too considered brand equity creation as a cyclical phenomenon, where the consequences, through a feedback loop, impact the antecedents of brand equity.

2.3.4 Operationalization of brand equity in team sports

Several models have been proposed aiming to assist managers in their efforts to build a sport team brand and to operationalize the components of brand equity (e.g. brand awareness and brand image), using the frameworks proposed in the previous section. In addition, several researchers proposed operationalizations of brand equity models focusing only on the brand image dimension of sport brand equity, arguing that brand awareness is usually high for professional clubs in popular sports like soccer (Bauer et al., 2008; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Kaynak et al., 2008; Ross et al., 2006). All these models are presented next, as they form the basis of the adopted customer-based brand equity model in the research at hand.

Gladden & Funk (2002) developed the **Team Association Model (TAM)** which operationalizes the brand image dimension of brand equity. The TAM is the most widely used team brand association scale (Doyle et al., 2012). It adapts Keller’s model in the sport setting taking into account the peculiarities of the sport product. The model specifies 13 dimensions of brand associations that constitute the sport teams’ brand equity. The items are classified into attributes, benefits, and attitudes, being consistent with Keller’s customer-based brand equity model (Table 2.4).

Classification	Item
Attributes	Success
	Star player
	Head coach
	Management
	Logo design
	Stadium
	Product delivery
Benefits	Tradition
	Escape
	Fan identification
	Peer group acceptance
	Nostalgia
Attitudes	Pride in place
	Importance
	Knowledge
	Affect

Table 2.4: The Team Association Model (TAM) (Gladden & Funk, 2002)

Although the TAM intended to operationalize Keller’s model for team sports, it did not measure the uniqueness, favorability or strength of brand associations, which are required in Keller’s model (Bauer et al., 2008). Ross et al. (2006) identified some additional limitations regarding the brand associations of the TAM. According to them, it is questionable and unsupported from the literature that factors influencing attendance and sport consumer motives are in fact team brand associations. In addition, the validity of the scales used, as they are developed from a manufacturer goods perspective and their application in the sport setting is questionable. But perhaps the most fundamental limitation of the TAM model is that the brand association measures relied upon categories identified by the researchers and not by consumers, as it should be.

Bauer, Sauer and Schmitt (2005), based on Gladden & Funk (2002) developed a parsimonious customer-based Brand Equity model in Team Sport (**BETS**) (Table 2.5).

Brand equity component	Item
Awareness	Recognition Familiarity
Product-related attributes	Athletic success Star player(s) Coach Management
Non-product-related attributes	Logo Stadium Stadium atmosphere Regional importance
Benefits	Fan identification Interest of family and friends Nostalgia Escape

Table 2.5: The Brand Equity model in Team Sport (BETS) (Bauer et al., 2005)

The researchers showed that a model less complex than Gladden and Funk’s could be used as an adequate measurement tool for brand equity. The model measured both components of Keller’s brand equity model (e.g. brand awareness and brand image) using fourteen indicators distributed by brand awareness, product-related attributes, non-product-related attributes, and brand benefits (without however distinguishing between Keller’s three types of benefits). If consumers hold a certain degree of

knowledge, brand recall and brand recognition are easily identified. Furthermore, the researchers, testing their model in the German top-tier football league (Bundesliga), showed that brand equity has a positive effect on purchase intention, price premiums, game attendance numbers and brand loyalty.

Ross et al. (2006), using as a starting point that brand associations are consumers' thoughts when thinking of brand, proposed the **Team Brand Association Scale (TBAS)** to measure professional sport team brand associations (Table 2.6).

Brand association
Brand mark
Rivalry
Concessions
Team History
Organizational attributes
Non-player personnel
Stadium community
Team success
Social interaction
Commitment
Team play

Table 2.6: The Team Brand Association Scale (TBAS) (Ross et al., 2006)

The researchers used both qualitative and quantitative work to identify eleven dimensions of relevant associations: non-player personnel, team success, team history, stadium community, team play characteristics, brand mark, commitment, organizational attributes, concessions, social interaction and rivalry. These dimensions have been measured using 41 items. Further analysis revealed that eight dimensions had acceptable reliabilities: non-player personnel team success, team history, stadium community, brand mark, organizational attributes, concessions, and rivalry. Although the TBAS has been empirically tested and has been found to be a reliable tool to measure brand equity both in the intercollegiate as well as in the professional sport setting, it has also some limitations. One of its theoretical drawbacks is that it does not provide a categorization of brand associations into product-related and non-product-related attributes, brand benefits and brand attitudes. In addition, from a practical standpoint, the scale does not obtain ratings of the favorability of the items or the dimensions. For example, participants of the study could only rate the strength of their

association with the “head coach” (an item from the non-player personnel dimension of the TBAS), without mentioning whether the association is favorable or unfavorable. Furthermore, the TBAS treats commitment as an indicator of brand image, although it is more appropriately treated as a part of brand loyalty (Bauer et al., 2008).

Bauer et al. (2008) developed a parsimonious model for measuring brand image in the team sport industry (Table 2.7).

Factor	Item
Product-related attributes	Team Success
	Star player
	Head Coach
	Team performance
Non-product-related attributes	Logo and club colors
	Club’s History and tradition
	Management
	Stadium
	Club’s Culture and values
	Fans
	Sponsor or owner
Regional provenance	
Benefits	Identification
	Pride in place
	Peer group acceptance
	Escape/Get away from it all
	Socializing/Companionship
	Emotions
	Nostalgia/Evoke fond memories
	Entertainment

Table 2.7: Operationalization of brand image (Bauer et al., 2008)

The researchers investigated the importance of brand image to brand loyalty and based their model on Gladden & Funk’s TAM, but addressed several of its limitations. As such, they added several components to operationalize brand associations (product-related attributes, non-product-related attributes, brand benefits and brand attitudes) in order to address the service-related characteristics of football. Their research has been based on fans of German football teams and concluded that benefits fans obtain through the team brand are strongly affected by the brand’s product and non-product related

attributes. Additionally, they operationalized brand loyalty and concluded that brand image plays a significant role in fostering loyal fan behavior.

Kaynak et al. (2008) provided a conceptual framework of various dimensions of brand associations that are predictive of brand loyalty in professional sports (Table 2.8).

Construct	Item
Product-related attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success • Star player • Head Coach • Team performance
Non-product-related attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logo • Tradition • Stadium • Product delivery
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan Identification • Pride • Peer group acceptance • Escape • Nostalgia
Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance • Knowledge • Affective reactions
Behavioral Loyalty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance • Involvement with the team • Involvement with the club
Attitudinal loyalty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitudinal • Intentional

Table 2.8: Operationalization of brand image (Kaynak et al., 2008)

Ross et al. (2008) empirically examined the SBBE model in the professional sport setting (NBA) using the measurement model of the next table (Table 2.9). Specifically, the researchers tried to develop measurements for both brand awareness and brand associations. In order to measure brand awareness, identification (the degree to which a fan identifies with the team) and internalization (the degree to which a fan has incorporated the team into his/her personal identity) have been used. Brand associations are the thoughts that come to mind immediately after the brand is recalled. The model

has been statistically proved to be overall a reliable model for measuring brand equity (Ross et al., 2008).

Brand equity components	Item
Brand associations	Brand mark Rivalry Concessions Social interaction Commitment Team History Organizational attributes Non-player personnel Stadium community Team play Team success
Brand awareness	Identification Internalization

Table 2.9: Measurement model for SBBE (Ross et al., 2008)

Biscaia et al. (2013) made several refinements to the SBBE measurement model by adopting some items based on Bauer et al. (2008) and Gladden & Funk (2002) models in order to adapt to the European professional football context (Table 2.10).

Brand equity component	Item
Brand associations	Brand mark Concessions Social interaction Commitment Team History Organizational attributes Head coach Management Stadium Team Success
Brand awareness	Internalization

Table 2.10: SBBE model adapted to the European professional football context (Biscaia et al., 2013)

2.3.5 Summary

In the team sport industry, the brand is the sport club and the customers are the fans (Bauer et al., 2005; Berry, 2000; Ferrand & Pages, 1999; Villarejo-Ramos & Martin-Velicia, 2007). The brand equity of professional sport teams is derived from the meaning fans attach to the name and logo of their favorite sports team (Gladden & Milne, 1999). Keller's customer-based brand equity model (Keller, 1993) and Berry's service brand model (Berry, 2000) have provided the basis for the conceptualization and operationalization of brand equity in sports. Several sports brand equity models have been proposed and empirically tested, both in the collegiate and professional team sport context (Bauer et al., 2005; Bauer et al., 2008; Biscaia et al., 2013; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Kaynak et al., 2008; Ross et al., 2006; Ross et al., 2008).

Chapter 3. Literature Synthesis

3.1 Social Media, Brand Equity and Sport Teams: How it All Fits Together

The concepts of brand and brand equity gained significant interest in the marketing literature during the last decades (Aaker, 1991; Farquhar, 1989; Keller, 1993; 2003; 2009). Keller (1993) proposed one of the most cited conceptualizations of brand equity by introducing the customer-based brand equity model. Keller argued that brand equity is ultimately derived from the words and actions of consumers. Therefore, the ultimate goal of every marketing program of a brand should be to develop favorable knowledge structures for the brand in the mind of the consumers. Berry (2000), trying to convey Keller's model to the service industry added that the experiences a consumer has with a brand as well as communications which are outside of the control of the brand have a significant impact to the perceptions of the customers about the brand.

Keller's and Berry's models have provided the basis for the conceptualization and operationalization of brand equity in team sports (Bauer et al., 2005; Bauer et al., 2008; Biscaia et al., 2013; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Kaynak et al., 2008; Ross et al., 2006; Ross et al., 2008). Several sport branding researchers highlighted the importance of the components of the service marketing mix to communicate the values of a team as well as market perceptions uncontrollable by the organization itself, as important factors to leverage the brand of the team (Richelieu, 2004; Ross, 2006). In line with this, Richelieu et al. (2011) pointed out that new means of communication and the development of online communities have a large impact on building a football team brand.

The tremendous worldwide growth of social media usage have introduced several new and attractive marketing communication channels to brands and social media are nowadays heavily used across industries for communication and branding reasons (Blaszka, 2011; Constantinides et al., 2008; Hambrick et al., 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Martin, 2012; Pegoraro, 2010). Social media can play a crucial role in building appropriate perceptions and attitudes on a consumer's mind. This is because social media provide a direct communication link to the consumers and can therefore allow organizations to communicate a specific brand image (Wallace et al., 2011). Sport brands are offered the opportunity to communicate with their huge worldwide fan base and Williams & Chinn (2010) see the advantages of sport entities using social media in engaging with their fans and cultivating favorable relationships for encouraging repeat consumption (tickets and merchandise) of the sport product.

Brands can use social media to convey tangible and intangible features to their audiences (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Weinberg, 2009, p.17), using a variety of different communication tools (pictures, videos, comments etc.) (Flinck, 2011). Such offerings enhance the feelings of fun and excitement and consequently the experiences of the consumers. In addition, social media support and facilitate the development of online communities, where consumers engage in two-way communications with the brand and other consumers. Online communities are very popular in team sport, where fans can share experiences and opinions about their common object of interest, which is the team (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Schilhanek, 2008). By monitoring or starting new conversation topics periodically, clubs can gain information of what fans are talking about as well as how often and in what ways they are talking about the club (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Moreover, industry surveys reported that fans who use social media has made them bigger fans of their respective teams (Broughton, 2011) and engaging with their favorite teams via social media increases their time spending to watch their team (Broughton, 2010). In addition, communicating specific facets of the team's image increases the involvement of fans (Ferrand & Pages, 1999), while a strong brand stimulates purchases by fans and is able to attract higher sponsorships (Pons & Standifird, 2007) .

In summary, the literature so far suggests that:

- Brand equity is ultimately derived from the perceptions of the customers about the brand
- Several brand equity models have been proposed and empirically tested in the team sports setting
- The perceptions of the customers can be influenced by marketing actions of the brand itself as well as by communications outside the control of the brand
- Social media are novel marketing tools which are heavily used by both brands and consumers
- Social media affect the creation of brand associations in the minds of consumers
- Sport teams are using social media to engage with and communicate their brand to their fan base
- Fans are using social media to stay in touch and up to date with their club as well as to communicate with other fans
- Social media positively impacts the affiliation of fans towards their club which has implications to the revenues of the club

3.2 Identification of Research Gap

Considering the novelty of the phenomenon of social media as such as well its application in sports, researchers are increasingly calling to address the impact of social media in the sport industry (Brody et al., 2010; Gibbons & Dixon, 2010). In addition, there is considerable interest in the approach that businesses in different sectors take to the management of their social media brand presence (Beer, 2008; Gummerus et al., 2011) and particularly to research how marketing concepts such as brand equity can be implemented in the sport context (Coyle, 2010). The *SportsBusiness Journal* of November 17th, 2008, contained a special section that focused on the ability of the industry to understand the potential of Web 2.0 and social media.

Research to date has mainly focused on the use of online communication as marketing tools (Coyle, 2010; Ioakimidis, 2010; Williams & Chinn, 2010). The use of Twitter by athletes (Hambrick et al., 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Pegoraro, 2010) and sport fans (Blaszka, 2011; Clavio, 2011; Ozsoy, 2011) has been also investigated. However, with regard to the use of social media tools in the context of sports brand equity, little has been published so far. Cooper's (2010) survey of NCAA Division I administrators aimed to gain an understanding of the technologies that athletic departments value regarding branding initiatives. Ventura & Dedeoglu (2013) attempted to find out the impact of marketing programs of Turkish football teams on their brand value. Twitter has been examined as a form of e-WOM for brand related activities (Jansen et al., 2009). More recently, Wallace et al. (2011) integrated the models of Bauer et al. (2008), Kaynak et al. (2008) and Ross et al. (2006) in order to examine the use of Facebook as a brand management tool in college athletics, while, in a similar work, Brand & Klein (2012), based on the work of Kaynak et al. (2008), examined the use of Facebook as an online marketing communication tool in a customer-based brand equity context of professional football clubs. Pronschinske et al. (2012) examined how sport organizations utilize the pre-defined pages in Facebook, which could increase the number of fans in the respective online account of clubs. Finally, Allison (2013) examined Twitter as a fan engagement tool in the context of a strategy for long-term growth of football clubs and Price et al. (2013) explored how English football clubs are coping with Twitter as part of their media relation activities and what are the implications between clubs, players, supporters and journalists.

However, despite the increasing significance of Facebook and Twitter, the platforms received relatively little academic attention to date. This research seeks to partly address this shortcoming. In particular, no research to date has taken a combined understanding

of the use of social media by professional sport clubs in the context of customer-based brand equity. In this context, the current research addresses therefore an identified research gap by understanding of how Facebook is used by a professional team sport organization and how this usage is perceived by its fans. Moreover, to the knowledge of the researcher, it is the first time that Twitter has been examined as a brand management tool of professional football clubs. In this research, posts of two social media tools, Facebook and Twitter, are analyzed from the point of view of Liverpool FC in order to investigate which and how brand attributes of the club are communicated (answering the first research question) as well as from the point of its fans in terms of engagement and perceived brand benefits (answering the second research question).

3.3 The Adopted Customer-based Brand Equity Model

The author draws on previous conceptualizations and operationalizations of sports brand equity and modifies various components (brand attributes and brand benefits) in order to adapt and employ them in the current thesis to fulfill the research purpose. In particular, while the list of brand attributes remains fixed and is presented next (Section 3.3.1), the brand benefits part of study's model (Section 3.3.2) remains open to accessions from interviews with fan clubs, as explained in later sections (Section 3.3.3). The customer-based brand equity model which has been applied in the main as well as in the pilot study, is built on Keller's customer-based brand equity model, as well as on adaptations of Keller's model by Bauer et al. (2008), Biscaia et al. (2013), Gladden & Funk (2002), Kaynak et al. (2008) and Ross et al. (2006). As big EPL clubs enjoy high brand awareness, the research examined only the brand image (associations) dimension of brand equity. Such an approach has been also followed by Bauer et al. (2008), Brand & Klein (2012), Gladden & Funk (2002), Kaynak et al. (2008), Ross et al. (2006) and Wallace et al. (2011).

Brand associations have been broken down into attributes and benefits. The third component of brand associations, brand attitudes, has been not considered in the framework of this thesis as they are very abstract in contrast to the other brand associations (Bauer et al., 2008) and hence difficult to operationalize for the purpose of the research.

Brand attributes have been further divided into product and non-product related attributes. Product related attributes are associated with the physical composition of the product or service (Kaynak et al., 2008) and must be therefore directly connected to the

actual game (Bauer et al., 2008). Non-product related attributes are not directly related to the actual game and therefore do not affect performance when putting them in the context of professional team sport (Bauer et al., 2008).

Benefits relate to the personal value and meaning that an individual attach to the product or service (Keller, 1993). Keller (1993) distinguishes between three types of benefits: experiential, symbolic and functional. However, in the context of the current research, the author does not distinguish between Keller's proposed three-fold benefits, following the suggestion of the literature that in a sport consumption context such a distinction is not clearly possible (Bauer et al., 2005; Gladden & Funk, 2002).

The next sections provide a description of each component of the adopted customer-based brand equity model and explain in detail how it has been applied during the current research.

3.3.1 Brand attributes

Product related attributes

Team Success: Team success is the most common antecedent of the sport brand equity frameworks and has a profound impact on brand awareness and brand equity in general (Bauer et al., 2005; Bauer et al., 2008; Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Kerr & Emery, 2011; Ross et al., 2006; Ross et al., 2008). However, the literature is divided into two main categories. The first category, influenced by Gladden & Funk (2002), views *team success* as the importance of a winning team in the minds of its fans whereas the second category, influenced by Ross et al. (2006) considers *team success* as not only the thoughts regarding the actual success but additionally the perceived quality of the team and its players. In this thesis, following the suggestion of Biscaia et al. (2013), *team success* and *players* have been viewed as two separate constructs as both have an impact on the brand equity of the team. Putting it differently, the success of the team and the presence of a high quality (star) player are both (independent) reasons for a fan to follow a team either live or through TV/internet (Naik & Gupta, 2013). Team success includes also the perceived characteristics of the team (quality of the team, style of play of the team) because of their strong relation (Biscaia et al., 2013).

Star Player: This construct deals with the presence of high quality and highly recognizable (star or celebrity) players. Celebrity players have the power to enhance brand equity (brand awareness) of a team in the long-run as well as to increase merchandize and ticket sales (Gladden et al., 1998). What is more, star players become

an important brand association for foreign fans. An excellent example is David Beckham whose move from Manchester United to Real Madrid can be easily explained by marketing (Hatfield, 2003) and financial criteria (Kerr, 2009). Finally, the preference of particular club by satellite supporters can be heavily impacted by the presence of a player (Kerr & Emery, 2011). For Asian supporters, the presence of a native player in a European team is particularly important to support that team (Chadwick, 2007).

Head Coach: This construct is another area of differences in the literature. Ross et al. (2006) included *head coach* under the umbrella of *non-player personnel*. In this thesis, the construct *non-player personnel* has been separated into *head coach*, *management* and *sponsor*, as proposed by several researchers in the literature (Bauer et al., 2008; Biscaia et al., 2013; Gladden & Funk, 2002). In fact, coaches are becoming increasingly famous during the years and are associated with success or even as an integral part of a particular team, as the case of Sir Alex Ferguson and Manchester United (Biscaia et al., 2013). Others, such as Bill Shankly or Robert Paisley (both Liverpool FC), remain iconic figures in their club folklore.

Non-product related attributes

Brand Mark: Under Gladden & Funk (2002), brand mark has been cited as *logo*, covering thereby the *logo*, the *colors* and the *uniforms* of the team. Similarly, Ross et al. (2006) argued that there are three constituents of *brand mark* namely the *logo*, *symbol* and the *colors* of a team, a view also supported by Ross et al. (2008) and Naik & Gupta (2013). A logo can be used to introduce a team as well as to change the image of a team (Gladden & Milne, 1999). The logo and colors of a team's shirt are often responsible for their nicknames of as is the case of Arsenal (the gunners), Liverpool FC (the reds) or Chelsea (the blues). Additionally, the colors of a team can be associated with a whole region. A case in point is FC Barcelona's away shirt which has the colors of the flag of the Region of Catalonia. Another notable example is the MLB club New York Yankees who have left their uniforms unchanged since 1936 and as a result, their pinstripes and intertwined "NY" insignia often come to mind whenever one mentions the franchise. Particularly for Liverpool FC the anthem "You'll never walk alone" is heavily affiliated with the club, as is its acronym YNWA, which is several times included in Facebook posts and tweets. Finally, the mascot of the team has been also included under this brand attribute.

Management: Often part of a larger construct called *non-player-personnel* (Ross et al., 2006; Ross et al., 2008), *management* will be considered as a separate component in this

model, as proposed (Bauer et al., 2008; Gladden & Funk, 2002) and validated in the literature (Biscaia et al., 2013). Gladden & Funk (2001) emphasize the importance of the management to garner trust from fans in that the fans believe management is doing its best to satisfy their needs. Biscaia et al. (2013) highlights the importance of president-figures such as Pinto da Costa (Porto FC). In addition, several take-overs have resulted into heavy controversies or have been called off because of huge demonstrations from fans, as the case of Murdoch's efforts to take control over Manchester United.

Club's History & Tradition: Widely accepted in the literature (Bauer et al., 2008; Biscaia et al., 2013; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Naik & Gupta, 2013; Ross et al., 2006; Ross et al., 2008) a team's history and tradition has a severe impact on fans' perceptions. It deals with thoughts regarding the team, winning records, past success and general history of the team, which includes also tragedies, as for example the Hillsborough tragedy of Liverpool FC fans. In other occasions, historical information is the origin of nicknames, as the case of EPL club Everton, who are nicknamed "the toffees", due to their association with two toffee shops near their home ground (ToffeeWeb, 2013). Marketers also very often use historical information (historical wins, legendary matches, traditional jerseys) to form associations or to promote events. For instance, with a view to an upcoming derby, legendary matches of the past are used to increase affiliation and fan attendance.

Club's Culture & Values: The perception of service brands is strongly influenced by the organizational culture and the behavior of the organization's members (de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2001). The term has been used by Bauer et al. (2005) but is also known from previous research as organizational attributes. According to Ross et al. (2006, p.270), organizational attributes are defined as "*thoughts regarding specific attributes that characterize the organization as whole; organization's loyalty to fans, management actions and brand personality*". It can be seen as opposite to fan loyalty (Naik & Gupta, 2013). Richelieu (2003) argued that the values of the team should be carefully communicated and there must be congruence between team values and the way they are understood by the fans. Bauer et al. (2005), providing some examples of the different culture and values of German teams refers to Bayern Munich as having the image of a celebrity team and to FC Schalke as a working class team.

Event's Image: Previous conceptual models have emphasized the importance of the conference or schedule (Gladden & Milne, 1999; Gladden et al., 1998) or the concept of the league (Kerr & Gladden, 2008) as an antecedent of brand equity. Although not

applicable for North American sports where the league is more of a governing body, it holds in the European sports context where the league is characterized by a system of promotion and relegation. Membership of such a league cannot be underestimated as a club seeks to create and maintain brand equity in the foreign marketplace (Kerr & Gladden, 2008). As a case in point, the EPL can be seen by hundreds of million people worldwide (Premierleague, 2013), making clubs such as Manchester United, Liverpool FC or Chelsea widely known. The success of these clubs, on and off the pitch, has in turn boosted the brand equity of the league. But the same is true the other way around. Because of the quality and reputation of the EPL, inclusion in the league can only boost the brand equity of lesser-known clubs (Kerr & Gladden, 2008). Consistent with Aaker's notion of perceived quality, it can be argued that fans tend to gravitate to products that represent the pinnacle in their respective sport (Kerr & Gladden, 2008). Finally, because of the high competition amongst EPL members, this component includes also *team rivalry*, which has been proposed as a separate construct (Ross et al., 2006) or has been entirely left out by others (Biscaia et al., 2013).

Sponsor: Sports fans express higher levels of loyalty towards those companies that financially support their favorite team (Kerr, 2008). The image of the sponsor can have spillover effects on the brand image of the club (Bauer et al., 2008). Great examples are sponsors trying to attract attention by sponsoring stadiums as the Allianz Arena in Munich or the Emirates Stadium in London. Keller (1993) claimed that, when a sponsor becomes linked with the event, some of these associations with the event may become indirectly associated with the brand. In line with this, Kerr & Gladden (2008) suggested that the involvement of high-profile parties can enhance the perceived quality of a sports organization. Potential fans may reconsider the team brand, especially if they consider those associated with it to be reputable and high-quality.

Fans: Fans are an essential part of the team sport product and can therefore influence the club's brand image (Bauer et al., 2008). Fans have a large impact on other business segments such as sponsorship and media, which would otherwise play a much weaker role in the sport industry (Gladden et al., 2001; Piipponen, 2011). There is also an increasing number of fans, whether local or international, who build offline or online communities and follow their team via TV or internet (Buehler et al., 2006; Dolles & Soderman, 2005/1; Kerr & Gladden, 2008). These spectators form a major group of buying customers for the team sport product (Bauer et al., 2008; Dolles & Soderman, 2005/1; 2005/5; Piipponen, 2011) and are vitally important for the brand equity of the team (Gladden et al., 2001; Kerr & Gladden, 2008; Naik & Gupta, 2013).

Stadium/Arena: Several researchers discuss the importance of the facilities to impact the brand equity of the team (Gladden & Milne, 1999; Ross et al., 2006). Kerr (2009) points out the intimate relationships which are developed between fans and the home arena, although satellite supporters are given rarely the opportunity to visit it. Sometimes stadiums are used to instill fear into the opposition by using signs such as Liverpool FC's "This is Anfield" sign right at the exit of the tunnel to the pitch. Modern stadiums such as FC Barcelona's Camp Nou have become tourist attractions offering access to the club's museum. Ross et al. (2006) proposes the use of *Concessions* at the stadium as a separate brand association. In this study, these constructs will be considered as one.

3.3.2 Brand benefits

Fan Identification: According to Gladden & Funk (2002), identification with a particular team fulfills a sport consumer's need to affiliate with something successful or desirable and can therefore be regarded as a form of brand association (brand benefit in particular). This view has been also adopted by several researchers (Bauer et al., 2005; 2008; Kaynak et al., 2008). It is important to fans to be seen as such by others. A related concept is what studies call "Basking In Reflected Glory (BIRG)", e.g. that the consumers of the sports product so strongly identify with their favorite teams that they attempt to proclaim affiliation with a successful club even when they do not influence the team's success (Mason, 1999).

Escape: Temporary escape from daily stress can be linked to professional team sport experience as a fan (Gladden & Funk, 2002). This thesis follows the approach of Bauer et al. (2008), Gladden & Funk (2002) and Kaynak et al. (2008) sharing the view that people follow team sport as an escape from their daily troubles or routines as well as in order to find fulfillment and contentment. By doing so, they often participate in rituals (particular dressing code, songs, etc.) of their team.

Social Interaction: Deals with the idea of associating with other fans of the team or friends (Ross et al., 2006). As an individual's decision to follow (whether offline or online) a particular team is influenced by friends and/or family members, a team can experience higher levels of loyalty from fans if friends and/or family members follow the same team. Thus, it incorporates Gladden & Funk's (2002) *peer group acceptance* component (if a consumer feels that friends and family approve the following or supporting of a specific team, all constituents of the consumption experience will be

viewed more favorably) as well as the construct of Bauer et al. (2008) *socialization and companionship*, the latter dealing with developing and maintaining relations with other fans. Wallace et al. (2011) argue that clubs portray the game experience through socialization. Moreover, it can be argued that TV or internet spectators also tend to view matches in the company of friends and/or family members either at home or gathering at pubs and bars (Naik & Gupta, 2013; Premierleague, 2013).

Emotions: Sport elicits strong emotions. The bond between the fan and the sports team is stronger than in any other industry (Bauer et al., 2005; Bauer et al., 2008; Richelieu, 2004; Underwood et al., 2001). Fans often view football teams as an extension of themselves and often experience feelings of joy, pride or even ecstasy but also frustration and worry as well (Bauer et al., 2008). For fans, team success is personal success and team failure is personal failure (Richelieu et al., 2011).

Entertainment: Sport is often described as part of the entertainment industry (Avgerinou, 2007; Bauer et al., 2005; Bauer et al., 2008; Buehler et al., 2006; Dolles & Soderman, 2005/1; 2005/5; Kerr, 2009; Piipponen, 2011; Richelieu, 2004; Schilhaneck, 2008), although sport has certain individual characteristics that distinguishes it from other industries (Buehler et al., 2006). Entertainment is an important factor for both stadium attendees and supporters viewing the match through TV or internet and serves also as motivators for spectators and fan behavior (Bauer et al., 2008). Entertainment can be also in the form of receiving up to date news for the club or participating in contests and polls (Brand & Klein, 2012).

3.3.3 How to apply the customer-based brand equity model

The proposed customer-based brand equity model described previously is divided into two parts: The first part, which is open to confirmation by the current study and includes the brand attributes, and the second part, that is open to development and confirmation by the current study and includes the brand benefits. In particular, the list of brand attributes (product and non-product related) remains fixed and open to confirmation by the study as it forms the categories to which Liverpool FC's posts have been assigned to. Brand attributes are well-defined and widely used in the literature and the model has been used as a guide map in order to examine which of these are communicated through Liverpool FC's Facebook and Twitter accounts.

On the contrary, the brand benefits section of the model has been left open to confirmation as well as to further development by the study. That is, although brand

benefits have been also widely acknowledged in the literature, the research aims not only to confirm their presence and resonance amongst fan club members but seeks to potentially extend the list of brand benefits perceived by fans. Such an uneven outcome in the approach is justified by the novelty of the phenomenon investigated. Brand attributes are directly or indirectly related to the actual game (Bauer et al., 2008; Kaynak et al., 2008) and the current study is designed to test which of them are part of Liverpool FC’s online posts. Brand benefits however have been only examined so far with regard to fans who actually watch a game live, either at the stadium or on television. It is therefore reasonable to assume that besides the brand benefits already identified in the literature, additional brand benefits might result from the social media interaction of fans with their club.

The following table (Table 3.1) provides an overview of the model described in the previous sections.

Association	Component	Brief Description
Brand attributes	Team Success	Success of the team, quality/style of play of the team
	Star Player	High quality and/or highly recognizable players
	Head Coach	Successful, charismatic or iconic head coach
	Brand Mark	The logo, mascot, colors and uniforms of the team
	Management	The executive management, presence of presidents-figures
	Club’s History & Tradition	Winning records, past success, tragedies, legendary matches and players
	Club’s Culture & Values	Values/culture of the team, its role in the community it operates
	Event’s Image	The image of the competition or the opponent (rivalry)
	Sponsor	The image of the sponsor, its association with the club
Brand benefits	Fans	Not just customers, essential part of a unique product
	Stadium	The arena, facilities, concessions at the stadium
	Fan Identification	Affiliation with something successful or desirable
	Escape	Temporary escape from daily stress, feelings of fulfillment and contentment, performing rituals
	Social Interaction	Associating with other fans of the team or friends, social approval when follow a team
	Emotions	Feelings of joy, pride ecstasy but also frustration and worry
	Entertainment	Entertainment/information provided to supporters
<i>Other</i>	<i>To be potentially identified during pilot/main study</i>	

Table 3.1: Applied customer-based brand equity model (source: Author, adapted from Bauer et al., 2008; Biscaia et al., 2013; Kaynak et al., 2008; Ross et al., 2001)

Chapter 4. Research Questions, Aims and Objectives

The **Research Aims** are stated as follows:

- *To provide an understanding of how Liverpool FC uses Facebook and Twitter in the context of customer-based brand equity*
- *To compare the perceptions of UK and Greek fan clubs regarding the usage of Facebook and Twitter by Liverpool FC*

The **Research Objectives** are stated as follows:

1. *To analyze the content posted by Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter in terms of communication tools*

Addressing this objective provides an understanding of the number, frequency, and type of communication tools used (text, picture, video etc.) by Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter.

2. *To analyze the content posted by Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter in terms of brand attributes*

The content posted by Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter will be assigned to the categories of brand attributes (product related and non-product related) of the adopted customer-based brand equity model and an understanding of their number and frequency will be provided.

3. *To analyze and compare the content posted by Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter during onseason and offseason*

In order to address this objective, a statistical analysis of the posts of Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter in terms of frequency and type of brand attributes will be conducted for both time periods (onseason, offseason) under investigation.

4. *To analyze the responses of the fans in Facebook and Twitter in terms of engagement*

Addressing this objective provides quantitative insights on the responses of the fans in terms of number, frequency and type of interaction for both social media

tools. Engagement will be addressed by evaluating key responding features of Facebook (“Like”, “Comment”, “Share”) and Twitter (“Reply”, “Retweet”, “Favorite”). In addition, statistical associations between brand attributes and fan responses during both time periods (onseason and offseason) will be identified.

5. *To analyze the responses of UK and Greek fan club members in Facebook and Twitter in terms of engagement*

Addressing this objective provides more qualitative insights on the responses of members of fan clubs in UK and Greece. Engagement is again measured by evaluating key responding features of Facebook (“Like”, “Comment”, “Share”) and Twitter (“Reply”, “Retweet”, “Favorite”).

6. *To identify specific brand benefits that UK and Greek fan club members perceive in Facebook and Twitter*

Addressing this objective provides insights on key brand benefits that UK and Greek fan club members perceive by interacting with Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter and compares these benefits with the benefits described in the adopted customer-based brand equity model.

7. *To analyze the effects of Facebook and Twitter in the consumption behavior of UK and Greek fan club members as well as on Liverpool FC’s revenues*

At first, intentions of the fan clubs in UK and Greece will be captured in order to identify whether or not social media interaction changed their consumption patterns in terms of match tickets and/or memorabilia buys. Secondly, and with a view to enhance and triangulate the results, two interviews with Liverpool FC executives have been used to identify whether or not Liverpool FC’s use of Facebook and Twitter has indeed affected the revenues of the club.

8. *To suggest how Liverpool FC can improve its usage of Facebook and Twitter in the context of customer-based brand equity*

Based on the responses of the members of the fan clubs, the research makes suggestions towards the improvement of the social media usage by Liverpool FC.

Following the stated aims and objectives and addressing directly the identified research gap, the research answers the following **Research Questions**:

- **RQ1:** *How does Liverpool FC use Facebook and Twitter in the context of customer-based brand equity?*
 - **RQ1a:** *What types of communication tools are used?*
 - **RQ1b:** *What brand attributes are used?*
 - **RQ1c:** *What are the differences between offseason and onseason posts?*
 - **RQ1d:** *How are fans engaging with content in Facebook and Twitter?*
 - **RQ1e:** *How are the revenues affected?*

- **RQ2:** *How do UK and Greek fan clubs perceive Liverpool FC's usage of Facebook and Twitter?*
 - **RQ2a:** *How are fan club members engaging with content in Facebook and Twitter?*
 - **RQ2b:** *What brand benefits do they perceive?*
 - **RQ2c:** *How is their consumption behavior affected?*
 - **RQ2d:** *What improvements do they suggest?*

Chapter 5. Research Methodology

This section provides a description of the methodological approach that has been used during the main study. The same approach, although to a smaller extent has been also used for the pilot study.

5.1 Research Approach

The thesis combines both deductive and inductive reasoning. In the deductive approach, the process of developing the research question is strictly theory guided and the data collected are analyzed in respect to a prior established theoretical framework (Malhotra & Birks, 2006, p.141). With regard to the research at hand, the theory of customer-based brand equity as well as models of sport brand equity and the usage of social media tools from a marketing theory perspective are presented. Then, a content analysis of Liverpool FC's Facebook and Twitter accounts has been conducted and posts have been categorized to communication tools and brand attributes based on theories and constructs derived from the literature.

In the inductive approach, theoretical frameworks are seen as restrictive and counter-creative for the researcher's perspective. The theory is the outcome of the research and observations lead to generalized inferences (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.13). In the framework of the current research, the inductive approach has been implemented as follows: With the findings of the social media content analysis in mind, questionnaires have been distributed and interviews have been conducted (focus group and one-to-one), in order to explore the perceptions of fan clubs in UK and Greece about the clubs' social media usage, to identify links between social media usage and revenue increases as well as to confirm the brand benefits of the adopted model and/or identify new brand benefits that fans perceive because of their online interaction with the football club.

5.2 Research Strategy

This study adopted the case study approach as its research strategy. According to Yin (2009, p.18), a case study is an empirical inquiry that

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident

Yin argues that the case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points. Therefore, it relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.

Others also highlight that various data collection techniques may be employed (interviews, observation, questionnaires etc.) in the case study approach and are likely to be used in combination for triangulation purposes (Saunders et al., 2009, p.146). In this thesis, Liverpool FC's usage of Facebook and Twitter has been selected as the case study, as described below. Multiple sources of evidence have been used (content analysis, focus group interviews, one to one interviews, questionnaire, as described in section 5.6 hereby), which were combined for triangulation purposes, while the theoretical frameworks of sports brand equity have been used to guide the data collection and analysis process.

In addition to the above, the case study approach has been decided to be appropriate for the research at hand for a number of other reasons:

- It has considerable ability to generate answers to the question “why?” as well as the “what?” and “how?” questions (Saunders et al., 2009, p.146), which applies to the stated research questions in this thesis.
- It can be used when a holistic, in-depth exploration of phenomenon is required and when the individual viewpoints of participants is important (Tellis, 1997a), which is in line with the goal of the thesis to gain a deep understanding of the observed phenomena and to compare the views of UK and Greek fan clubs.
- It is especially of advantage when the literature on the issue is poor or scarce (Jacobson, 2003 in Kerr, 2008), which is indeed the case about the literature concerning social media usage of professional football clubs in the context of customer-based brand equity.
- It has been increasingly adopted in football-related marketing studies (McCarthy et al., 2013; Tapp, 2004; Tapp & Clowes, 2002) and as a vehicle to examine sport fans (Heinonen, 2002; Kerr, 2008; Ozsoy, 2011)
- It has been used to examine the content of social media sites and online communities (Brand & Klein, 2012; Gummerus et al., 2011; Hambrick et al., 2010; Wallace et al., 2011)

5.2.1 Case selection

Liverpool FC and Facebook and Twitter have been selected from the entire population of teams and used social media tools of the EPL during the season 2013/2014. The EPL has been chosen for several reasons. Stake (1995 in Kerr, 2009, p.109) explained that it is beneficiary to select cases which are “*easy to get to and hospitable to our inquiry*”. EPL is amongst the most profitable leagues in the world (Deloitte, 2012), enjoying global popularity and recognition. EPL clubs are amongst the most valuable football brands worldwide (Brand Finance, 2014). In Deloitte’s report about the highest earning football clubs, six EPL clubs made it to the top-20 for two consecutive years (Deloitte, 2013). The report rank the clubs in terms of their ability to generate revenue from matchday ticket and corporate hospitality sales, broadcast rights (including distributions from participation in domestic leagues, cups and European club competitions) and sponsorship, merchandising and other commercial operations. Social media tools are widely used in UK (Eurostat, 2012) and highly used by EPL teams and fans. Furthermore, the web offerings of the football clubs are solely or primarily presented in the English language, facilitating the collection of data. The EPL club as well as the two social media tools have been selected as described in the next sections. In addition, the selection procedure of the Greek and UK fan clubs is also described.

5.2.2 Selection of Facebook and Twitter

Two social media tools that provided the content for both pilot and main research have been purposively selected by identifying the total range of social media offerings of each EPL club of the season 2013/2014 and selecting the two most prominent of them. At first, the official EPL web site (www.premierleague.com) has been visited (August 2013), in order to follow the links to the official web site of each club of the season 2013/2014 (20 teams). Each team’s website has been examined by following the first and second level links in order to determine the information posted and the social media tools available. While most of the sites offered multilingual environments, the examination has been made only in the English version. Two kinds of offerings were of particular interest: Media-related content and tools that provided opportunities for user interaction, other than betting or e-commerce (e.g. online purchasing tickets or online merchandise sale). No distinction has been made between free services, services that required registration or services that required a fee. Several official team websites linked to team-authorized social networking, forums, or blog sites. Following the

approach used by Ioakimidis (2010), if an official team website linked to a league site or to a non-team site offering media services specifically related to the team, they were regarded as an offering of the team.

The social media offerings of the clubs are provided in alphabetic order in the following table (Table 5.1). Fourteen (14) distinct categories of social media tools have been identified. The “x” in a particular cell of the table means that the social media tool has been found at the web site of the respective EPL club.

EPL Club	Blogs	Facebook	Flickr	Forum	Foursquare	Google+	Instagram	LinkedIn	Pinterest	RSS	Twitter	Tumblr	Wechat	Youtube	TOTAL
Arsenal FC	x	x		x						x	x				5
Aston Villa	x	x				x		x		x	x			x	7
Cardiff		x								x	x				3
Chelsea FC	x	x		x	x	x	x			x	x		x	x	10
Crystal Palace		x								x	x				3
Everton FC	x	x		x						x	x		x		6
Fulham FC		x			x	x	x	x			x			x	7
Hull City		x								x	x				3
Liverpool FC	x	x					x		x	x	x	x		x	8
Man City		x						x			x				3
Man Utd	x	x		x							x				4
Newcastle Utd		x	x			x	x	x			x			x	7
Norwich		x								x	x				3
Southampton		x								x	x				3
Stoke		x								x	x				3
Sunderland	x	x				x					x				4
Swansea		x								x	x				3
Tottenham H.		x									x				2
West Brom		x								x	x				3
West Ham		x									x				2
Total	7	20	1	4	2	5	4	4	1	13	20	1	2	5	

Table 5.1: EPL clubs of the season 2013/2014 and their social media offerings (source: Author)

The three most widely used tools have been Facebook, Twitter, and RSS (Table 5.2). In particular, every EPL club had an official Facebook and Twitter page (20/20). RSS is

used by 65% of the teams (13/20). Accordingly, Facebook and Twitter have been selected for the remaining of the research.

Social Media Tool	Number of clubs used
Facebook	20
Twitter	20
RSS	13

Table 5.2: Top-3 social media tools used by EPL teams (source: Author)

5.2.3 Selection of Liverpool FC

The selection of the football club, which served as the research case in both pilot and main study, has been purposively selected from the EPL. The rationale behind the selection has been the usage of the two previously selected social media tools, the global appeal of the club in terms of fans and social media followers, its social media followers particularly in UK and Greece as well as the presence of fan clubs in UK and Greece. All the above, restricted by the availability of data.

The previous section showed that all EPL clubs make use of Facebook and Twitter. As such, the pool of case study candidates consisted initially of all EPL clubs of the season 2013/2014. The table below shows the top six clubs of the EPL during the 2013/2014 season in terms of Facebook and Twitter followers in a descending order (Table 5.3).

EPL club	Facebook fans	EPL club	Twitter followers
Manchester United	39.338.095	Arsenal FC	3.339.078
Chelsea FC	21.556.812	Chelsea FC	3.239.599
Arsenal FC	18.890.025	Liverpool FC	2.261.621
Liverpool FC	14.573.896	Manchester United	1.703.711
Manchester City	8.304.433	Manchester City	1.421.001
Tottenham Hotspurs	3.546.648	Tottenham Hotspurs	743.703

Table 5.3: Top six EPL clubs in terms of Facebook and Twitter followers (source: Author, adapted from Socialbakers, 2014)

Regarding local fans (i.e. fans living in UK), Manchester United and Liverpool FC are the ones with the highest number of Facebook fans (Table 5.4) (Socialbakers, 2014).

EPL Club		UK-based Facebook fans
1	Manchester United	1.549.870
2	Liverpool FC	1.158.448
3	Arsenal FC	811.393
4	Chelsea FC	616.251
5	Tottenham Hotspurs	305.179
6	Manchester City	236.107

Table 5.4: UK based Facebook fans of EPL clubs (source: Author, adapted from Socialbakers, 2014)

However, the majority of social media fans are living outside UK. Global fan following of the Premier League is 1.46 billion – or 70% of the world’s estimated 2.08 billion football fans (Premierleague, 2013). This global appeal of the EPL is reflected in Football Industry’s (2013) analysis regarding the geographic location of Facebook fans of the 2012/2013 EPL clubs. The analysis reveals the degree of internationalization of the clubs, computing the percentage of fans from outside the UK to the total fan base. Only 5 of the 20 clubs from the 2012/2013 season had a percentage lower than 50% in this ratio. The next table (Table 5.5) shows the top six clubs in terms of internationalization. Chelsea is the club that has the most international fan base, being comprised by 96% of fans located outside the UK.

EPL Club		% of Facebook fans living outside UK
1	Chelsea FC	96%
2	Manchester United	95%
3	Manchester City	95%
4	Arsenal FC	94%
5	Liverpool FC	90%
6	Fulham FC	88%

Table 5.5: Degree of internationalization of EPL clubs (source: Author, adapted from Football Industry, 2013)

Regarding fans of EPL clubs living in Greece, Manchester United, Liverpool FC, Arsenal FC and Chelsea FC can be found in the top ten list of football brands with the most Facebook fans (Table 5.6) (Socialbakers, 2014). What is more impressive, Manchester United and Liverpool FC can claim more Facebook fans than Greece’s

biggest and most famous club, Olympiacos FC. Liverpool FC has even started an official Twitter account in the Greek language run by their official supporters' branch in Thessaloniki. Although there are a lot of fan clubs in Greece, very few of them are officially recognized by the clubs. Only Arsenal FC, Chelsea FC, Liverpool FC and Manchester United have official fan clubs in Greece.

Club	Facebook fans in Greece
FC Barcelona (Spain)	331.976
Real Madrid (Spain)	236.841
Manchester United (UK)	154.505
AC Milan (Italy)	135.208
Liverpool FC (UK)	130.809
Olympiacos FC (Greece)	123.311
Chelsea FC (UK)	95.949
Arsenal FC (UK)	92.855
Juventus Turin (Italy)	88.041
Bayern Munich (Germany)	71.740

Table 5.6: Top-10 football clubs of Facebook fans living in Greece (source: Author, adapted from Socialbakers, 2014)

It becomes clear from the above discussion that the pool of case study candidates has been limited to four teams (Table 5.7).

Club
Manchester United
Arsenal FC
Chelsea FC
Liverpool FC

Table 5.7: Pool of case study candidates (source: Author)

The author selected Liverpool FC for two reasons. First, Liverpool FC has two different fan clubs in Greece (based in Athens and Thessaloniki), which facilitates the data collection process. Secondly and most important, he has established connections with fan club members of the Thessaloniki fan club, which again have been thought to facilitate the research process.

5.2.4 Selection of fan clubs

In order to approach and select the fan clubs to participate in the focus group interviews and the distribution of the questionnaires, the researcher contacted Ms. Jane Kavanagh, Supporters Club Relationship Manager of Liverpool FC, to find out the number of the officially recognized Liverpool FC fan clubs in UK and Greece as well as their population (number of members). There were two fan clubs in Greece (Athens and Thessaloniki) and 44 fan clubs in UK (England, Scotland, Wales). Both Greek fan clubs have been contacted. The decision of which UK fan clubs to contact has been based on localization (most preferably one in the nearest region of the club's home) and population criteria, according to the data provided by Ms. Jane Kavanagh. The table below (Table 5.8) shows which fan clubs have been contacted as well as their form of participation, if any. The procedure stopped when the two Greek fan clubs as well as three UK fan clubs agreed to participate in both the interview and the questionnaire process. Such amount of data has been considered enough and appropriate, taking into account the goals as well as time and resources restrictions which applied to the study at hand.

	Fan club (home town)	Members	First Contact Date	Interview	Questionnaire
1	Thessaloniki	124	01/11/2013	YES	YES
2	Athens	249	15/04/2014	YES	YES
3	Merseyside	102	15/04/2014	NO	YES
4	London	350	15/04/2014	YES	YES
5	Nottingham	250	15/04/2014	NO	NO
6	Leeds	100	15/05/2014	NO	NO
7	Caldicot & Gloucester	62	15/05/2014	YES	YES
8	Glasgow	60	15/05/2014	YES	YES
9	Newcastle	50	15/05/2014	NO	NO

Table 5.8: Selection and participation of fan clubs during the research (source: Author)

Ms. Jane Kavanagh established the initial introductions to the fan clubs through email. However, additional attempts have been made by email and phone by the author. The fan club of Nottingham refused to participate, while the fan clubs of Leeds and Newcastle have not responded to emails and phone calls made by the author. The Merseyside fan club agreed to participate only in the questionnaire survey. However, they finally have not contributed at all. Both Greek fan clubs agreed to participate. As

such, one Greek fan club has been chosen for the pilot study (Thessaloniki fan club) while the remaining four fan clubs (Athens, London, Glasgow and Caldicot & Gloucester) which agreed to participate both in the interview as well as in the questionnaire, have been chosen for the main study.

5.3 Research Methods

In choosing the research methods, the researcher can choose to use either a single data collection technique and corresponding analysis procedures (mono method) or use more than one data collection technique and analysis procedure to answer the research question (multiple methods). A multiple method approach is gradually more advocated within business and management research where a single research study may use a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques and procedures as well as primary and secondary data (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.630).

The multiple method choice has been adopted in the framework of this thesis. In particular, one form of it, the mixed method approach has been adopted. The mixed method research uses quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques and analysis procedures either at the same time (parallel) or one after the other (sequential) but does not combine them. This means that, although mixed method research uses both quantitative and qualitative world views at the research methods stage, quantitative data are analyzed quantitatively and qualitative data are analyzed qualitatively (Saunders et al., 2009, p.153).

The multiple sources of evidence and methods in the research at hand include content analysis, focus group interviews, questionnaires and one to one interviews. The study involved quantitative and qualitative methods for the content analysis and the analysis of the questionnaires, as well as qualitative methods for the analysis of the focus group and the one to one interviews. In addition, statistical analysis of the data collected by the content analysis and the questionnaires has been also undertaken. Such an approach addresses the research topic in the most efficient way as the combined use of quantitative and qualitative methods resolve any gaps that each of the methods would leave when applied alone and offers another way to triangulate the results of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.634; Saunders et al., 2009, p.146).

In particular, the content analysis of Liverpool FC's Facebook and Twitter accounts has been used to categorize the posts according to communication tools as well as according to the brand attributes of the adopted customer-based brand equity model. The

categorized data, along with fan responses, has been then quantitatively analyzed. Focus group interviews have been used to confirm the perceived brand benefits of the adopted customer-based brand equity model and to identify new as a result of the interaction of Greek and UK fan clubs through Facebook and Twitter with Liverpool FC. In addition, these interviews provided the first input regarding the impact of fan behavior to the revenues of the club with the form of increased desire to buy match tickets, memorabilia or affiliation to sponsors. Such qualitative analysis is very helpful as a source of new data which can be later quantitatively tested (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.634). Questionnaires to UK and Greek fan club members have been used to investigate the resonance of communication tools and brand attributes of the adopted customer-based brand equity model, the resonance of the brand benefits of the model or any additional benefits which might have been identified during the focus group interviews, as well as to quantitatively analyze any changes in the consumption behavior of the fans. Finally, one to one interviews with Liverpool FC management staff provided the opportunity to understand the overall reasoning behind Liverpool FC’s posts as well as to further investigate the relationship between social media usage and revenue increase. Each method is described in detail in the next sections. The next figures depict the methodological approach explained so far and show how it contributes to the stated research questions (Figure 5.1) as well as how it is used as part of the triangulation process (Figure 5.2).

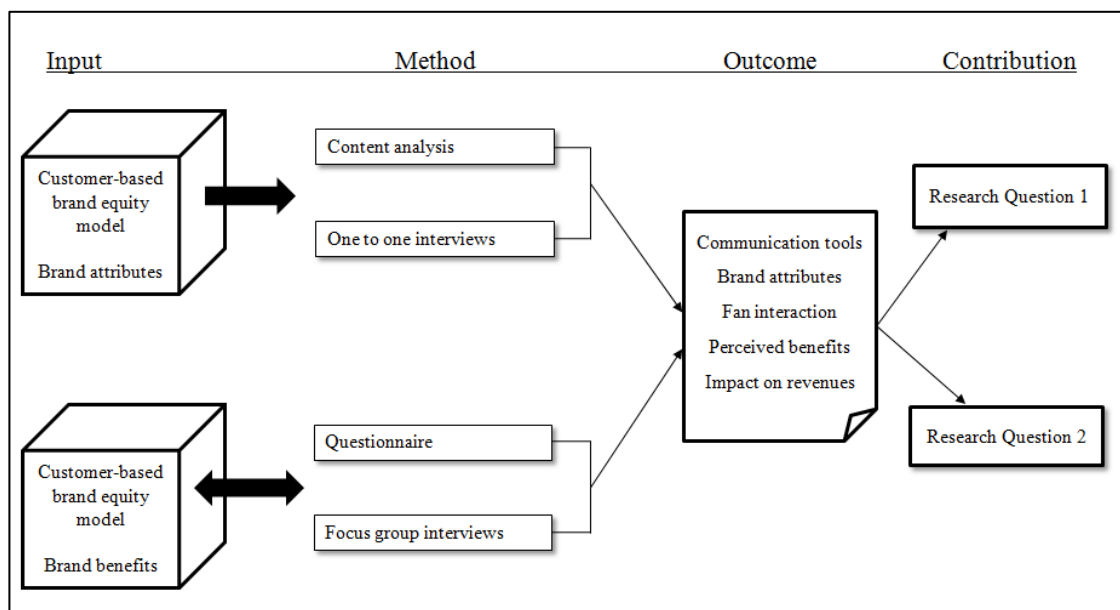


Figure 5.1: Methodological approach and contribution to research questions (source: Author)

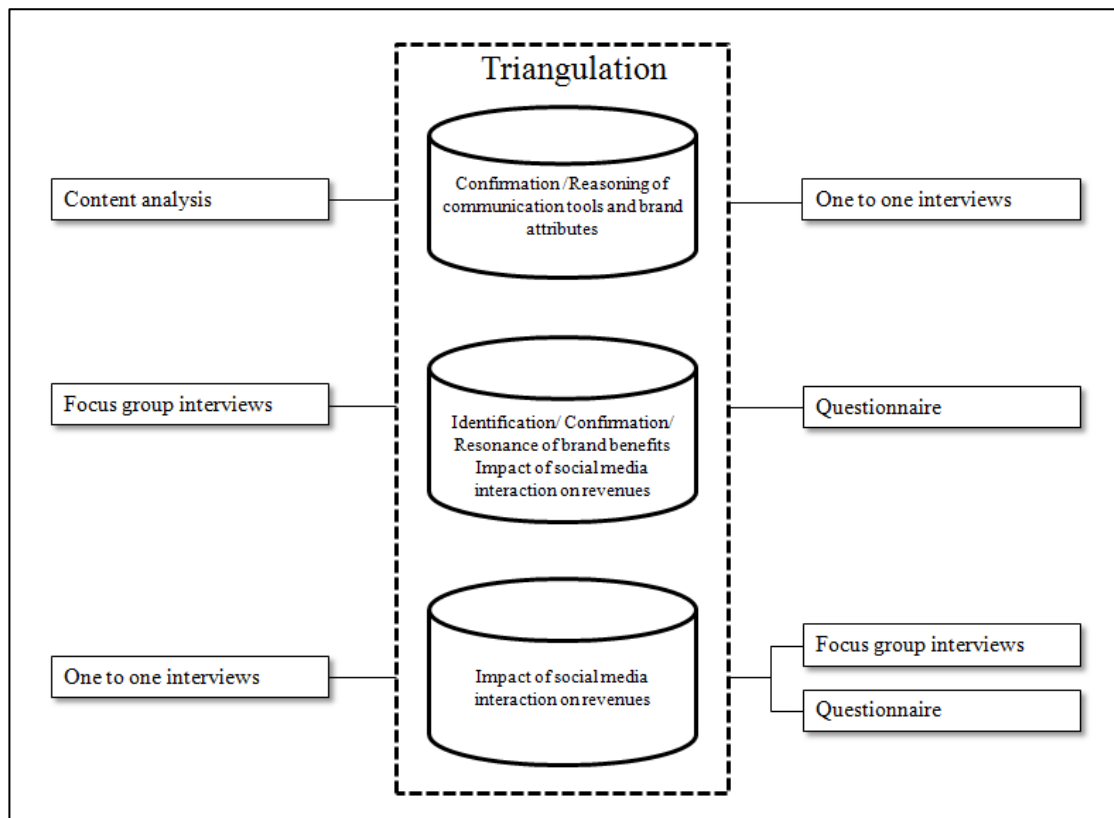


Figure 5.2: Methodological approach and triangulation of results (source: Author)

5.3.1 Content analysis

Content analysis is defined as the analysis of documents and texts, whether printed or visual, that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.289). Especially in business and management research, content analysis is associated with websites (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.305). Content analysis has been previously documented as an appropriate method to examine sport media coverage (Maxwell, 2009), brand strategy, as well as social media relative to online brand communication (Hambrick et al., 2010; Wallace et al., 2011). The data sets for the content analysis emanated from the two defined time periods, as described next (Section 5.3.4). The data collected consisted of posts of Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter as well as responses of fans to these posts in the form “Like”, “Comment” and “Share” for Facebook and “Reply”, “Retweet” and “Favorite” for Twitter.

A post (content item) is defined as any form of communication uploaded to the public news feed on the official Facebook (Twitter) account of Liverpool FC (i.e. text, picture, video, link, etc.). The terms “content item” and “post” will be used interchangeably hereafter. A Twitter content item example (Figure 5.3) and a Facebook content item

example (Figure 5.4) of Liverpool FC are depicted next to demonstrate how the items were viewed.



Figure 5.3: Twitter content item example (Liverpool FC’s Twitter account)

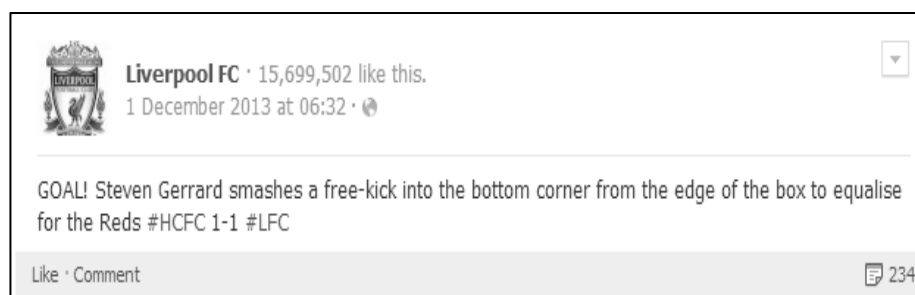


Figure 5.4: Facebook content item example (Liverpool FC’s Facebook account)

The posts of Liverpool FC have been categorized according to communication tools used (picture, video, links etc.) as well as to which brand attributes (product and non-product related) they refer to. In addition, they have been analyzed in terms of frequency of use as well as in terms of responses of fans in the respective social media tools. The coding categories regarding the brand attributes have been derived deductively from previous models in the literature, as presented in the adopted customer-based brand equity model of this study. The coding categories of both brand attributes and communication tools are presented below (Table 5.9).

Coding category	Brand component
Product related attributes	Team Success Star Player(s) Head Coach
Non-product related attributes	Brand Mark Management Club's History & Tradition Club's Culture & Values Event's Image Sponsor Fans Stadium/Arena
Communication tools	Text Picture Link Video Contest Poll Application (only Facebook)

Table 5.9: Coding categories content analysis (source: Author)

Coder selection and training

In order to increase reliability and decrease bias associated with one coder (Priest, 2010), the coding was conducted independently by two coders, one of which was the author. The second coder was selected based on previous experience, time availability, knowledge of social media communication tools and interest in football. Two coders are considered to be adequate as previous research illustrates the increase in error associated with multiple coders (Priest, 2010). The second coder holds a BSc in Information Technology and runs a consulting company on new media and e-commerce applications in Greece. The author provided coder training which involved an oral presentation, discussion, and practice session (pretest) of coding of 80 (20 Facebook and 60 Twitter) practice content items, other than the main sample content items. The intercoder reliability for the pretest, which involved only the brand attributes coding categories, has been calculated using two methods, percentage of agreement and Cohen's kappa. The results, produced by SPSS v.19, are shown in the next table (Table 5.10).

Reliability test	Facebook	Twitter
Percentage of agreement	93.96%	95.96%
Cohen's kappa	0.931	0.953

Table 5.10: Pretest intercoder reliability (source: Author)

According to Frey et al. (2000), an agreement above 80% and a Cohen's kappa score above 0.7 is sufficient to judge a result as reliable, and therefore the two coders continued to code the main sample. Both coders analyzed independently and for all coding categories (brand attributes and communication tools) the total amount of posts of the main sample. Again, to assess the coding quality between the two coders for the main sample, percentage of agreement between the raters and Cohen's kappa tests were applied. Disagreements in coding was resolved by discussion among the coders.

5.3.2 Interviews

Two forms of interviews have been used during the study:

- Focus group interviews with members of Liverpool FC fan clubs in UK and Greece
- One to one interviews with management professionals working at Liverpool FC

Both types of interviews took a semi-structured form as this form provides flexibility to changes both prior to as well as during the interview, adapting to the flow of the conversation (Saunders et al., 2009, p.467). Semi structured interviews have been widely used in the literature to understand sport fans worldwide (Kerr, 2009; Tapp & Clowes, 2002).

The focus-group interviews served as the primary source to identify which brand benefits are perceived by fans through their online interaction with the club and therefore to confirm and/or extent the set of brand benefits presented in the adopted customer-based brand equity model of the research at hand. In addition, they addressed issues of engagement and consumption behavior of fans as well as preferred communication tools and brand attributes. Finally, they have been used to identify suggestions for the improvement of the social media accounts of Liverpool FC. During the interviews, fan club members have been asked to describe what brand benefits they perceive without specifically mentioning the brand benefits presented in the adopted

customer-based brand equity model by the author (see Appendix B). During the analysis of the interviews, the author referred back to the model in order to confirm the existence of a perceived benefit in it or to update the model in the case a brand benefit perceived by a member did not match any brand benefit already included in the model. Thus, focus group interview responses have been analyzed using grounded theory techniques in order to develop coded categories from the interview transcripts (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.578; Malhotra & Birks, 2006, p.210). At first, the interview responses have been broken down into concepts, which are partly based on the theoretical framework but mostly driven through the detected pattern and themes in the transcribed text (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.579). In general, it is not specified how detailed coding should be carried out, however the goal of the author was to minimize the amount of data as much as possible, while at the same time form as many valuable concepts as possible. The next step organized the initial concepts into categories identified which represent real-world phenomena (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.578). Finally, the last step involved the adoption of core categories, around which the previous categories pivot (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.579). The process is mapped out in Appendix C and Appendix E. The one to one interviews served as a source to investigate Liverpool FC's general marketing approach with a focus on social media as well as to identify potential links between social media usage and revenue increases.

5.3.3 Questionnaire

A self-administered semi-structured questionnaire has been made available online to fans of fan clubs in UK and Greece. The questionnaire's aim has been to understand the perceptions of the fans regarding the social media presence of their club as well as the extent to which the brand benefits (confirmed or newly identified) are perceived. The questionnaire was common for all fan branches and has been translated into the Greek language in order to facilitate the distribution and collection of it by the Greek fan clubs. Online questionnaires have been using widely in the sports setting (Bauer et al., 2005; Kerr, 2009) as it is regarded as a cost effective tool when attempting to reach large-scale sample sizes in a wide geographic region (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.668).

The questionnaire is divided into two main sections:

- Demographics section (questions 1-5)
- Main section (questions 6-25)

The main section dealt with the actual research problem at hand, examining issues such as engagement of fans, preference of communication tools and brand attributes, perceived brand benefits, changes in the consumption behavior as well as overall satisfaction/suggestions for improvement for the social media presence of the club.

The questionnaires have been descriptively analyzed through Google Forms for each fan club. Google Forms facilitates quick analysis of the responses, as the questionnaire is coded per question and extracted automatically to an Excel worksheet. Inferential statistics (tests of significance) have been used to support the results.

Regarding the calculation of the response rate, the following considerations have been made. As per literature, the response rate is the percentage of the sample that agreed to participate in the survey and is calculated as follows (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.189):

$$\frac{\text{number of usable questionnaires}}{\text{total sample} - \text{unsuitable or uncontactable members of the sample}} \times 100$$

The “total sample” is the total number of the sample, i.e. the number of paid memberships for the season 2013-2014 of each fan club. The “number of usable questionnaires” is the total number of the responses which are suitable for examination. The “unsuitable or uncontrollable members of the sample” are the responses which are unsuitable for further processing as well as the part of the total sample which does not participate at the survey at all.

5.3.4 Sampling

With regard to content analysis, the case has been restricted by analyzing only the content posted during the 2013/2014 EPL season. Hence, the research can be characterized as a cross-sectional study (Saunders et al., 2009). In addition, as the amount of data posted on Facebook and Twitter within one EPL season has been expected to be tremendous, the content analysis data has been collected within two time periods, on- and offseason, each 15 days long. During those periods, the complete data set posted in the two selected social media tools has been analyzed. In particular:

- Period 1 (offseason): August 1st, 2013 – August 15th, 2013
- Period 2 (onseason): December 1st, 2013 – December 15th, 2013

Besides the manageability of the data, such an approach offered the opportunity to identify whether or not different patterns of use by either the sport club or the fans apply in each time period.

Interviewees have been approached using the convenience and snowball sampling technique. The snowball technique is a non-random sampling technique and, besides the limited resources that applied to the research, fits well with the aim of the research to examine the selected case in-depth in order to provide information-rich results (Saunders et al., 2009, p.233). At first, fan clubs in the region of Greece have been contacted because they were the most easily available for the researcher by virtue of accessibility (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.190). Fan club members have been then asked to refer to further respondents of the same target group (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.192). The chosen sampling techniques facilitated the process of approaching people of the research target group within a relatively short time frame and efficient way. The interviews have been arranged at the convenience (time and place) of the interviewees (see section hereby). Then, three fan clubs in UK have been selected, based on localization (most preferably one in the region of the club's home) and population (number of members) criteria. For that reason, the researcher contacted Liverpool FC and was able to get a list of all Liverpool FC fan clubs as well as the number of their members, as described in section 5.2.4 hereby. Then, fan clubs have been contacted and interviews arranged using again the snowball sampling technique as described in this section.

Questionnaire respondents came from the total population (members) of each fan club, as the link of the questionnaire has been offered online to all members for a substantial amount of time (45 days for each fan club).

5.4 Summary

A mixed method case study approach has been adopted, using a variety of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis tools: Focus group interviews, one to one interviews, questionnaire and content analysis of Facebook and Twitter. The rationale behind using such an approach is that it will address the research topic in the most efficient way and will offer the means to triangulate the results of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.634; Saunders et al., 2009, p.146).

Chapter 6. Reliability, Validity and Ethical Considerations

6.1 Reliability

Reliability is a measure of the extent to which the results of a study are replicable (Malhotra & Birks, 2006). The primary threats to reliability are subject error, subject bias, interviewer error and interviewer bias (Roberts et al., 2003). Hence, the quality of phenomenological research is largely dependent on the skills, credibility and neutrality of the interviewer in gaining the subject's trust. Reliability issues have been addressed by maintaining a high degree of detailed and accurate records of all aspects of the research and attempting to reduce the possibility of bias wherever possible. With specific regard to the qualitative nature of the research, a number of provisions have been made to increase the possibility of replication:

- interviews have been taped and transcribed the same day
- transcription accuracy have been confirmed by respondent
- a summary of findings have been forwarded to respondents

The researcher's awareness of the threats to reliability and validity guided his approach to interviews. The researcher, being a football fan himself, felt that he was able to establish trust quicker with the interviewees than an outsider might. In addition, it was felt that he was able to establish the proper researcher/subject rapport and he maintained the focus of discussions without controlling the interviewee, thus minimizing challenges to the integrity and final contribution of the research.

As far as the coding process is concerned and with regard to the intra-coder reliability, it has been addressed by using the coding manual and adhering to its rules, as suggested in the literature (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.300). The coding procedure itself has been also backed up by the literature.

With regard to the intercoder reliability, it has been measured using two methods, percentage of agreement between the raters and Cohen's kappa. The results of the two methods are shown below (Table 6.1).

Reliability test	Facebook		Twitter	
	Brand attributes	Commun. tools	Brand attributes	Commun. tools
Percentage of agreement	89.26%	95.97%	93.82%	97.78%
Cohen's kappa	0.876	0.925	0.924	0.965

Table 6.1: Intercoder reliability (source: Author)

According to Frey et al. (2000), an agreement above 80% and a Cohen's kappa score above 0.7 is sufficient to judge a result as reliable, which was the case in the current research for all coding categories.

Reliability has been further ensured by the adopted models and measurements, as these arrive from the literature and have been empirically tested thoroughly by previous researchers. Finally, the mixed approach that has been adopted for the research permits triangulation, thus increasing the reliability of findings.

6.2 Validity

Validity is the extent to which the research measures what it is supposed to measure (Malhotra & Birks, 2006). The research ensured that validity issues have been met by pilot testing the questionnaires. In addition, the study used multiple sources of evidence to collect data for triangulation purposes (Saunders et al., 2009, p.146; Yin, 2003). These include the content of the official social media pages as well as questionnaires and interviews.

As far as the issue of generalisability is concerned, it is considered that the results of the research will have a great amount of applicability to the case itself and could be expanded to other cases of similar characteristics (big clubs from different sports and leagues with a worldwide fan base and numerous social media followers). In addition, given the very limited previous research into the management of social media presence by brands, it is anticipated that this research will have relevance and transferability to other industry sectors beyond the specific sector (sport sector) in which the current research is conducted.

6.3 Ethical Considerations

The candidate states the following:

- To consent to the Heriot-Watt university's code of conduct
- To act in the best interests of the research community
- To treat all research subjects fairly and with respect
- To handle information from individuals with due care and responsibility, assuring anonymity
- To maintain confidentiality relating to interview processes

- To act with honesty and integrity throughout the research process
- To act free of bias towards any group (age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, race, gender, etc.)

The participants have been presented a letter that explains the purpose of the study and procedure as well as ensuring confidentiality and anonymity and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Anonymity of questionnaires has been assured by providing a link of the questionnaire and allowing users to access this link, avoiding mail exchanges that could trace back the name of the respondent. In addition, permission had been obtained in advance of to tape record each meeting.

To ensure confidentiality, completed questionnaires, research notes, interview transcripts and collected documents have been and will be only accessible to the researcher and the university.

Chapter 7. Pilot Study

7.1 Introduction

The pilot study was designed to apply the main themes and outcomes emerging from the literature and to assess the suitability of the proposed methodology. The methodological approach is the same as the one proposed for the main study, though in a smaller time scale and using a smaller sample. Data were collected from members of the official Liverpool FC branch in Thessaloniki, Greece, using a combination of a semi-structured focus group interview and a structured questionnaire as well as from analyzing the content of the posts of the official Liverpool FC Facebook and Twitter accounts for a period of 8 days.

7.2 Subject Details

7.2.1 Thessaloniki fan club

The Liverpool FC fan club, Thessaloniki branch, has been established 1995 and has been officially recognized in 2005. The fan club is located in Thessaloniki, Greece and had over 1200 different members since its foundation. During the 2013-2014 season, the club had 124 active (paid membership) members. Fan club members are mostly males (91% of the current active members) of a rather young age (up to 18-50 years old). Besides several social activities, fan club members are actively promoting Liverpool FC by organizing trips to Liverpool FC's home or away matches (especially European cup matches), running their own web site (www.liverpool.fc.gr) and being responsible for the official Liverpool FC Twitter account in the Greek language.

7.3 Methodology

The methodology involved content analysis as well as collection and analysis of primary data (online questionnaire and focus-group interview).

The purpose of the content analysis has been to identify types of communication tools and brand attributes used by Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter and to analyze the responses of fans and followers in the respective social media tools.

The primary data have been used to provide insights regarding the usage of Facebook and Twitter by Liverpool FC in terms of fan engagement and perceived brand benefits as well as to describe ways in which Liverpool FC can use them more effectively.

Grounded theory techniques have been used to develop coded categories from the interview transcripts (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.578; Malhotra & Birks, 2006, p.210).

7.3.1 Content analysis

The official Facebook (www.facebook.com/LiverpoolFC) and Twitter (@LFC) accounts of Liverpool FC have been perused from the 25th of November 2013 to the 2nd of December 2013 (on-season, 8 days). The validity of the social media accounts has been checked by accessing them through the official EPL web site as well as through the official Liverpool FC web site. In summary, 19 Facebook and 108 Twitter content items posted by Liverpool FC have been collected.

For each of the two social media tools, the data collection process involved copying the post, its date and its web address into an MS Excel workbook and assigning a number to each. Posts of one day formed a separate worksheet, inside the MS Excel workbook. The coding categories (type of communication tools and type of brand attributes) emerged from the content analysis. The types of communication tools used in Facebook and Twitter are presented next (Table 7.1).

Posts qualified for only one type of communication tool (i.e. text, picture, link, video, poll, contest and Facebook application). For most cases, the coding was clear and posts could be assigned easily to one category. Where posts contained more than one type of communication tools (for example a picture and a link), they have been assigned to one category by analyzing what the post was emphasizing. For instance, the purpose of a post that contained both a picture and a link has been most likely to give an impulse to the fans to click the link, while the picture played a more supportive role. Accordingly, the post has been categorized as “link”. Such an approach is supported by the literature (Brand & Klein, 2012; Wallace et al., 2011).

Post	Description
Type of communication tools in Facebook and Twitter	Text (only): A simple text status update
	Picture: A post that focuses on a picture, accompanied by text describing the content of that picture
	Link: A post where the user is given an impulse to click the link for further information. Is usually accompanied by communication tools (e.g. picture, text) and leads most of the times to the official web site of the club
	Video: A post that focuses on a video, accompanied by text describing the content of that video
	Application: The user is given an impulse to use a specific Facebook application (only applicable to Facebook)
	Contest: The user is asked to take part in a contest, usually following a link to an external site
	Poll: Users are asked to cast their votes, usually following a link to an external site

Table 7.1: Types of communication tools in Facebook and Twitter (source: Author)

Liverpool FC Facebook and Twitter posts, according to their subject, have been assigned to a brand attribute type based on the description of brand attributes provided in section 3.3 hereby. Posts qualified for only one type of brand attributes (i.e. product or non-product related), which was in all cases a straightforward procedure. Difficulties showed up when trying to assign the post to a specific component of product or non-product related attribute. Again, the component has been chosen by analyzing what the post was emphasizing. However, there were posts where this was not absolutely clear. A case in point was the comments of the head coach about the team's style of play. Arguably, the emphasis of the post could be on the head coach (the significance of who is saying something) as well as on the style of play of the team (the significance of what is said about). In such cases, the post has been assigned to both product related attributes (e.g. "head coach" and "team success"). This approach is also supported by the literature (Brand & Klein, 2012; Wallace et al., 2011). Frequencies of posts have been then investigated.

In addition, the responses of the fans to Liverpool FC's posts have been analyzed and quantitatively categorized (frequency of occurrence) in terms of "Like", "Comment" and "Share" for Facebook and "Reply", "Retweet" and "Favorite" for Twitter.

Finally, statistical tests (chi-square analysis, Mann-Whitney U test) to examine any associations between club posts and fan responses have been executed using the software package SPSS v.19.

7.3.2 Focus group interview

At first, a semi-structured focus-group interview with five members of the Thessaloniki fan club has been conducted (Table 7.2).

	Name	Age	Nationality	Gender
1	S.	30	Greek	Male
2	G.	40	Greek	Male
3	M.	43	Greek	Male
4	C.	31	Greek	Male
5	D.	26	Greek	Male

Table 7.2: Overview of the interviewees (source: Author)

The interviewees were previously contacted per phone as well as per letter (Appendix A) and agreed on participating. The interview took place in the headquarters of the branch in Thessaloniki, Greece on the 7th of December, 2013. Members of the branch usually gather during matchdays to watch Liverpool FC live on TV and the interview took place one hour before the EPL match between Liverpool FC and West Ham. The duration of the interview was 36 minutes and 42 seconds. All participants were male and have been actively following Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter i.e. they regularly interact online with the club. Since all participants were Greeks, the interview was held in the Greek language. The interview has been recorded with the consent of those present. The recordings were later fully transcribed (during the same day) and translated into the English language. The transcripts were then imported into the software program MS Word and, by using the line-number function software, each line of the interview was assigned a number. The transcripts were then coded and analyzed as described in the methodology section of this thesis. The coding results can be viewed in Appendix C hereby.

7.3.3 Questionnaire

A semi-structured questionnaire has been designed and made available online to members of the Liverpool FC branch in Thessaloniki. The questionnaire has been designed in the Greek language, as all the members of the branch are Greeks. Data has been collected online using Google Forms.

The author provided access to the link of the questionnaire for a period 30 days (29/01/2013 – 28/02/2013). The total amount of questions was 25, the majority of which have been of a multiple choice type supported by free text questions. The multiple choice answers have been measured on 5-Likert type scale. The questionnaire has been divided into two sections, the first of which addressed the demographics of the respondents (5 questions), while the second dealt with the actual problem at hand (20 questions). The questionnaire can be viewed in Appendix D.

7.4 Results

7.4.1 Content analysis results

The content analysis results are presented as follows: For each social media tool, the analyzed data will be firstly presented from the point of view of the club. Posts are presented in terms of frequency (e.g. post per day), type of communication tool (e.g. picture, link, video, etc.) and brand attribute (e.g. product or non-product related). Statistical analysis of the posts follows. Then, the results are presented from the point of view of the fans. Their responses are categorized in terms of “Like”, “Comment” and “Share” for Facebook and “Reply”, “Retweet” and “Favorite” for Twitter. Finally, the results of the statistical tests to examine interrelations between posts and fan responses are presented.

Twitter

In total, the size of the sample consisted of 108 tweets. As far as the type of communication tools of Twitter posts is concerned, Liverpool FC makes mostly use of links (64 tweets, 59.26%), which in turn forward the fans in most of the cases to the official Liverpool FC web site (57 of 64 tweets, 89%). In more detail, the findings are visualized in the next graph (Figure 7.1).

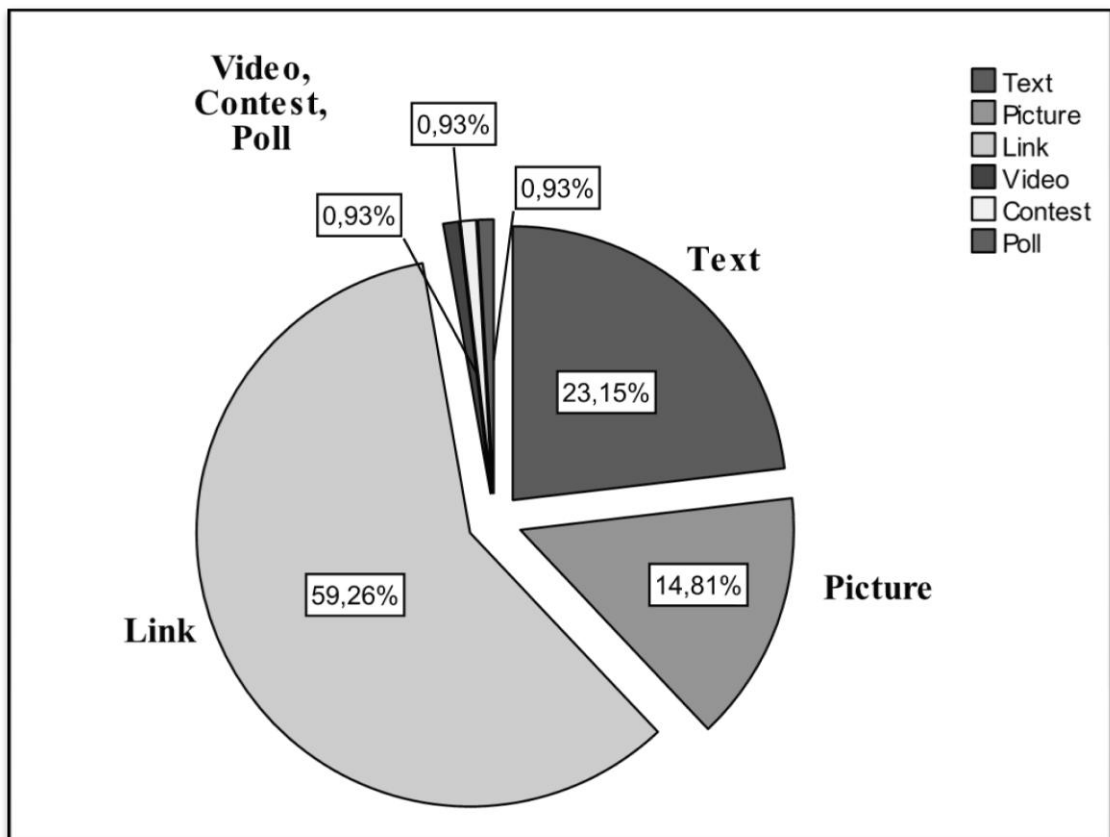


Figure 7.1: Type of communication tools in Twitter (source: Author)

Regarding the proportions of product and non-product related posts, the examination of the content revealed that Liverpool FC places more emphasis on product (81 posts or 75%) than non-product related posts (27 posts or 25%). The two by one chi-square analysis revealed that product related content was significantly higher than non-product related content: $\chi^2 (1, N=108) = 27, p < .001$.

The most popular product related post, which was simultaneously the most popular post during the period of investigation, has been about Star Player(s), followed by Team Success and Head Coach. Non-product related content was spread amongst posts about Fans, Club's History & Tradition, Club's Culture & Values, Event's Image, Management and Sponsor. An overview of the proportions of product and non-product related posts is presented in the next table (Table 7.3). Brand Mark (e.g. logo, colors of the club) has not been the subject of any Twitter post during the pilot study period. However, the brand mark (the logo) of Liverpool FC is uploaded in the first page and is visible by every post generated by Liverpool FC.

	Twitter post	Frequency	Percentage
Product-related	Team Success	34	29.31%
	Star Player	39	33.62%
	Head Coach	10	8.62%
Non-product related	Brand Mark	0	0.00%
	Management	1	0.86%
	Club's History & Tradition	5	4.31%
	Club's Culture & Values	7	6.03%
	Event's Image	1	0.86%
	Sponsor	3	2.59%
	Fans	16	13.79%

Table 7.3: Identified brand attributes in Twitter (source: Author)

The second part of the content analysis of Twitter posts presented hereby deals with the responses of the fans. The next table (Table 7.4) gives an overview of the tweets and the fan responses for each day of the pilot study.

Day	Tweets	Reply	Retweet	Favorite
MonNov25	9	63	4845	1753
TueNov26	12	50	6922	1126
WedNov27	9	39	1953	440
ThuNov28	11	60	2205	1042
FriNov29	14	56	6653	3081
SatNov30	5	12	2533	1265
SunDec01	29	127	15569	3559
MonDec02	19	77	2319	910
TOTAL	108	484	42999	13176

Table 7.4: Daily engagement in the official Liverpool FC Twitter account (source: Author)

Each of the 108 tweets has been visited two weeks after the end of the period under investigation, in order to leave sufficient amount of time for the followers to respond and to collect an accurate total number of “Reply”, “Retweet” and “Favorite”. The most common response on behalf of fans has been to “Retweet” a post (a total of 42.999 re-tweets), followed by “Favorite” (a total of 13.176 “Favorite”). “Reply” to posts were

not preferred by fans (484 total replies). In absolute numbers, product related posts received the biggest part of the fan responses (Table 7.5).

	Tweets	Reply	Retweet	Favorite
Product related	81	349	32839	9574
Non-product related	27	135	10160	3602

Table 7.5: Engagement in the official Liverpool FC Twitter account in terms of brand attributes
(source: Author)

An independent-samples Mann-Whitney-U test evaluated the fan interaction with product and non-product related posts. “Reply” for product related content ($n=81$, $M=53.57$) were not significantly higher, $U(n=108)=1018$, $p=.585$, than for non-product related content ($n=27$, $M=57.30$). “Retweet” for product related content ($n=81$, $M=57.16$) were also not significantly higher, $U(n=108)=878$, $p=.126$, than for non-product related content ($n=27$, $M=46.52$). Finally, “Favorite” for product related content ($n=81$, $M=55.88$) were also not significantly higher, $U(n=108)=982$, $p=.126$, than for non-product related content ($n=27$, $M=50.37$).

Facebook

In total, the size of the sample consisted of 19 Facebook posts. As far as the type of communication tools in Facebook posts are concerned, Liverpool FC makes mostly use of links (9 posts, 47.37%) and pictures (7 posts, 36.84%). It is important to note that the majority of posts contained a picture (17 of 19, 90%), but mostly in a supportive role and not as the main subject of the post. As in Twitter, the links forward the fans in most of the cases to the official Liverpool FC web site (6 of 8 posts, 75%). Simple textual status updates, video and Facebook applications are not frequently used and each is represented only once in the sample. The findings are visualized next (Figure 7.2).

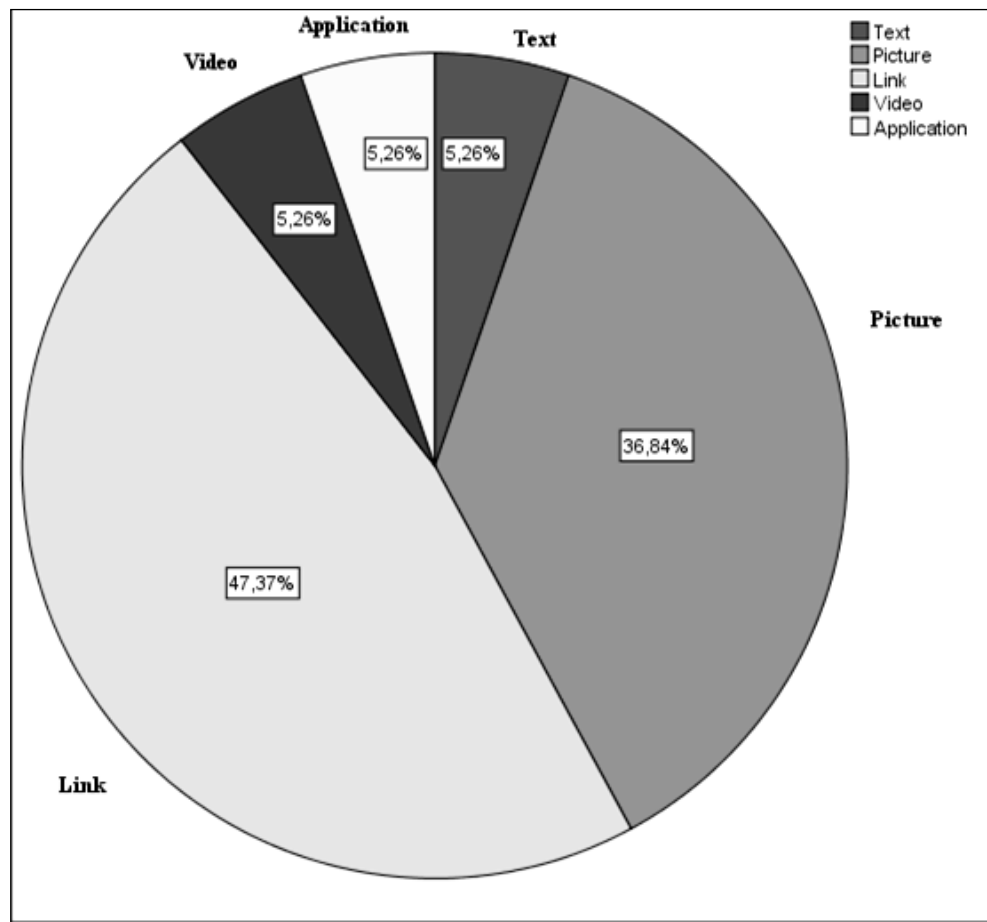


Figure 7.2: Type of communication tools in Facebook (source: Author)

Regarding the type of brand attributes of posts in Facebook, the examination of the content revealed that Liverpool FC places more emphasis on product (11 posts or 57.89%) than non-product related posts (8 posts or 42.11%). However, the two by one chi-square analysis revealed that product related content was not significantly higher than non-product related content: $\chi^2(1, N=19)=.474, p=.491$.

The highest percentage of product related posts, which was simultaneously the most popular post during the period of investigation, was about Star Player(s), followed by Team Success and Head Coach. Non-product related content has been spread amongst posts about Fans, Club's History & Tradition, Club's Culture and Values, Event's Image and Sponsor. Posts about Management were not part of the sample. An overview of the proportions of product and non-product related posts is presented in the next table (Table 7.6). As in Twitter, Brand Mark (logo, colors) has not been the subject of any Facebook post during the pilot study period. However, the brand mark (the logo) of Liverpool FC is uploaded in the first page and is visible by every post generated by Liverpool FC in Facebook.

	Facebook post	Frequency	Percentage
Product-related	Team Success	8	19.05%
	Star Player	12	28.57%
	Head Coach	1	2.38%
Non-product related	Brand Mark	0	0.00%
	Management	0	0.00%
	Club's History & Tradition	2	4.76%
	Club's Culture & Values	2	4.76%
	Event's Image	5	11.90%
	Sponsor	4	9.52%
	Fans	8	19.05%

Table 7.6: Identified brand attributes in Facebook (source: Author)

The second part of the Facebook content analysis presented hereby deals with the responses of the fans. Each of the 19 status updates has been viewed at least two weeks after the end of the period under investigation in order to leave sufficient amount of time for fans to respond and to collect an accurate total number of “Like”, “Share” and “Comment”. The most common reaction on behalf of fans has been to “Like” a post. In total, the 19 posts received 194.621 “Like”. The next most common form of interaction has been to “Comment” (a total of 21.147 comments) followed by “Share” (7226 shares). The next table (Table 7.7) gives an overview of the number of posts per day and the total amount of different fan responses for each day.

Day	Posts	Like	Share	Comment
MonNov25	1	11468	331	312
TueNov26	2	15300	792	2396
WedNov27	1	3283	38	610
ThuNov28	1	7004	102	312
FriNov29	2	50087	2720	5605
SatNov30	2	34860	1076	736
SunDec01	6	61190	1958	9811
MonDec02	4	11499	209	1365
TOTAL	19	194691	7226	21147

Table 7.7: Daily engagement in the official Liverpool FC Facebook account (source: Author)

In absolute numbers, product related posts received the biggest part of the fan responses (Table 7.8). In particular, product related posts resulted in 79.45% “Like”, 84% “Share” and 84.2% “Comment”.

	Post	Like	Share	Comment
Product related	11	154699	6071	17811
Non-product related	8	39992	1155	3336

Table 7.8: Engagement in the official Liverpool FC Facebook account in terms of brand attributes (source: Author)

An independent-samples Mann-Whitney-U test evaluated the fan interaction with product and non-product related posts. “Like” for product related content ($n=11$, $M=135$) were significantly higher, $U(n=19)=19$, $p=.039$ than for non-product related content ($n=8$, $M=55$). “Share” for product related content ($n=11$, $M=134$) were also significantly higher, $U(n=19)=20$, $p=.047$ than for non-product related content ($n=8$, $M=56$). However, “Comment” between product related content ($n=11$, $M=133.50$) and non-product related content ($n=8$, $M=56.50$) were not significantly different: $U(n=19)=20.500$, $p=.052$.

7.4.2 Focus group interview results

The findings of the interview with the Greek fan club in Thessaloniki are supported by quotes extracted from the interview transcripts, which represent thoughts expressed by interviewees. All interviewees agreed that the affiliation towards their club has been relatively strong for a substantive amount of time. Several reasons have been pointed out that led to support Liverpool FC. These include (past) sporting success, big losses and tragedies as well as the club’s history and values:

- *“Liverpool was winning everything: Championships, League Cups, European cups, really everything”*
- *“There wasn’t any other club so successful, not only in UK but in Europe I would say”*
- *“We went to European finals and, you know, love is growing”*

- *“I will never forget the cup final we lost against Wimbledon in 1988 or Heysel or Hillsborough later”*
- *“I support Liverpool for its history and for the way it is supported by its fans, the Liverpool way”*

The interviewees also stated that they are early followers of Liverpool FC in Facebook, while Twitter receives less attention:

- *“Liverpool’s account doesn’t actually exist for a long time in Facebook...about 3 years I guess...I am in Facebook since 2008, there wasn’t a Liverpool account then...”*
- *“I have been following Liverpool from the very beginning, I have been under the first few thousands but I think it’s only about 3 years they are up and running...may be even less than that”*
- *“Twitter, I don’t understand it, I don’t like it at all. I only made recently a Twitter account because of the Greek Liverpool fan club account”*

The main reason for following Liverpool FC in social media is to stay informed and up to date:

- *“If something happens, you get informed immediately through a post at your wall. The same is true for Twitter”*
- *“Through Facebook you get informed about what’s happening the very moment it happens”*
- *“With a Facebook account you can inform people about everything”*

However, other reasons include socialization and promotional activities:

- *“I think it’s the easiest way to stay in touch with people, to inform and to talk to them”*
- *“I am responsible for the Twitter account of the Greek fan club, I have to be informed about tickets and offers”*

In addition, it has been detected that there is no time frame for visiting Liverpool FC's social media accounts (e.g. before a match, after a match). Facebook is visited more than once a day, while Twitter again receives much less attention:

- *“Facebook has become an extension of my arm”*
- *“I am in Facebook all day”*
- *“For several hours each day”*
- *“Twitter? Much less, but we are there too of course. Once per day I would say”*

The interviewees pointed out that, in order to gather further information, the official website of Liverpool FC is visited never, occasionally or regularly:

- *“All other web sites have become second choices”*
- *“I visit also Liverpool's web site very often”*
- *“With an exception of Liverpool's eshop, I don't even visit our official web site”*

Regarding the type of communication tools of posts (e.g. pictures, videos, links etc.) that fans are mostly interested in, the interviewees agreed that they are not attracted to any particular type:

- *“Pictures, news, everything, I get all the information I need from there”*

On the contrary, regarding brand attributes, there are certain kinds of posts that fans are mostly interested in. In particular the interviewees responded that mainly product-related brand attributes such as news about the team, star players or potential players of the team (transfers) receive their attention. The latter is the reason that several interviewees responded that during offseason, they are even more interested in searching for news regarding their club.

- *“Everything, everything that is related to Liverpool is interesting to me”*
- *“Well, mainly about our star players but also newcomers, I mean new signings, or interest about a player to get him on our board”*
- *“News about our team or what about Suarez's contract for example, or Gerrard”*

Interviewees perceived various benefits by following Liverpool FC in the social media context.

Fan identification has been expressed as making a statement and communicating it through social media:

- *“Through Facebook you disclose to everyone what you feel and how you feel about the club”*

Feelings of fulfillment and contentment have been also identified but the interviewees agreed that the closeness or affiliation to the club has not increase as a result of “liking” or “following” the club in social media:

- *“Liverpool is a way of living. A special way, a family....”*
- *“You become you become a member of the family...a worldwide family”*
- *“I don’t feel something special”* (by following Liverpool FC in social media)
- *“In terms of love or passion? It can’t go any further! Whether on Facebook or not, we would love, we would follow the team”*

Some of the respondents referred to the benefits of socializing and sharing of emotions. Socializing occurs in several ways, from online discussions with other fans, commenting on club’s posts and “Like” or “Retweet” a post. However, such interacting depends heavily on the kind of post:

- *“It’s simply that, instead of, for example, sharing your disappointing with S. or G., you are sharing it with another 10 thousand people”*
- *“Of course it depends whether we like it or not”*
- *“Our reaction depends on the kind of post. There was for example this post on Wednesday, “Louis Suarez-phenomenon”, of course you respond to that by Like. But last Sunday, there was a post “Hull City beats Liverpool 3-1”, you can’t respond to that by Like. That’s common sense”*

In terms of entertainment, interviewees pointed out the informational effect of social media, but are also looking for other kind of posts such as contests:

- *“If something happens, you get informed immediately through a post at your wall. The same is true for Twitter”*
- *“Through Facebook you get informed about what’s happening the very moment it happens”*
- *“With a Facebook account you can inform people about everything”*
- *“More contests, asking people to answer questions in order to win something”*

The most common way of interaction is through “Like” or “Retweet”. In fact, they indicated that the vast amount of comments by other fans prevents them from adding something as they do not feel that commenting would add any value. What is more, keeping up with the content that is produced through comments by other fans is very time-consuming.

- *“The easiest way to respond is to “Like” or “Retweet”. It’s very difficult to keep track of comments, you know, there are thousands of comments and you sometimes can’t find even your own comment”*
- *“I don’t mind to look for comments, they are thousands”*

As such, the interviewees preferred the type of posts that require fast and easy reactions and which do not lead into long discussions:

- *“I mean, they posted the other day “Good morning fans, where are you sending us your good morning from?” and everyone responded, you know, from Indonesia, Singapore, Greece and so on. This way, you are not interested to see the responses of the others. A very smart idea!”*

With regard to the frequency of the posts, the interviewees seem to be satisfied with the number of daily posts generated by the club:

- *“It’s also the way they are posting everything, they are very careful at it, they try not to be tiresome”*
- *“There are several other sites which are full of posts. You want to see a post, to comment, to Like. If they were to post every two minutes, you would quickly lose your interest”*

According to the interviewees, their buying behavior is generally not influenced because of their social media interaction with the club. Fan club members mentioned the price of the products as one factor which affects their buying behavior:

- *“To influence me? No, no way. Not even 1%”*
- *“Very few of us are influenced by such things”*
- *“I would have bought it but the price was out of my range “*
- *“No matter how they promote this, I wanted them and I got them”*

7.4.3 Questionnaire results

In total, 58 responses have been collected. However, 2 could not be used because the respondents indicated that they are not making use of Twitter (Table 7.9).

Participating Fan club	Members 2013/2014	Facebook followers	Twitter followers	Total responses	Response rate
Thessaloniki	124	100	80	58 (56)	45.16%

Table 7.9: Pilot study questionnaire response rate (source: Author)

The remaining 56 usable questionnaires (response rate: 45.16%) produced the results presented next.

According to the demographics section of the questionnaire, the typical Liverpool FC fan who lives in Greece is Greek (100%), male (96.4%), between 18-34 years old (92.9%), single (87.5%), with an income lower than 10.000 € (82.1%), who follows Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter because of its loyalty to the team (87.5% and 78.6% respectively).

During the season, 78.6% fans are accessing Liverpool FC’s Facebook account at least once a day. The respective percentage for Twitter is 53.6%. During the summer (offseason) these numbers are lower. 62.5% fans are accessing Liverpool FC’s Facebook and 42.9% Twitter account at least once a day during the summer period.

In terms of responses, Greek fans frequently “Like” a Facebook post. It is highly unusual that no responsive action is taken at all (either “Like”, “Share” or “Comment”) in Facebook (Table 7.10).

How frequently do you respond to Liverpool's posts in Facebook with ...			
	...Like	...Comment	...Share
Always	12.5%	0.0%	1.8%
Frequently	57.1%	14.3%	14.3%
Sometimes	21.4%	39.3%	21.4%
Rarely	7.1%	39.3%	44.6%
Never	1.8%	7.1%	17.9%

Table 7.10: Thessaloniki fan club responses to Facebook posts (source: Author)

This is not the case in Twitter, where more than one third of tweets received no response at all (“Reply”, “Retweet” or “Favorite”) from the Greek fan community in Thessaloniki (Table 7.11).

How frequently do you respond to Liverpool's posts in Twitter with ...			
	...Reply	...Retweet	...Favorite
Always	0.0%	0.0%	3.6%
Frequently	14.3%	14.3%	17.9%
Sometimes	17.9%	19.6%	17.9%
Rarely	33.9%	30.4%	23.2%
Never	33.9%	35.7%	37.5%

Table 7.11: Thessaloniki fan club responses to Twitter posts (source: Author)

As probably expected, most responses (either “Like”, “Share” or “Comment” for Facebook and “Reply”, “Retweet” or “Favorite” for Twitter) are regarded to the brand attribute “Team Success” (22.69% of Facebook and 23.68% of Twitter responses). However, the frequency of product and non-product responses in general is equally shared. Non-product related attributes such as “Club’s History & Tradition”, “Club’s Culture & Values” and “Fans” receive a very high proportion of responses. The following table shows the frequency of responses of the Thessaloniki fan club members in Facebook and Twitter respectively (Table 7.12).

Brand attribute	Facebook (% of responses)	Twitter (% of responses)
Team Success	22.69%	23.68%
Star Player(s)	16.20%	18.95%
Head Coach	7.87%	7.37%
Brand Mark	5.09%	5.26%
Management	2.31%	3.16%
Club's History & Tradition	17.13%	13.16%
Club's Culture & Values	10.65%	11.05%
Event's Image	5.56%	6.32%
Sponsor	0.00%	0.00%
Fans	12.50%	10.53%
Other	0.00%	0.53%

Table 7.12: Frequency of responses to brand attributes by the Thessaloniki fan club members (source: Author)

Thessaloniki fan club members seem to experience brand benefits especially through their Facebook interaction with the club. About 80% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that, through their Facebook interaction with the club, their identification with the club increases, they are offered the opportunity to socialize with other fans, they can entertain themselves (participate in polls, receive up to date information) as well as they are able to experience strong feelings of joy, pride or disappointment (Table 7.13).

	Through your interaction with Liverpool in Facebook you are able to ...				
	...identify with the team	...socialize with others	...escape from routine	...entertain yourself	...experience strong feelings
Strongly Agree	28.6%	32.1%	14.3%	19.6%	32.1%
Agree	46.4%	51.8%	46.4%	57.1%	51.8%
Neutral	17.9%	14.3%	25.0%	19.6%	12.5%
Disagree	5.4%	1.8%	12.5%	1.8%	1.8%
Strongly disagree	1.8%	0.0%	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%

Table 7.13: Perceived brand benefits of the Thessaloniki fan club members in Facebook (source: Author)

Although the results tend to be the same in Twitter, the benefits the fans receive here are clearly not as strong as in the case of Facebook (Table 7.14).

Through your interaction with Liverpool in Twitter you are able to ...					
	...identify with the team	...socialize with others	...escape from routine	...entertain yourself	...experience strong feelings
Strongly Agree	14.3%	12.5%	7.1%	14.3%	23.2%
Agree	50.0%	41.1%	39.3%	42.9%	46.4%
Neutral	28.6%	37.5%	39.3%	32.1%	26.8%
Disagree	5.4%	7.1%	14.3%	8.9%	1.8%
Strongly disagree	1.8%	1.8%	0.0%	1.8%	1.8%

Table 7.14: Perceived brand benefits of the Thessaloniki fan club members in Twitter (source: Author)

Thessaloniki fan club members clearly have a preference to be informed through Facebook and Twitter rather than using more traditional information sources such as newspapers or radio. In particular, 80.4% of the fans indicated that they “most of the time” to “always” use social media to stay up to date.

Social media posts become more attractive to Greek fans if they include pictures, video and links. However, almost one of five fans indicated that they find simple text posts equally attractive (Figure 7.3).

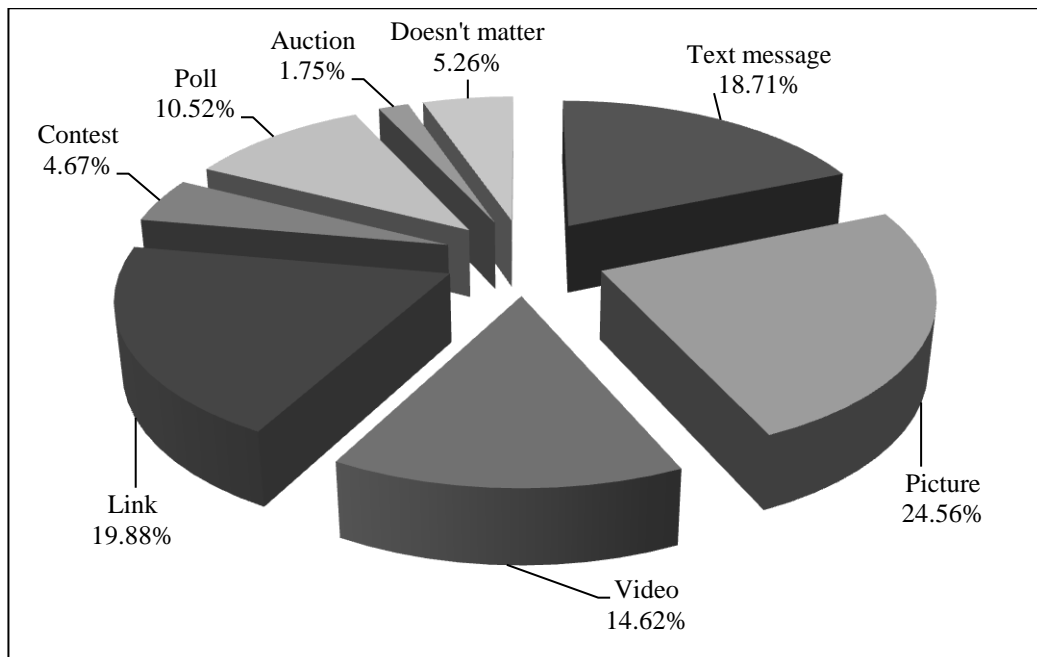


Figure 7.3: Attraction to communication tools of the Thessaloniki fan club members (source: Author)

A huge majority of the Greek fan club, 85.7%, responded that their interaction with the club through Facebook and Twitter has increased their knowledge about the club (answering “probably yes” or “definitely yes” to the respective question). In terms of affiliation, social media plays a less important but still severe role. In particular, 42.9% answered that their affiliation increased as a result of their interaction with the club (“probably yes” or “definitely yes”), while 26.7% disagree (“probably no” or “definitely no”).

With regard to consumption patterns, Thessaloniki fan club members stated that they have been altered as a result of their social media interaction with the club. In particular, 53.58% of fans indicate that their interest in watching matches (either at the stadium or on TV) has increased (answering “probably yes” or “definitely yes” to the respective question), while 55.56% responded that their interest in buying Liverpool FC’s memorabilia has increased (answering “probably yes” or “definitely yes” to the respective question). The next figures present those results graphically (Figure 7.4 and 7.5 respectively).

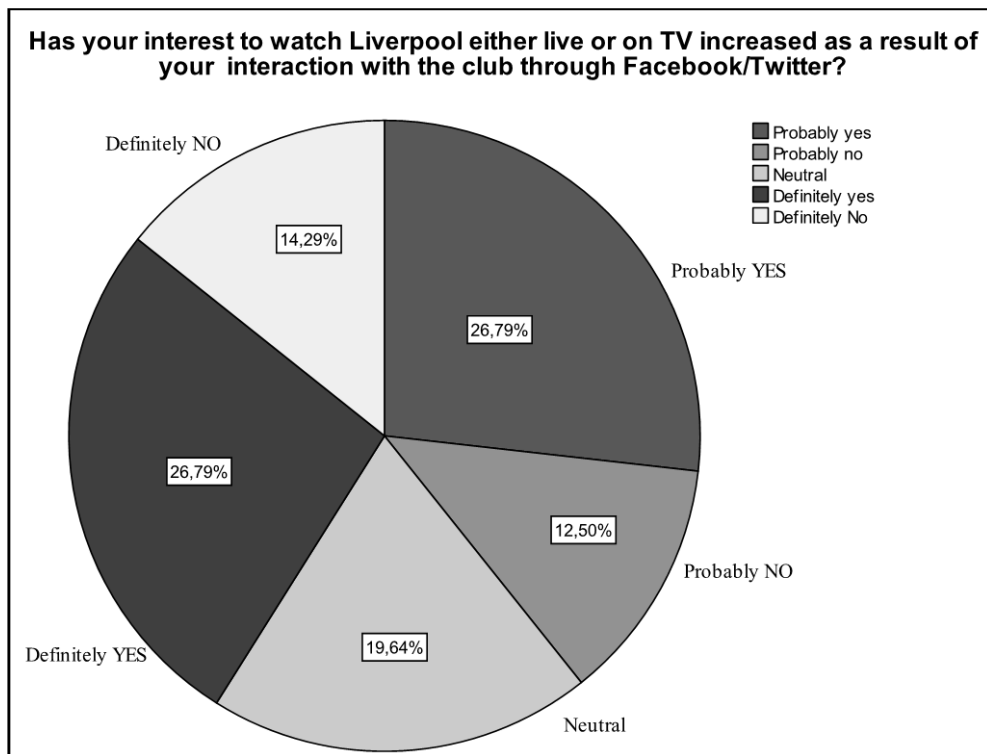


Figure 7.4: Altered buying intentions of match tickets - Thessaloniki fan club (source: Author)

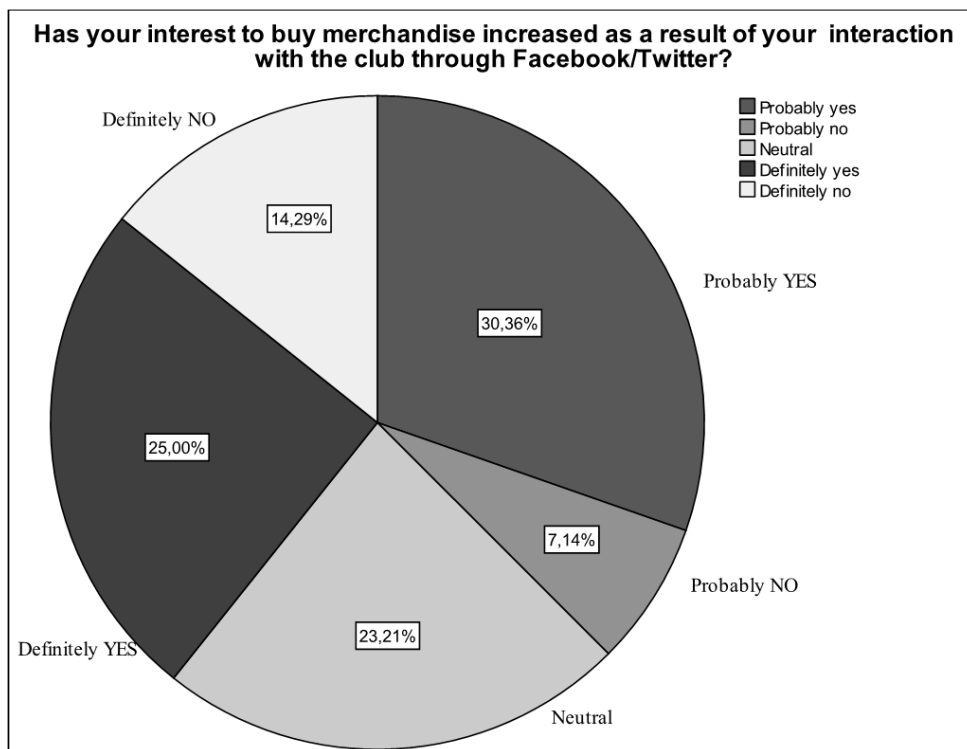


Figure 7.5: Altered buying intentions of memorabilia - Thessaloniki fan club (source: Author)

Greek fans seem to be satisfied with the content produced by Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter. In particular, 85.7% in Facebook and 69.7% in Twitter state that they are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the produced content. This is probably one of the reasons that the majority of the fans would invite other people to “Like” Liverpool FC’s Facebook page and to become a “follower” of Liverpool FC in Twitter (Table 7.15).

	Would you invite others to follow Liverpool in ...	
	...Facebook	...Twitter
Definitely yes	48.2%	35.7%
Probably yes	37.5%	37.5%
Neutral	8.9%	16.1%
Probably no	1.8%	1.8%
Definitely no	3.6%	8.9%

Table 7.15: Likelihood of Thessaloniki fan club members to invite others to follow Liverpool FC in social media (source: Author)

Finally, the two free text questions regarding suggestions to improve the content of Liverpool FC’s Facebook and Twitter have not received much attention from the respondents. Only 8 of the 56 valid questionnaires (14.28%) commented to those questions. Two responses contained the words “online shop” while another two comments mentioned the need to appoint someone to respond to questions of fans real time. The organization of more frequently online sessions with players of the club has been mentioned once as the organization of auctions and contests. The remaining two responses mentioned with the quality of the posts in terms of accuracy.

7.5 Analysis

Content analysis

The content analysis of Liverpool FC’s Facebook and Twitter accounts during the pilot testing period of 8 days revealed the following results.

The next table (Table 7.16) gives a numerical overview of the content posted by Liverpool FC as well as the responses of its social media fan base for the period of the pilot study.

Club					
Facebook			Twitter		
Posts (total)	19		108		
Frequency	2.37 per day		13.5 per day		
Type	Text	1 (5.2%)	Text	26 (24.0%)	
	Picture	7 (36.8%)	Picture	16 (14.8%)	
	Link	9 (47.3%)	Link	64 (59.2%)	
	Video	1 (5.2%)	Video	1 (0.9%)	
	Application	1 (5.2%)	Contest	1 (0.9%)	
Product Non-product	Team Success	8 (42.1%)	Team Success	34 (31.4%)	
	Star Player(s)	12 (63.1%)	Star Player	39 (36.1%)	
	Head Coach	1 (5.2%)	Head Coach	10 (9.2%)	
	Brand Mark	0 (0.0%)	Brand Mark	0 (0.0%)	
	Management	0 (0.0%)	Management	1 (0.9%)	
	Club Hist. & Tradition	2 (10.5%)	Club Hist. & Tradition	5 (4.6%)	
	Club's Culture & Values	2 (10.5%)	Club's Culture & Values	7 (6.4%)	
	Event's Image	5 (26.3%)	Event's Image	1 (0.9%)	
	Sponsor	4 (21.0%)	Sponsor	3 (2.7%)	
	Fans	8 (42.1%)	Fans	16 (14.8%)	
Fans					
Facebook			Twitter		
Total number of responses	Like	194691	Reply	484	
	Share	7226	Retweet	42999	
	Comment	21147	Favorite	13176	
Content	Product	Like	154699	Reply	349
		Share	6071	Retweet	32839
		Comment	17811	Favorite	9574
	Non-product	Like	39992	Reply	135
		Share	1155	Retweet	10160
		Comment	3336	Favorite	3602

Table 7.16: Summary of content analysis – Pilot study (source: Author)

In terms of communication types, Liverpool FC makes mostly use of links, in both social media settings which in the majority of the cases forward the user to the official web site of the club.

In terms of brand attributes, the following have been identified: Team Success, Star Player(s), Head Coach, Brand Mark, Management, Club’s History & Tradition, Club’s Culture & Values, Event’s Image, Sponsor and Fans. Surprisingly, given the great reputation of Liverpool FC’s home arena, the brand attribute “Stadium” has not been part of it. The small sample may be an explanation for that and the bigger sample during the main research may reveal other results.

Statistical analysis of the content posted by Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter revealed that, for both social media tools, product related content was significantly higher than non-product related content.

In terms of measuring engagement, the content analysis produced the results presented in the next table (Table 7.17). While fan responses in Twitter are indifferent in terms of product and non-product related content, there are significant differences in Facebook. In particular, users’ “Like” and “Share” responses differ significantly between product and non-product related attributes.

Twitter	<p>“Reply” for product related content were not significantly higher than for non-product related content</p> <p>“Retweet” for product related content were not significantly higher than for non-product related content</p> <p>“Favorite” for product related content were not significantly higher than for non-product related content</p>
Facebook	<p>“Like” for product related content were significantly higher than for non-product related content</p> <p>“Share” for product related content were significantly higher than for non-product related content</p> <p>“Comment” for product related content were not significantly higher than for non-product related content</p>

Table 7.17: Engagement of fans - Pilot study (source: Author)

Questionnaire/Interview analysis

The responses of the fans as per content analysis are in line with the responses of the small group of Greek fans from the interview as far as Facebook is concerned. As such, “Like” is the most common reaction on behalf of the fans. The results slightly differ in Twitter, where “Retweet” and “Favorite” are the most common responses in contrast to only “Retweet” mentioned in the interview. This however can be probably explained by

the lower usage rates of Twitter amongst the Greek community in contrast to other fan communities worldwide.

The results of the interview as well as the questionnaire suggest that fans perceive several benefits from their interaction with the club in social media: Identification with the club, socialization, entertainment, escape from daily routine and feelings of contentment as well as experience of strong emotions. All these benefits have been already included in the customer-based brand equity model of the study. No additional benefits have been identified.

In terms of consumption behavior, the interviewees stated that the social media content and interaction do not influence their buying behavior. The questionnaire however revealed that, both match attendance desire as well as memorabilia buying intentions have been increased for half the population as a result of the interaction with the club through Facebook and Twitter. In addition, both tools have been used to post messages from or about the official sponsors of Liverpool FC which could lead to additional revenue streams. Finally, the questionnaire revealed that knowledge and affiliation towards the club increased through the online interaction with the club, which suggests that Facebook and Twitter positively affects the creation of brand associations and could lead to increased revenues for the club.

In terms of engagement, the attributes of Team Success and Star player(s) receive comparable amount of responses with non-product related attributes such as Club's History & Tradition, Club's Culture & Values and Fans. In total, the Thessaloniki fan club almost equally responds to product and non-product related attributes, in both Facebook and Twitter (Table 7.18).

	Facebook	Twitter
Responses to product related attributes	46.76%	50.00%
Responses to non-product related attributes	53.24%	50.00%

Table 7.18: Thessaloniki fan club responses to brand attributes (source: Author)

The questionnaire analysis confirmed that all benefits identified during the interview analysis have a great relevance amongst the sample, although the benefit of escaping from daily routine to a lower extent than the others. The results slightly differ between Facebook and Twitter, where Facebook seems to be the social media tool that leads to more experiences. An explanation might be the lower usage rates of Twitter amongst

Greek fans, as stated by fan club members during the interview. With regard to the benefit of entertainment, the questionnaire analysis showed the desire of more up to date and reliable information, accompanied by real time interaction (interviews) with players as well as more frequent use of contests and auctions. These two last features have been also suggested during the interview.

Identified customer-based brand equity model

The table below (Table 7.19) summarizes the identified brand attributes and brand benefits during the pilot study in relation to the proposed customer-based brand equity model of the research.

Association	Component	Facebook	Twitter
Product–related attributes	Team Success	Identified	Identified
	Star Player	Identified	Identified
	Head Coach	Identified	Identified
Non-product-related attributes	Brand Mark	Not Identified	Not Identified
	Management	Not identified	Identified
	Club’s History & Tradition	Identified	Identified
	Club’s Culture & Values	Identified	Identified
	Event’s Image	Identified	Identified
	Sponsor	Identified	Identified
	Fans	Identified	Identified
	Stadium	Not Identified	Not Identified
Brand benefits	Fan Identification	Identified	Identified
	Escape	Identified	Identified
	Social Interaction	Identified	Identified
	Emotions	Identified	Identified
	Entertainment	Identified	Identified
	Other	Not Identified	Not Identified

Table 7.19: Identified customer-based brand equity model - Pilot study (source: Author)

7.6 Limitations

The results of the pilot study are limited in terms of the following factors.

With regard to the content analysis, a main shortcoming may be the coding process and the categorization of the results, which are based solely on the interpretation of the author. Although the approach has been backed up by the appropriate literature

wherever possible, the process may be not free of bias. In addition, the small sample size of the content, which is particularly true in the case of Facebook (19 posts), might produced results which do not fully represent the total range of brand attributes that are communicated by Liverpool FC. Finally, the frequency of Facebook and Twitter user comments was not considered individual responses or individual fans. For example, two or three fans could comment on one content item and this interactivity could account for numerous responses.

With respect to the qualitative analysis, the sample itself may be subject to limitations. That is, the interview focus group consisted only of male participants of an age group between 26 and 43 years old. The questionnaire has been also dominated by male responses (54 of 56 responses, 96.4%) of almost the same age group (100% between 18-44 years old). However, this may attributed to the demographics of the fan club, where, according to the records of the fan club, over 90% of the members are male, while at the same time the majority of the fan club members is of the age group 18-50. In addition, as the use of Facebook and Twitter has been a prerequisite to take part in the interviewing and questionnaire process and younger populations are more likely to use such tools, the research can safely assume that the sample in both interview and questionnaire is representative of the total population of the fan club.

7.7 Evaluation of the Pilot Study and Implications to the Main Study

The methodology of the research has been tested during the pilot study and the results have been presented in the previous sections. Liverpool FC's usage of Facebook and Twitter has been examined for a timeframe of 8 days and its perception by the Greek branch of Liverpool FC fans in Thessaloniki has been investigated.

Besides the limitations mentioned before and with a view to evaluate the pilot study in order to make any necessary adjustments to the main study, the author made the following observations:

Candidates suggested that the wording of the pilot study questionnaire and interview questions were satisfactorily stated and there was minimal ambiguity or confusion. That is, the responses to the questions produced information they were intended to do and therefore no changes were deemed necessary. However, the questionnaire needed to be translated in the English language prior distribution to the UK fan communities during the main study.

The questionnaire response rate was high which showed a high motivation of recipients to participate in the survey. The interview has been also organized very quick and efficient and the participation was satisfactorily. Although the former relationship between the author and members of the fan club might have contributed towards this, the adopted approach to contact the fan club members may be used to contact other fan clubs and members. The motivation of the respondents was also evident in that they stated that issues of confidentiality did not applied to them as they felt free to express their views even when their full names would be revealed under each answer or comment.

The structure and length of the questionnaire did not raise any concerns to the respondents. The same applies to the length of the interview.

The interview process could not identify any new/additional brand benefits perceived by fan club members through their interaction with Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter. The additional focus group interviews that will be held during the main study might change this. In general, given that some of the most important findings in the pilot study were from the interview held with candidates, the proposal to conduct both quantitative and qualitative research was further endorsed.

With regard to the coding process, it provided an easy way to categorize content items according to types of communication tools and brand attributes. Whereas the majority of the cases during the pilot study were straightforward, this might not be the case during the main study. Therefore, content items that will not provide sufficient instances to develop a mutually exclusive type of communication tools or brand attributes will be labeled “other”, an approach supported by the literature (Wallace et al., 2011).

Finally, although some sub-questions of the research could not be fully answered and triangulated, the pilot study confirmed that the proposed research methodology is capable of answering the research questions and addressing the stated research objectives.

Chapter 8. Data Collection

This chapter looks in detail into the particular collection and analysis procedures of the main study as they have been outlined in the research methodology chapter. Several techniques and tools have been used with success during the pilot study and are therefore adopted in the main research. The following table (Table 8.1) summarizes the different collection and analysis tools and shows their contribution to the stated research objectives. The process is described in detail in the following sections.

Data collection/analysis tool	Research Objective (RO)
Facebook content analysis	RO1. To analyze the content posted by Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter in terms of communication tools
Twitter content analysis	RO2. To analyze the content posted by Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter in terms of brand attributes RO3. To analyze and compare the content posted by Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter during onseason and offseason
Statistical analysis	RO4: To analyze the responses of the fans in Facebook and Twitter in terms of engagement
Questionnaires	RO5. To analyze the responses of UK and Greek fan club members in Facebook and Twitter in terms of engagement
Focus group interviews	RO6. To identify specific brand benefits that UK and Greek fan club members perceive in Facebook and Twitter
One to one interviews	RO7. To analyze the effects of Facebook and Twitter in the consumption behavior of UK and Greek fan club members as well as on Liverpool FC's revenues
Statistical analysis	RO8. To suggest how Liverpool FC can improve its usage of Facebook and Twitter in the context of customer-based brand equity

Table 8.1: Data collection tools and contribution to research objectives (source: Author)

Chronologically, the data collection and analysis process has been executed in the following order:

1. Collecting and analyzing the content in Liverpool FC's Facebook and Twitter accounts with a view to test the adopted customer-based brand equity model in terms of identified brand attributes as well as to identify which communication tools have been used
2. Conducting the focus group interviews in order to identify which brand benefits are perceived by Liverpool FC fans in UK and Greece through their online interaction, with a view to confirm and/or extent the adopted customer-based brand equity model in terms of brand benefits
3. Drawing on the previous findings, designing, distributing and collecting the questionnaire in order to investigate the associations between fan clubs and brand attributes, the resonance of brand benefits amongst fans as well as potential alterations to consumption behavior
4. Conducting the one to one interviews in order to triangulate previous findings on Liverpool FC's posts and fan responses and identify potential links between social media usage and revenue increase

Ethical considerations on interviews and questionnaires apply and have been presented in the corresponding section hereby.

8.1 Content Analysis

The official Facebook (www.facebook.com/LiverpoolFC) and Twitter (@LFC) accounts of Liverpool FC have been perused from the 1st to the 15th of August 2013 (offseason, 15 days) and from the 1st to the 15th of December 2013 (onseason, 15 days). The validity of the social media accounts has been checked by accessing them through the official EPL web site as well as through the official Liverpool FC web site. In total, 149 Facebook (67 offseason and 82 onseason) and 676 Twitter (324 offseason and 352 onseason) content items posted by Liverpool FC have been collected.

For each of the two social media tools and for each time period, the data collection process involved copying the post, its date and its web address into an MS Excel workbook and assigning a number to each. Posts of one day formed a separate worksheet, inside the workbook. The coding categories (type of communication and

type of brand attributes) emerged from analyzing each Liverpool FC post in Facebook and Twitter. In order to increase reliability, two independent coders participated in the coding process, as described in the methodology section hereby.

Post	Description
Type of communication tool in a Facebook or Twitter post	<p>Text (only): A simple text status update</p> <p>Picture: A post that focuses on a picture, accompanied by text describing the content of that picture</p> <p>Link: A post where the user is given an impulse to click a link for further information (either to the official Liverpool FC web site or to external web sites). Is usually accompanied by other communication tools (e.g. picture, text) and leads most of the times to the official web site of the club</p> <p>Video: A post that focuses on a video, accompanied by text describing the content of that video</p> <p>Application: The user is given an impulse to use a specific Facebook application (only applicable to Facebook)</p> <p>Contest: The user is asked to take part in a contest, usually following a link to an external site</p> <p>Poll: Users are asked to cast their votes, usually following a link to an external site</p>

Table 8.2: Types of communication tools (source: Author)

Posts qualified for only one type of communication tool (i.e. text, picture, link, video, poll, contest and Facebook application) (Table 8.2). For most cases, the coding was clear and posts could be assigned easily to one category. Where posts contained more than one type of communication tools (for example a picture and a link), they have been assigned to one category by analyzing what the post was emphasizing. For instance, the purpose of a post that contained both a picture and a link has been most likely to give an impulse to the fans to click the link, while the picture played a more supportive role. Accordingly, the post has been categorized as “link”. Such an approach is supported by the literature (Brand & Klein, 2012; Wallace et al., 2011).

Liverpool FC’s Facebook and Twitter posts, as per subject, have been assigned to a brand attribute type of the adopted customer-based brand equity model. Posts qualified for only one type of brand attributes (i.e. product or non-product related), which was in all cases a straightforward procedure. Content items that did not provide sufficient

instances to develop a mutually exclusive brand attribute type were labeled “Other”, an approach followed in the literature (Wallace et al., 2011). Difficulties showed up when trying to assign the post to a specific component of a product or a non-product related attribute. Again, the component has been chosen by analyzing what the post was emphasizing. However, there were posts where this was not absolutely clear. A case in point was the comments of the head coach about the team’s style of play. Arguably, the emphasis of the post could be on the head coach (the emphasis placed on who is saying something) as well as on the style of play of the team (the emphasis placed of what is said about). In such cases, the post has been assigned to both product related attributes (i.e. “Head Coach” and “Team Success”).

In addition, the process involved the quantitative collection of the responses (frequency of occurrence) of the fans to Liverpool FC’s posts during the selected time periods in terms of “Like”, “Share” and “Comment” (Facebook) as well as “Reply”, “Retweet”, and “Favorite” (Twitter). Such types of responses have been collected by viewing each content item separately. The frequency of occurrence of each response to each post has been then inserted in the same MS Excel worksheet, next to the post, its web address and its date. The table below shows an extract from an MS Excel worksheet of the MS Excel workbook of the Facebook posts (Table 8.3).

	Post	Date	Like	Share	Comments	Web address
1	Liverpool Football Club today confirmed that defender Jack Robinson has joined Championship side Blackpool on a season-long loan deal - http://lfc.tv/5Db	01/08/2013	5671	138	314	https://www.facebook.com/67920382572/posts/10151890185642573

Table 8.3: Example of organizing the collected Facebook posts (source: Author)

8.2 Focus Group Interviews

The focus group interviews were the first step to understand the perceptions of the fans regarding the social media presence of their club. In addition to the one focus group interview conducted during the pilot study, four additional focus group interviews have been conducted during the main study, with small groups of fans (3-5 members of fan clubs) in Greece and UK.

Each interview has been pre-arranged and held at the fan clubs' residence. Where this could not be arranged, the interview has been conducted via Skype. In every case, the interviewees have been contacted prior to the interview through phone and email, in order to familiarize them with the scope of the research (Appendix A). Upon agreement on participation, arrangements have been made to conduct the interview either face to face or via Skype. Before the actual interview started, the researcher thanked the interviewees for participating, outlined the goals of the study, assured the participants about confidentiality and anonymity issues and briefly outlined the process of the interview (rules, recording, the need to hear everybody's view). The interviewees were offered the possibility to withdraw at any time from the interview and have been also assured about the confidentiality of their information. Each interview, with the consent of the interviewees, has been recorded. During the interview, the questions from the guideline (Appendix B) were adapted to the statements of the interviewees and the conversation has been re-focused in cases of deviations. The recordings of the Greek fan clubs were later translated into the English language. All interviews have been transcribed the same day they have been conducted.

8.2.1 Athens fan club

The Athens fan club is the oldest Liverpool FC fan club in Greece, established 1997. Over 1000 people have become members since the establishment of the fan club, of which 249 renewed their subscription for the season 2013-2014. Five members of the fan club agreed to participate in the interview (Table 8.4).

	Name	Age	Nationality	Gender
1	A.	22	Greek	Male
2	D.	21	Greek	Male
3	N.	30	Greek	Male
4	C.	35	Greek	Male
5	J.	48	Greek	Male

Table 8.4: Athens fan club interviewees (source: Author)

The interview took place in Patras, Greece, on the 27th of April, 2014 in the place where members of the branch usually gather during matchdays to watch Liverpool FC live on

TV. The interview took place after the EPL match between Liverpool FC and Chelsea FC. The duration of the interview was 39 minutes and 40 seconds. All participants were male and have been actively following Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter i.e. they regularly interact online with the club. Since all participants were Greeks, the interview was held in the Greek language.

8.2.2 London fan club

The Liverpool FC Supporters Club (London Branch) was founded in 1967 and had 350 members during the season 2013-2014. Three members of the London fan club agreed to participate in the interview (Table 8.5).

	Name	Age	Nationality	Sex
1	S.	28	Mauritian	Male
2	P.	23	Danish	Female
3	A.	48	English	Male

Table 8.5: London fan club interviewees (source: Author)

The interview took place on the 12th of May, 2014 at the Hampton at Hilton hotel in Liverpool, UK. Members of the fan club were staying there during their trip from London to Liverpool to watch Liverpool FC's final match of the season against Newcastle (which took place on the 11th of May). The duration of the interview was 31 minutes and 03 seconds. All participants have been actively following Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter i.e. they regularly interact online with the club. The interview was held in the English language.

8.2.3 Caldicot & Gloucester fan club

Initially known as Caldicot Rangers, the fan club changed its name during the season 2012-2013 in order to reflect the increasing number of members from Gloucestershire and the Forest of Dean. Officially recognized since 2001, the fan club had 60 members during the season 2013-2014. Three members of the Caldicot & Gloucester fan club agreed to participate in the interview (Table 8.6).

	Name	Age	Nationality	Gender
1	N.	28	English	Male
2	J.	20	English	Male
3	A.	50	English	Female

Table 8.6: Caldicot & Gloucester fan club interviewees (source: Author)

The interview took place on the 19th of July, 2014 through Skype. The duration of the interview was 29 minutes and 25 seconds. All participants have been actively following Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter i.e. they regularly interact online with the club. The interview was held in the English language.

8.2.4 Glasgow fan club

The Glasgow Reds granted official status by Liverpool FC in February 2013. During the season 2013-2014, the club had 62 paid subscriptions. Four members of the Glasgow fan club agreed to participate in the interview (Table 8.7).

	Name	Age	Nationality	Gender
1	L.	32	Scottish	Male
2	C.	32	Scottish	Male
3	J.	28	Scottish	Male
4	G.	45	Scottish	Male

Table 8.7: Glasgow fan club interviewees (source: Author)

The interview has been initially agreed to take place at the fan club's headquarters in Glasgow, on the 10th of July, 2014. However, last minute cancellations on behalf of the interviewees resulted in rescheduling the meeting, which took finally place on the 20th of July, 2014, this time through Skype. The duration of the interview was 32 minutes and 16 seconds. All participants have been actively following Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter i.e. they regularly interact online with the club. The interview was held in the English language.

8.3 Questionnaire

The questionnaires (i.e. the same questionnaire, available in the Greek and English language) have been distributed and collected online using Google Forms. The total amount of questions was 25, addressed by multiple choice and free text answers. The multiple choice answers have been measured on 5-Likert type scale.

The questionnaire has been divided into two sections, the first of which addressed the demographics of the respondents (5 questions), while the second dealt with the actual research problem (20 questions). The author provided access to the online link of the questionnaire for each branch for a period 45 days (from 15/05/2014 to 30/06/2014 for the Athens and London fan clubs and from 15/06/2014 to 30/07/2014 for the Glasgow and Caldicot & Gloucester fan clubs). The English version of the questionnaire can be viewed in Appendix D.

As expected, the responses of every fan club were very frequent in the beginning and decreased on the later stages. Therefore, during the period of 45 days of which the questionnaire had been online for each fan club, the author sent 2 additional reminders to each fan club. The first, two weeks after the initial contact, reasserting the nature and aims of the survey as well as including the link of the questionnaire and the second, two weeks after that, including the link of the questionnaire.

8.4 One to One Interviews

With regard to the one-to-one interviews, they have been mainly used for triangulation purposes. In particular, the goal was to identify the reasoning behind the use of social media by Liverpool FC as well as to evaluate the purpose of the posts (in terms of perceived benefits of the fans) and the relation of social media followers and potential revenue increase for the club. Two such interviews have been undertaken. The first interviewee has been Mr. Paul Rogers, Head of the International Digital Development at Liverpool FC. The interview has been conducted by telephone on the 8th of July, 2014 and lasted for 19 minutes and 33 seconds. Mr. Rogers is responsible for the developing and leading the club's international digital media strategy, to oversee how the club engages with its fans all over the world and to put together a strategy to expand the clubs fan base. The second interviewee has been Mr. Fernando Maisonnave, Digital Engagement Coordinator at Liverpool FC. The interview took place at the headquarters of Liverpool FC on the 3rd of December, 2014 and lasted for 25 minutes and 07 seconds. Mr. Maisonnave's role is to develop Liverpool FC's social media content, to

support the clubs' partners in social media and to analyze the performance of the club in these settings.

The procedure to contact and set up the interview has been the same for both interviews. That is both interviewees have been previously contacted per phone as well as per email, have been informed about the content and the rules of the interview and agreed on participating. Before the actual interviews started, the researcher thanked the interviewees for participating, outlined the goals of the study and asked for a brief description of the role of the interviewees at Liverpool FC. Both interviews took a semi-structured format and have been recorded with the consent of the interviewees. The interviews have been transcribed the same day they took place. During the interviews, the questions from the guideline (Appendix F) were adapted to the statements of the interviewees.

Chapter 9. Data Analysis

This chapter presents the analysis of the collected data and describes the identified customer-based brand equity model. In addition, it compares the views of UK and Greek fan clubs, synthesizes the results and describes how the different sources of data triangulate the results. The following table (Table 9.1) provides a numerical overview of the methods and the collected data of the research. Although the Thessaloniki fan club has been part of the pilot study, the responses of the interviewees as well as of the questionnaires have been re-examined during the main study in order to facilitate the comparison between UK and Greek fan clubs.

Content analysis (825 posts)	Facebook posts	onseason	82
		offseason	67
		TOTAL	149
	Twitter posts	onseason	352
		offseason	324
		TOTAL	676
Focus group Interviews (5 group interviews, 20 fan club members in total)	Greek fan clubs	Thessaloniki (5 members)	1
		Athens (5 members)	1
		TOTAL (10 members)	2
	UK fan clubs	London (3 members)	1
		Caldigot & Gloucester (3 members)	1
		Glasgow (4 members)	1
		TOTAL (10 members)	3
One to one interviews (2 interviews)	Mr. Paul Rogers Head of International Digital Development		1
	Mr. Fernando Maisonnave Digital Engagement Coordinator		1
	TOTAL		2
Questionnaires (207 questionnaires)	Greek fan clubs	Thessaloniki	56
		Athens	58
		TOTAL	114
	UK fan clubs	London	48
		Glasgow	29
		Caldigot & Gloucester	16
		TOTAL	93

Table 9.1: Overview of collected data (source: Author)

9.1 Content Analysis

The content analysis of the posts of Liverpool FC in its official Facebook and Twitter accounts provided both quantitative and qualitative data. In particular, the collected data provided an understanding of the type of communication tools (e.g. text, link, picture, video etc.) and brand attributes (product-related attributes, non-product related attributes) as well as the total number and frequencies of posts of Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter. Fan responses (“Like”, “Share”, “Comment” for Facebook and “Reply”, “Retweet”, “Favorite” for Twitter) to posts of the club have been only quantitatively analyzed. This is because posts are addressing a multimillion fan base which in turn results in several thousands of fan responses making it therefore impossible to undertake a qualitative analysis in the framework of a DBA thesis.

In addition to the above, statistical tests have been executed using the software package SPSS v.19. More precisely, the differences in used communication tools have been analyzed using frequency distribution, including both absolute and relative frequencies. For analyzing the difference between product and non-product related attributes, a two by one contingency analysis (also referred to as two by one chi-square analysis) was applied. To compare differences between product and non-product related attributes between the two periods, a two by two contingency analysis (also referred to as two by two chi-square analysis) was used. Finally, Mann-Whitney-U tests have been used in order to examine the type of fan responses (e.g. Like, Retweet, etc.) to brand attributes in both social media settings and for both time periods.

In total, the size of the sample consisted of 149 Facebook posts (67 during offseason and 82 during onseason) and 676 Twitter posts (324 offseason and 352 onseason). Of the 324 offseason tweets, 25 (7.71%) have been retweets (RT) and have been therefore excluded from further analysis as they have not been considered tweets originated by the club itself. The same applied to the 20 of 352 onseason tweets (5.56%). The remaining 631 tweets have been selected for further analysis.

Liverpool FC has been very active in Facebook and Twitter regardless time periods. Although the absolute number of posts during the season increased (mainly as a result of the matches played, as matches are covered in Facebook and Twitter informing about the commencement of the match, highlights, goals etc.), the two by one chi-square analysis revealed that in both Facebook and Twitter, posts during offseason were not significantly different than posts during onseason (Facebook: $\chi^2 (1, N=149) = 1.51, p = .219$ and Twitter: $\chi^2 (1, N=676) = 1.16, p = .282$).

9.1.1 Types of communication tools - Facebook

In Facebook, during offseason, Liverpool FC makes mostly use of text messages (26 posts, 38.81%) and links (24 posts, 35.82%). The links forward the fans in most of the cases to the official Liverpool FC web site (19 of 24, 79%) and in fewer cases to external sites (5 of 24, 21%). The same behavior has been observed during onseason. Liverpool FC makes mostly use of links (29 posts, 35.36%), followed by simple text posts (25 posts, 30.49%). As before, the links forward the fans in most of the cases to the official Liverpool FC web site (20 of 29, 69%) and in fewer cases to external sites (9 of 29, 31%). Some minor differences include the slightly increased use of pictures during onseason than during offseason. Videos, Facebook applications, polls and contests are rarely used. The results are summarized in the next table (Table 9.2).

Facebook		Offseason	Onseason
Total number of Facebook posts		67	82
Frequency		4.46 per day	5.46 per day
Communication tool	Text	26 (38.81%)	25 (30.49%)
	Picture	15 (22.38%)	23 (28.04%)
	Link	24 (35.82%)	29 (35.36%)
	Video	0 (0.00%)	2 (2.43%)
	Poll	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
	Facebook application	0 (0.00%)	3 (3.65%)
	Contest	2 (2.98%)	0 (0.00%)

Table 9.2: Types of communication tools used in Liverpool FC's Facebook posts (source: Author)

9.1.2 Types of communication tools - Twitter

As far as communication tools of Twitter posts are concerned, Liverpool FC makes mostly use of text (133 tweets, 44.48%). Links are also extensively used (96 tweets, 32.11%), which in most cases forward the user to the official Liverpool FC web site (89 of 96 tweets, 92.70%). Text and links have been also widely used during onseason. Again, in most of the cases, links forwarded the user to the official Liverpool FC web site (133 of 149 links, 89.26%). As in Facebook, videos, polls and contests are rarely used. The results are summarized next (Table 9.3).

Twitter		Offseason	Onseason
Total number of tweets		324 (incl. 25 RT)	352 (incl. 20 RT)
Frequency		21.6 per day	23.46 per day
Communication tool	Text	133 (44.48%)	135 (40.66%)
	Picture	63 (21.07%)	47 (14.16%)
	Link	96 (32.11%)	149 (44.86%)
	Video	1 (0.33%)	1 (0.3%)
	Poll	1 (0.33%)	0 (0.00%)
	Contest	5 (1.67%)	0 (0.00%)

Table 9.3: Types of communication tools used in Liverpool FC’s tweets (source: Author)

9.1.3 Brand attributes - Facebook

With respect to brand attributes, they have been divided into product related and non-product related attributes. In Facebook, the following brand attributes have been identified: “Team Success”, “Star Player(s)” and “Head Coach” as product related attributes and “Brand Mark”, “Club’s History & Tradition”, “Club’s Culture & Values”, “Event’s Image”, “Sponsor”, “Fans” and “Arena/Stadium” as non-product related attributes. The frequencies and percentages of their appearances are presented below (Table 9.4).

Facebook		Offseason	Onseason
Total number of Facebook posts		67	82
Frequency		4.46 per day	5.46 per day
Product related attributes	Team Success	15 (22.06%)	29 (30.53%)
	Star Player	19 (27.94%)	37 (38.95%)
	Head Coach	2 (2.94%)	3 (3.16%)
Non-product related attributes	Brand Mark	4 (5.88%)	0 (0.00%)
	Club’s History & Tradition	8 (11.76%)	2 (2.11%)
	Club’s Culture & Values	0 (0.00%)	1 (1.05%)
	Event’s Image	6 (8.82%)	6 (6.32%)
	Sponsor	1 (1.47%)	3 (3.16%)
	Fans	11 (16.18%)	13 (13.68%)
	Arena/Stadium	2 (2.94%)	1 (1.05%)
Other		3 (4.48%)	7 (8.53%)

Table 9.4: Brand attributes of Liverpool FC’s Facebook posts (source: Author)

The examination of the content in absolute numbers revealed that during offseason Liverpool FC places slightly more emphasis on product (35 posts, 52.24%) than non-product related posts (29 posts, 43.28%). Three posts (4.48%) could not be assigned clearly to one of these categories and has been therefore labeled as “other”. The two by one chi-square analysis revealed that during offseason, product related content was not significantly different than non-product related content: $\chi^2(1, N=64)=.250, p=.617$.

During onseason, in absolute numbers, Liverpool FC places more emphasis on product (50 posts, 60.97%) than non-product related posts (25 posts, 30.48%). Seven posts (8.53%) could not be assigned clearly to one of these categories and has been therefore labeled as “other”. The two by one chi-square analysis revealed that during onseason, product related posts were indeed significantly different than non-product related posts: $\chi^2(1, N=75)=8.33, p=.004$.

During both time periods, most posts have been about “Star Player(s)”, followed by “Team Success”. Non-product related posts have been mainly about “Fans”, “Club’s History & Tradition” and “Event’s Image”. Noteworthy, the logo (“Brand Mark”) of Liverpool FC is uploaded in the first page and is visible by every post generated by Liverpool FC in Facebook, although not particularly mentioned every time in a post.

9.1.4 Brand attributes - Twitter

During offseason, the examination of the content revealed that Liverpool FC places more emphasis on product (162 posts or 50%) than non-product related posts (119 posts or 36.72%). A total of 18 posts (5.5%) could not be clearly assigned to any of the above categories and has been therefore labeled as “other”. The two by one chi-square analysis revealed that product related content during offseason was significantly different than non-product related content: $\chi^2(1, N=281)=6.874, p=.009$.

During onseason, Liverpool FC clearly emphasized product (203 posts or 57.67%) than non-product related brand attributes (110 posts or 31.25%). In fact, the two by one chi-square analysis revealed that during onseason, product related content was significantly different than non-product related content: $\chi^2(1, N=313)=27.633, p<.001$. Notably, a total of 19 posts (5.39%) could not be clearly assigned to any of the above categories and has been labeled as “other”.

Liverpool FC’s product related posts have been again mostly about “Star Player(s)”, while non-product related content have been mostly about “Fans”. The results are summarized in the table below (Table 9.5).

Twitter		Offseason	Onseason
Total number of tweets		324 (incl. 25 RT)	352 (incl. 20 RT)
Frequency		21.6 per day	23.46 per day
Product related attributes	Team Success	50 (15.43%)	108 (28.65%)
	Star Player	132 (40.74%)	119 (31.56%)
	Head Coach	31 (9.57%)	24 (6.37%)
Non-product related attributes	Brand Mark	9 (2.78%)	0 (0.00%)
	Management	0 (0.00%)	1 (0.27%)
	Club's History & Tradition	28 (8.64%)	10 (2.65%)
	Club's Culture & Values	2 (0.62%)	11 (2.92%)
	Event's Image	23 (7.09%)	13 (3.45%)
	Sponsor	3 (0.93%)	6 (1.59%)
	Fans	57 (17.59%)	80 (21.22%)
	Arena/Stadium	1 (0.31%)	5 (1.33%)
Other		18 (5.5%)	19 (5.39%)

Table 9.5: Brand attributes of Liverpool FC's tweets (source: Author)

9.1.5 Fan engagement - Facebook

Engagement has been measured by collecting the responses of the fans in terms of "Like", "Share" and "Comment" to Liverpool FC's posts during the two selected periods, offseason and onseason, in Facebook.

The content analysis revealed that in Facebook, "Like" is by far the most common reaction on behalf of the fans, regardless brand attribute type (Table 9.6).

Facebook		Offseason	Onseason	
Total number of responses	Like	976781	1466438	
	Share	43559	76049	
	Comment	46391	65971	
Responses for	Product related attributes	Like	495601	1099596
		Share	16267	50191
		Comment	25522	54846
	Non-product related attributes	Like	460075	144998
		Share	25867	7601
		Comment	20026	6882

Table 9.6: Fan engagement in Facebook (source: Author)

However, fans seem to respond differently during the time periods. In particular, “Like”, “Comment” and “Share” were all significantly different across time periods, as the following table highlights (Table 9.7).

Type of response	Offseason	Onseason	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Like	976781	1466438	$\chi^2 (1, N=2443219) = 98134.46$	$p < .001$
Share	43559	76049	$\chi^2 (1, N=119608) = 8825.497$	$p < .001$
Comment	46391	65971	$\chi^2 (1, N=112362) = 3411.976$	$p < .001$

Table 9.7: Statistical analysis of fan engagement across time periods in Facebook (source: Author)

The independent-samples Mann-Whitney-U test evaluated the fan responses to product and non-product related posts in Facebook for both time periods and produced the following results (Table 9.8).

Facebook	
Offseason	“Like” for product related content ($n=35, M=1201$) were not significantly different $U(n=64)=444, p=.392$ than for non-product related content ($n=29, M=879$)
	“Share” for product related content ($n=35, M=1081$) were not significantly different $U(n=64)=451, p=.446$ than for non-product related content ($n=29, M=999$)
	“Comment” for product related content ($n=35, M=1281.50$) were not significantly different $U(n=64)=363.50, p=.052$ than for non-product related content ($n=29, M=798.50$)
Onseason	“Like” for product related content ($n=50, M=2410$) were significantly different $U(n=75)=115, p < .001$ than for non-product related content ($n=25, M=440$)
	“Share” for product related content ($n=50, M=2311$) were significantly different $U(n=75)=164, p < .001$ than for non-product related content ($n=25, M=464$)
	“Comment” for product related content ($n=50, M=2376.50$) were significantly different $U(n=75)=148.50, p < .001$ than for non-product related content ($n=25, M=473.50$)

Table 9.8: Statistical analysis of fan engagement in terms of brand attributes in Facebook (source: Author)

9.1.6 Fan engagement - Twitter

Engagement in Twitter has been measured by collecting the responses of the fans in terms of “Reply”, “Retweet” and “Favorite” to Liverpool FC’s posts during the two selected periods, offseason and onseason.

In Twitter, “Retweet” is the most common response while the absolute number of “Reply” is impressively low compared to “Retweet” and “Favorite” (Table 9.9).

Twitter			Offseason	Onseason
Total number of responses		Reply	1921	4007
		Retweet	126160	221722
		Favorite	36724	69649
Responses for	Product related attributes	Reply	787	2459
		Retweet	81679	162004
		Favorite	22893	47014
	Non-product related attributes	Reply	939	1274
		Retweet	35992	38949
		Favorite	11035	14963

Table 9.9: Fan engagement in Twitter (source: Author)

The chi-square analysis showed that, as in Facebook, fan responses are influenced by the time period. That is, “Reply”, “Retweet” and “Favorite” were all significantly different across the two types of seasons, as the following table shows (Table 9.10).

Type of response	Offseason	Onseason	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Reply	1921	4007	$\chi^2 (1, N=5928) = 734.041$	<i>p</i> <.001
Retweet	126160	221722	$\chi^2 (1, N=347882) = 26250.556$	<i>p</i> <.001
Favorite	36724	69649	$\chi^2 (1, N=106373) = 10191.079$	<i>p</i> <.001

Table 9.10: Statistical analysis of fan engagement across time periods in Twitter (source: Author)

The independent-samples Mann-Whitney-U test evaluated the fan responses to product and non-product related posts in Twitter for both time periods and produced the following results (Table 9.11).

Twitter	
Offseason	“Reply” for product related content ($n=162$, $M=128.03$) were significantly different $U(n=281)=7538.5$, $p<.001$ than for non-product related content ($n=119$, $M=158.65$)
	“Retweet” for product related content ($n=162$, $M=162.65$) were significantly different $U(n=281)=6131$, $p<.001$ than for non-product related content ($n=119$, $M=111.52$)
	“Favorite” for product related content ($n=162$, $M=155.31$) were significantly different $U(n=281)=7321.5$, $p<.001$ than for non-product related content ($n=119$, $M=121.53$)
Onseason	“Reply” for product related content ($n=203$, $M=158.63$) were not significantly different $U(n=313)=10835$, $p=.665$ than for non-product related content ($n=110$, $M=154$)
	“Retweet” for product related content ($n=203$, $M=180.63$) were significantly different $U(n=313)=6369$, $p<.001$ than for non-product related content ($n=110$, $M=113.40$)
	“Favorite” for product related content ($n=203$, $M=176.83$) were significantly different $U(n=313)=7139$, $p<.001$ than for non-product related content ($n=110$, $M=120.40$)

Table 9.11: Statistical analysis of fan engagement in terms of brand attributes in Twitter (source: Author)

9.1.7 Summary of content analysis results

The content analysis identified a variety of communication tools used in the Facebook and Twitter accounts of Liverpool FC (Table 9.12). The total number of posts has not been significantly different for both social media settings and during both time periods.

Communication tool	Communication tool found in...	
	...Facebook (N=149)	...Twitter (N=676)
Text	YES	YES
Picture	YES	YES
Link	YES	YES
Video	YES	YES
Contest	YES	YES
Poll	NO	YES
Facebook Application	YES	NOT APPLICABLE

Table 9.12: Identified communication tools during content analysis (source: Author)

The results confirmed the presence of all brand attributes described in the adopted customer-based brand equity model as they have been identified during the content analysis of the two selected periods (offseason, onseason) of Liverpool FC’s Facebook

and Twitter accounts. However, ten (10) Facebook posts (6.71%) and thirty seven (37) Twitter posts (5.47%) could not be assigned to any brand attribute. Product related attributes have been significantly different than non-product related attributes in both social media settings and during both periods with the single exception of the offseason period in Facebook. In terms of content, Liverpool FC’s posts have great similarities in both social media tools. “Team Success” and “Star Player(s)” have been the brand attributes mostly used while “Management” has been the least posted brand attribute in both social media tools. The next table (Table 9.13) juxtaposes the brand attributes of the adopted customer-based brand equity model (Section 3.1) with the brand attributes identified during the content analysis of Liverpool FC’s Facebook and Twitter account.

Brand attributes of the adopted customer-based brand equity model	Brand attribute found in...			
	...Facebook (N=149)		...Twitter (N=676)	
Team Success	YES	44 (29.53%)	YES	158 (23.37%)
Star Player	YES	56 (37.58%)	YES	251 (37.13%)
Head Coach	YES	5 (3.35%)	YES	55 (8.13%)
Brand Mark	YES	4 (2.68%)	YES	9 (1.33%)
Management	NO	0 (0.00%)	YES	1 (0.14%)
Club’s History & Tradition	YES	10 (6.71%)	YES	38 (5.62%)
Club’s Culture & Values	YES	1 (0.67%)	YES	13 (1.92%)
Event’s Image	YES	12 (8.05%)	YES	36 (5.32%)
Sponsor	YES	4 (2.68%)	YES	9 (1.33%)
Fans	YES	24 (16.10%)	YES	137 (20.26%)
Stadium	YES	3 (2.01%)	YES	6 (0.88%)

Table 9.13: Juxtaposition of brand attributes from the adopted customer-based brand equity model and from the content analysis of the study (source: Author)

Finally, in terms of fan responses, “Like” is the most common response in Facebook and “Retweet” the most common response in Twitter. Fans seem to respond differently during the time periods. That is, “Like”, “Comment” and “Share” as well as “Reply”, “Retweet” and “Favorite” were all significantly different across time periods.

9.2 Focus Group Interviews

In total, five focus group interviews have been conducted, with 3-5 members each. An overview of the participating fan clubs and the number of the interviewees is given in

the next table (Table 9.14). All interviews have been transcribed the same day each interview took place. The transcripts of each interview were then imported into the software program MS Word and, by using the line-number function software, each line of the interview was assigned a number. The transcripts were then coded and analyzed. According to Bryman & Bell (2011, p.587) there is no correct approach to coding data. The transcript has been firstly broke down into concepts. Each concept has been backed up by a number of quotations from the interviewees. As each line has been assigned a number, the author or other researchers are allowed to easily locate the quotations in the transcript. Similar concepts have been then grouped into categories. During the interviews, fan club members have been asked to describe reasons for following, forms of engagement, responses to communication tools and brand attributes, perceived brand benefits, consumption patterns and alterations and overall attitude towards Liverpool FC's use of Facebook and Twitter. A summary of the findings has been forwarded to the interviewees in order to confirm their accuracy. The coding results are presented in detail in Appendix E.

	Participating fan club	Number of interviewees
Greece	Thessaloniki (pilot study)	5
	Athens	5
UK	London	3
	Glasgow	4
	Caldicot & Gloucester	3

Table 9.14: Focus group interviews – participating fan clubs and interviewees (source: Author)

9.2.1 UK fan clubs

Liverpool FC enjoyed high awareness among all interviewees for a substantive amount of time before following the club on Facebook and Twitter. According to the interviewees, family and friends have been the main influences for becoming Liverpool FC fans at an early age. Several interviewees stated that they are season ticket holders of Liverpool FC while others stated that they are following Liverpool FC for a substantial number of away matches during the season. All interviewees also stated that they are early and regular followers of Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter. In addition, all interviewees agreed that there is generally no time frame for visiting Liverpool FC's social media accounts (e.g. before a match, after a match, offseason, onseason). Finally, the huge majority of interviewees stated that they have been following Liverpool FC in

Facebook and Twitter mainly because of their loyalty to the club, or to cite a particular fan: *“It would be odd not to do so”*.

Engagement

UK fans stated that they engage in Facebook and Twitter in many forms. In Facebook, “Like” is the most common type of engagement of UK fan club members, whether to product or non-product related posts. In Twitter, “Retweet” and “Favorite” are the most common responses. Several interviewees, although stating that they are actively involved in online conversations with the club, pointed out the problematic nature of comments, particularly in Facebook (in the form of “Comment”) and to a lesser extent in Twitter (in the form “Reply”) (Table 9.15).

How do you engage/respond to Liverpool FC’s posts?	
London	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“It depends, if you like something you Like it, this is something you know, easy”</i> • <i>“It depends, sometimes Favorite, sometimes Reply, sometimes Retweet”</i> • <i>“Yes we Comment (in Facebook), as individuals you know”</i> • <i>“In Twitter, we do comment [Reply] on a lot of stuff”</i>
Caldicot & Gloucester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I Retweet on Twitter a lot, and comment [Reply]”</i> • <i>“Either by Retweet or Share”</i> • <i>“I just Share and Like, I do not Comment really, there are so many posts, you know...”</i>
Glasgow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I Like every post”</i> • <i>“I don’t [...] to get involved in comments and things like that because there are several fans who comment on post”</i> • <i>“I Like some posts and comments too who are making sense but there are some comments which come from some very uneducated fans”</i>

Table 9.15: Engagement as expressed by UK fan club interviewees (source: Author)

Responses to communication tools

In terms of communication tools, although all agreed that the simple fact that Liverpool FC posts something catches their attention and interest immediately, the majority of interviewees pointed out their attraction to pictures and videos (Table 9.16).

What type of communication features in Liverpool FC’s posts do you mostly appreciate/ notice/ catches your attention?	
London	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “What I notice is that the club posts more stuff like pictures now, like training pictures, or press conference they put anything, not like only words, they put the whole interview, they are trying to be catchy” • “For me it’s quite interesting to see the pictures itselfyou can see the expressions of the players” • “I like it when they go behind the scenes ...to know the players I little bit” • “I like videos, I like videos very much”
Caldicot & Gloucester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I think the more interacting the link, the more attracting it is” • “...a video about Liverpool’s goals would make the link you know, more attractive for someone to see it” • “It doesn’t really matter” • “It doesn’t really matter but ok, it is nice to see videos coming out, [or] pictures”
Glasgow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I like figures, [videos], watching how they are doing in training and stuff” • “it’s more about the content, what the story is about, so whether there is a picture or not it doesn’t matter” • “we don’t care whether there is a [...] or an image”

Table 9.16: Preferred type of communication tools of UK fan club interviewees (source: Author)

Responses to brand attributes

With regard to brand attributes, as previously, all interviewees agreed that the simple fact that Liverpool FC posts something catches their attention immediately. When asked to be more specific, interviewees responded that they appreciate posts about the history of the club (“Club’s History & Tradition”), current or potential players (“Star Player(s)”), as well as posts about fans (“Fans”) and the stadium (“Stadium/Arena”) (Table 9.17).

What types of posts/content do you mostly appreciate/notice/catches your attention?	
London	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I like anything that includes quotation by players or people connected directly to Liverpool FC rather than analysis from others”</i> • <i>“I would like to see for instance something about the redevelopment of the ground”</i>
Caldicot & Gloucester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“...about the players, the coach”</i> • <i>“Well it is news stuff that interests me, about the Kop [fans stand at Anfield]”</i> • <i>“The transfers, I guess, the gossip you know, which players..”</i>
Glasgow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“All of us will agree that the most important stuff to us is what is relevant to the team [the history of the team]”</i>

Table 9.17: Preferred brand attributes of UK fan club interviewees (source: Author)

Perceived brand benefits

UK fan club members perceive all brand benefits of the adopted customer-based brand equity model, namely: Identification with the club (“Fan identification”), socialization (“Social interaction”), entertainment (“Entertainment”), escape from daily routine (“Escape”) and experience of strong emotions (“Emotions”). No additional benefits could have been identified. Of great interest is the amount of affiliation that interviewees showed for their club. In particular, interviewees mentioned that Liverpool FC is *“more than a club”*, and described their affiliation with words and expressions such as *“culture”*, *“bonding”*, *“family”* and *“big part of our lives”*. In particular:

- **Fan identification**

All interviewees have been supporters of the club for a long time before the club established its presence in the social media settings. It came therefore naturally to follow the club in those settings.

- **Escape**

The feeling of fan integration, fulfillment and contentment by means of Facebook and Twitter rather than escaping from daily routine has been mentioned as an effect among several interviewees. Further, the majority of interviewees have pointed out the psychological connection to the club in reference to the social media presence. However, feeling closer to the club as an effect of following the club on Facebook

or Twitter is a view not shared by all interview participants. In fact, one particular interviewee mentioned that if the club stops using Facebook and Twitter, it would not have any impact to any of his feelings towards the club. In addition, fan club members either travel to games of Liverpool FC or gather in certain places, each time wearing scarves or club shirts in order to watch Liverpool FC's on TV.

- Social interaction

Most interviewees occasionally interact with the club on Facebook and Twitter by means of online discussions with other fans and commenting on posts which were uploaded by the club. However, interviewees showed differing interest in interacting with the club itself, varying from interacting rather heavily to infrequently, or, on the other side of the continuum not at all. Those who do not interact with the club indicated the vast amount of comments by other fans as a major problem and therefore their comment would not add any value to the conversation. In addition, keeping up with the content that is produced by other fans is very time-consuming.

- Emotions

Emotions also play some role for the interviewees. They are more expressed in terms of being inspired and increased motivation to follow the club.

- Entertainment

Entertainment has been mainly expressed in terms of getting quick and trustful updates regarding the club. In fact, all interviewees have repeatedly referred to the value being up to date with the club and its activities and receiving inside information.

The following table (Table 9.18, over two pages) contains quotes of the interviewees supporting the above assertions.

Why do you follow Liverpool FC in social media, what do you feel, what benefits do you perceive, what does it mean to you to follow the club in Facebook and Twitter?	
	Fan Identification
Caldicot & Gloucester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“It’s the loyalty to the club really, it [] your dedication to the club, it would be really odd not to follow the club”</i>

Glasgow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I am doing this because I am a Liverpool fan”</i> • <i>“We are massive fans of Liverpool and we have been for many years”</i>
	Escape
London	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“It’s like a big family in a way you know”</i> • <i>“The family of FB is massive, Twitter is massive”</i>
Caldicot & Gloucester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“The history of the club, the support around the world is just tremendous, it just means everything to me”</i>
Glasgow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“(Liverpool FC) is a really big part of our lives”</i> • <i>“If Facebook finishes I do not think that we all would care less”</i>
	Social Interaction
London	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Then [after having the online interaction], when I come over and meet the guys it feels nice and hommy”</i> • <i>“Yes we Comment (in Facebook), as individuals you know”</i>
Glasgow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I Like some posts and comments too who are making sense but there are some comments which come from some very uneducated fans”</i>
Caldicot & Gloucester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“It happens naturally to get in touch with other Reds”</i> • <i>“There is a lot more going on in terms of different opinions”</i> • <i>“I just Share, I do not bother to comment, there are so many comments, you know...”</i>
	Emotions
London	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“It’s a culture, you know, it inspires you and it makes you feel part of it, you don’t see such things in other clubs”</i>
Caldicot & Gloucester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I think it connects the fans everywhere, you know when there is kick-off time they are waiting everywhere”</i>
	Entertainment
London	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“To get information, the latest information of Liverpool FC, not tickets”</i> • <i>“Just when the news come out, sort of transfer news, interviews, players, managers, press conferences”</i> • <i>“We need to find some sources, and these sources must be official”</i>
Caldicot & Gloucester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“There is a lot of information about the players, the manager, news about tickets, or about the game, the members sales you know, ticket allocation”</i> • <i>“It keeps me up to date”</i> • <i>“I am using it for informational purposes more”</i> • <i>“To see what’s happening in Liverpool FC you know, it’s nice to see what happens behind closed doors”</i>
Glasgow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“..to read some news and stories”</i> • <i>“I like information about upcoming games, so that’s why I am using it for”</i> • <i>“To get some behind the scenes of players”</i>

Table 9.18: Perceived brand benefits of UK fan club interviewees (source: Author)

Consumption behavior

With respect to consumption patterns each fan club is divided into two - almost equal - categories, one of which is not influenced at all by Liverpool FC’s social media content and the other is influenced, but mainly by post and activities that have an emotional connection and meaning to fans (e.g. support a charity, posts about the Hillsborough disaster). It is interesting however that statements regarding changing buying intentions were restricted to memorabilia and not to the desire to watch a game (Table 9.19).

Are there any particular posts which affect your buying behavior?	
London	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Yeah of course, when the new kit comes out and you see people post it before it actually comes out officially”</i> • <i>“I never buy anything, I only buy a scarf every game I go to but that’s it”</i> • <i>“[Generally no but] if it is important to you, like a charity, you will try to buy something”</i>
Caldicot & Gloucester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I couldn’t be brainwashed so to speak to buy something”</i> • <i>“No I have never thought to buy something because of a post, either in Facebook or Twitter”</i> • <i>“Oh yes, especially when the new kits are released”</i>
Glasgow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I think if it means something to us then yes [like Hillsborough], absolutely, but I don’t remember me seeing something on Facebook that led me to buy some stuff”</i>

Table 9.19: Alterations in buying intentions of UK fan club interviewees (source: Author)

Satisfaction - Suggestions for improvement

Analyzing the responses of the interviews, there seem to be a general satisfaction of the content produced by Liverpool FC in both social media settings. Extracts from the interviewees include expressions such as *“I think it’s ok for me”*, *“I think it is really good ... decent news are coming out every 10 minutes and that is really good”*, and *“They [the management] are doing a decent job”*.

However, there are some suggestions for improvement made by UK fans. In particular, fans would like to see their club focusing more on them and integrate them more. Interviewees appreciate that Liverpool FC tries to *“embrace their fan base”* through Facebook and Twitter, but wish for more qualitative fan integration: *“...to recognize the fans a bit more, they are not just to give their money, they are I think part of the club”*

Others propose ways to do so: “*They could have been a direct interaction with the management*” or “*I would like to see for instance something about the redevelopment of the ground, something from John Henry [owner], to give you a kind of walkthrough for what’s going to happen in two-three years*”.

As already indicated fans pointed out the problematic nature of comments and claimed for content administration, particularly in Facebook. Several fans of all fan clubs agreed that many comments made by others are from “*irrelevant*” to “*uneducated*” to simply “*rubbish*”. They suggest that a content administrator should be put in place in order to cut off such comments.

Finally, a further common suggestion of all fan clubs deals with more “*behind the scenes*” content, particularly in the form of pictures and videos, as already explained previously in this section.

9.2.2 Greek fan clubs

Besides the Athens fan club, the analysis of the Greek fan club members includes statements from the Thessaloniki fan club as well (which has been examined as part of the pilot study), in order to facilitate the analysis and comparison of the fan clubs of both countries. Liverpool FC enjoyed high awareness among all Greek interviewees for a substantive amount of time before following the club on Facebook and Twitter. Besides family and friends, the success of Liverpool FC during the 80’s have been named as key factors that influenced Greek fans in selecting a football team to support. Several interviewees stated that they regularly organize trips to Liverpool or elsewhere to see their club playing live. One of the interviewees studied in Liverpool and has been a season ticket holder for the time living there. In addition, all interviewees stated that they are early and regular followers of Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter and agreed that there is generally no time frame for visiting Liverpool FC’s social media accounts (e.g. before a match, after a match, offseason, onseason). Finally, interviewees agreed that they have been following Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter mainly because of their loyalty to the club.

Engagement

In Facebook, “Like” is the most common response of the members of fan clubs in Greece, whether on product or non-product related posts. In Twitter, “Retweet” is the most common response. Greek fan club members pointed out the problematic nature of

comments, particularly in Facebook, where the amount of comments is huge and difficult to follow (Table 9.20).

How do you engage/respond to Liverpool FC's posts?	
Athens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Either Like, Comment or Share. We also copy some news to some groups"</i> • <i>"Either Like or Comment, if I do have a personal view on the topic, I leave my comments"</i> • <i>"I just read the news and respond by a Like"</i> • <i>"I rather prefer to avoid the whole process of reading and Like and so"</i> • <i>"Regarding Twitter, most of the times I Retweet a post"</i>
Thessaloniki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"The easiest way to respond is to "Like" or "Retweet". It's very difficult to keep track of comments, you know, there are thousands of comments and you sometimes can't find even your own comment"</i> • <i>"I don't mind to look for comments, they are thousands"</i> • <i>"Our reaction depends on the kind of post. There was for example this post on Wednesday, "Louis Suarez-phenomenon", of course you respond to that by Like. But last Sunday, there was a post "Hull City beats Liverpool 3-1", you can't respond to that by Like. That's common sense"</i>

Table 9.20: Engagement as expressed by Greek fan club interviewees (source: Author)

Responses to communication tools

In terms of communication tools, several interviewees pointed out their attraction to pictures and videos while many stated that everything is interesting to them. However, for some interviewees, it depends on the subject of the post rather the communication features. One interviewee pointed out the language barrier, which makes pictures and videos even more attractive. The following table consists of extracts of Greek interviewees related to their attraction and responses to communication tools and features on Liverpool FC's posts (Table 9.21).

What type of communication features in Liverpool FC’s posts do you mostly appreciate/ notice/ catches your attention?	
Athens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Everything, all!”</i> • <i>“I am particularly interested in the interviews after the matches”</i> • <i>“Well me, I don’t speak English and I am trying to translate every single word to get the meaning, and through pictures [it’s easier]”</i> • <i>“It depends to who is talking, what is said, what videos are available”</i>
Thessaloniki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Pictures, news, everything, I get all the information I need from there”</i> • <i>“Everything, everything that is related to Liverpool is interesting to me”</i>

Table 9.21: Preferred type of communication tools by Greek fan club interviewees (source: Author)

Responses to brand attributes

Although Greek interviewees that every post generated by Liverpool FC is of interest to them, they expressed some preference towards the history of the club (“Club’s History & Tradition”), particularly in order to use it as an educational tool for younger generations. Others areas of interest to fans include posts about “Star Player(s)” and the “Head Coach” (Table 9.22).

What type of news/content do you mostly appreciate/notice/catches your attention?	
Athens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Everything they post is interesting to me. For the younger ones, some historical pieces can offer very much”</i> • <i>“Players’ interviews are very interesting, about everything”</i> • <i>“The recent Hillsborough memorial captured my interest too”</i> • <i>“Some posts, after the game or regarding our coach, you know”</i> • <i>“Personally I would like to see more posts about the clubs’ history ... I am trying to explain this to younger fans, using pictures and stuff”</i>
Thessaloniki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Well, mainly about our star players but also newcomers, I mean new signings, or interest about a player to get him on our board”</i> • <i>“News about our team or what about Suarez’s contract for example, or Gerrard”</i>

Table 9.22: Preferred brand attributes of Greek fan club interviewees (source: Author)

Perceived brand benefits

Several interviewees expressed their love and affiliation towards the club by spontaneously stating that Liverpool FC is “*more than a club*” and using words and expressions such as “*passion*”, “*way of living*”, and “*family*”. Greek fan club members perceive all brand benefits of the adopted customer-based brand equity model, namely: Identification with the club (“Fan identification”), socialization (“Social interaction”), entertainment (“Entertainment”), escape from daily routine (“Escape”) and experience of strong emotions (“Emotions”). No additional benefits could have been identified during the interviews. In particular:

- **Fan identification**

All interviewees have been supporters of the club for a long time before the club established its presence in the social media settings. It came therefore naturally to become online followers of the club. Others agreed that they followed the club in Facebook and Twitter in order to signal to their friends and circle of acquaintances, which team they support, providing some kind of identity.

- **Escape**

The feeling of fan integration, fulfillment and contentment by means of Facebook and Twitter rather than escaping from daily routine has been mentioned as an effect among several interviewees. However, this view is not shared by all interview participants. In fact, two interviewees mentioned that their feelings remained unaffected by following the club in Facebook and Twitter. In addition, fan club members usually gather in a certain place during matches, wearing scarves or club shirts in order to watch Liverpool FC’s on TV.

- **Social interaction**

Most interviewees interact with the club on Facebook and Twitter by means of online discussions with other fans and commenting on posts which were uploaded by the club. Sharing of emotions with other online fans has been also mentioned during the interviews. However, interviewees showed differing interest in interacting with the club itself, varying from interacting rather heavily to infrequently, or, on the other side of the continuum not at all. Those who do not interact with the club indicated the vast amount of comments by other fans as a major problem and therefore their comment would not add any value to the

conversation. In addition, keeping up with the content that is produced by other fans is very time-consuming.

- Emotions

Emotions also play some role for the interviewees. They are more expressed in terms of being inspired and increased motivation to follow the club. In addition, following the club in Facebook and Twitter makes the Greek fans feeling closer to the club, as if they were living in Liverpool.

- Entertainment

Entertainment has been mainly expressed in terms of staying up to date, getting quick and trustful information regarding the club but also gaining amusement by viewing non-sport related pictures and videos.

An overview of the above assertions is given next (Table 9.23).

Why do you follow Liverpool FC in social media, what do you feel, what benefits do you perceive, what does it mean to you to follow the club in Facebook and Twitter?	
	Fan Identification
Athens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I feel part of the club! Since we cannot be there physically, to get in touch even through the newsfeed, makes you feel part of it”</i>
Thessaloniki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Through Facebook you disclose to everyone what you feel and how you feel about the club”</i>
	Escape
Athens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“We support Liverpool whether it is on FB or not”</i> • <i>“You are getting more involved with the team”</i>
Thessaloniki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I don’t feel something special”</i> • <i>“You become you become a member of the family...a worldwide family”</i>
	Social Interaction
Athens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Something I agree with I can share it through the internet”</i> • <i>“Retweeting a post ... can bring you closer to other likeminded people. This way I have got a lot of English friends who are Liverpool fans”</i>
Thessaloniki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“It’s simply that, instead of, for example, sharing your disappointing with S. or G., you are sharing it with another 10 thousand people”</i>
	Emotions
Athens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“To experience the atmosphere, to increase the motivation “</i> • <i>“I feel part of the club! Since we cannot be there physically, to get in touch even through the newsfeed, makes you feel part of it, they share with you the whole atmosphere around the club”</i> • <i>“Sometimes they upload pictures from a training session and you are getting right into (...), this brings you closer to the club”</i>
Thessaloniki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Liverpool is a way of living. A special way, a family....”</i>
	Entertainment
Athens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“For information purposes in general ...with the technology and the internet, staying up to date has become much easier”</i> • <i>“You see the players during a time out, joking...laughing or in family moments, you get another view and you see what they are representing”</i>
Thessaloniki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If something happens, you get informed immediately through a post at your wall. The same is true for Twitter”</i> • <i>“Through Facebook you get informed about what’s happening the very moment it happens”</i>

Table 9.23: Perceived brand benefits of Greek fan club interviewees (source: Author)

Consumption behavior

With respect to alterations in the buying behavior of Greek fan club members because of their interaction with Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter, Greek fan clubs members expressed different opinions. One category stated that they are not influenced at all by Liverpool FC's social media content and interaction, while another group is influenced, mainly by activities that have an emotional connection and meaning to fans (e.g. Hillsborough disaster). Some stated that they are negatively influenced by the price of the items offered by the club online, rather than the content and interaction in social media. It is interesting however that statements regarding changing buying intentions were restricted to memorabilia and not the desire to watch a game (Table 9.24).

Are there any particular posts which affect your buying behavior?	
Athens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"The internet does not affect me in any way"</i> • <i>"In general terms no, but in cases such as Hillsborough, where shirts are printed or regarding the title, it stimulates your desire to buy something"</i> • <i>"It depends on the situation, I mean in cases such as Hillsborough or other non-profit actions"</i> • <i>"To buy a Gerrard shirt, FB or Twitter does not affect me in any way"</i>
Thessaloniki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"To influence me? No, no way. Not even 1%"</i> • <i>"Very few of us are influenced by such things"</i> • <i>"I would have bought it but the price was out of my range"</i> • <i>"For example, such as the collection of match programmes [they offered] the other day, no matter how they promote this, I wanted them and I got them"</i>

Table 9.24: Alterations in buying intentions of Greek fan club interviewees (source: Author)

Satisfaction - Suggestions for improvement

Analyzing the responses of Greek fan club members, there seem to be an overall positive attitude towards the content produced by Liverpool FC in both social media settings. Extracts from the interviewees include expressions such as *"I think they post many things, I am really satisfied"*, *"I think it's ok for me"* and *"I am very satisfied with the content"*.

With regard to suggestions for improvement made by Greek fans, interviewees wish that *"...they [management] need to go a long way regarding approaching fans. They see you more as a customer, not a fan"*.

As mentioned earlier, fans pointed out the problematic nature of comments and claimed for content administration, particularly in Facebook “*It’s very difficult to keep track of comments, you know, there are thousands of comments and you sometimes can’t find even your own comment*”.

9.2.3 Summary of focus group interviews findings

The responses of the fan club members during the focus group interviews were primarily used to identify what brand benefits they perceive through their Facebook and Twitter interaction with Liverpool FC. The analysis of the focus group interviews confirmed the existence of all brand benefits described in the adopted customer-based brand equity model (Section 3.2). Almost every brand benefit has been perceived by at least one fan club member in each focus group interview, although, as probably expected, not all interviewees perceived the same benefits and certainly not to the same extent. No additional benefits have been identified, which indicates that fans perceive the same benefits through social media interaction as they do when watching a match live. The next table (Table 9.25) summarizes the previous discussion. Overall, fans perceive the same benefits and with the same level of resonance in both social media tools.

Furthermore, the analysis of the interviews suggest that fan club members interact in different ways with Liverpool FC and imply that their consumption behavior has been altered as a result to their social media interaction with Liverpool FC.

Focus group interview with fan club of...	Perceived brand benefits as per adopted customer-based brand equity model					Other brand benefit perceived
	Fan Identification	Escape	Social Interaction	Emotions	Entertainment	
London	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Glasgow	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Caldigot & Gloucester	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Athens	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Thessaloniki	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO

Table 9.25: Juxtaposition of brand benefits from the adopted customer-based brand equity model and from the interviews of the study (source: Author)

9.3 Questionnaire

The questionnaire responses provide a quantification of the views of each fan club in terms of the most appreciated communication tools and brand attributes, the resonance of the perceived brand benefits, consumption behavior alterations as well as the degree of satisfaction regarding the content produced by Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter.

An overview of the number of questionnaires collected by each fan club is given below (Table 9.26). The number of fan club members who follow Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter (columns: Facebook followers and Twitter followers) has been based on estimations made by the chairman and the interviewees of each fan club which, however accurate, are not known precisely, except the case of the Glasgow fan club. As with the interviews, this section re-evaluated the results of the Thessaloniki fan club (which has been the subject of the pilot study) in order to arrive at more reliable results and to facilitate the comparison between UK and Greek fan clubs. The questionnaire has been automatically analyzed through Google Forms for each fan club separately. Statistical analysis of the responses has been provided in order to facilitate the drawing of conclusions.

	Participating Fan club	Members 2013/2014	Facebook followers	Twitter followers	Total responses	Response rate
Greece	Thessaloniki (pilot study)	124	100	80	56	45.16%
	Athens	249	150	70	58	23.29%
UK	London	350	250	200	48	13.71%
	Glasgow	62	54	31	29	46.77%
	Caldicot & Gloucester	60	30	20	16	26.66%

Table 9.26: Questionnaire response rates (source: Author)

9.3.1 UK fan clubs

Demographics

In total, 93 questionnaires have been completed by UK fan clubs (London fan club: 48, Glasgow fan club: 29, Caldicot & Gloucester fan club: 16).

The first part of the questionnaire (5 questions) dealt with collecting demographics from the respondents. All returned questionnaires have completed this section except the “Marital Status” text box, which has been left blank by two respondents and the “Nationality” text box, which has been left blank from almost half of the UK

respondents. Ultimately, 14 nations were represented: Irish, British, American, Armenian, Zimbabwean, Thai, Indian, Brazilian, Mauritian, Maltese, Greek, Romanian, Swedish, and South African. Interestingly, no respondents were at the age group of “65 and over”. The results are tabulated next (Table 9.27).

Demographic		UK respondents (N=93)	
		Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-24	10	10.75%
	25-34	31	33.33%
	35-44	36	38.71%
	45-54	12	12.91%
	55-64	4	4.30%
	65 and over	0	0.00%
Gender	Male	79	84.95%
	Female	14	15.05%
Marital status	Single	52	57.14%
	Married	35	38.46%
	Divorced	4	4.40%
Yearly income	0-9999 £(€)	13	13.98%
	10000-19999 £(€)	12	12.90%
	20000-29999 £(€)	31	33.33%
	30000-39999 £(€)	12	12.90%
	40000 £(€) and above	25	26.89%

Table 9.27: Demographics of UK fan club members (source: Author)

Engagement

UK respondents agreed that there is generally no time frame for visiting Liverpool FC’s social media accounts (e.g. offseason or onseason). In addition, UK fan club members responded that they have been following Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter mainly because of their loyalty to the club (Figures 9.1, 9.2).

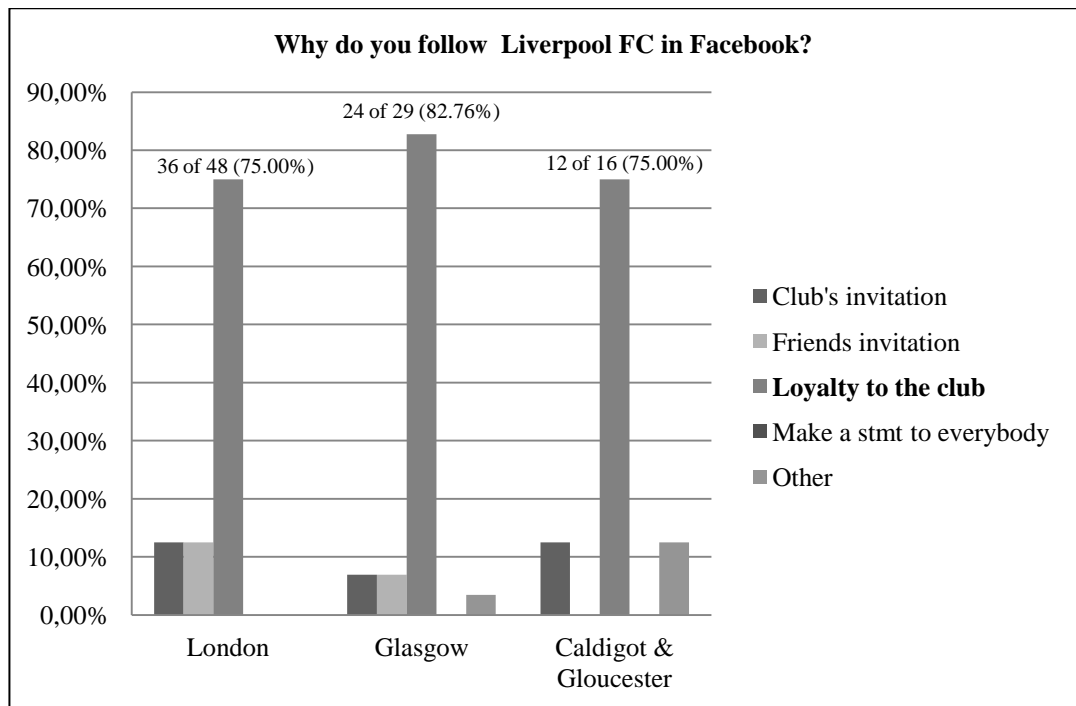


Figure 9.1: Reasons for following Liverpool FC in Facebook - UK fan club members (source: Author)

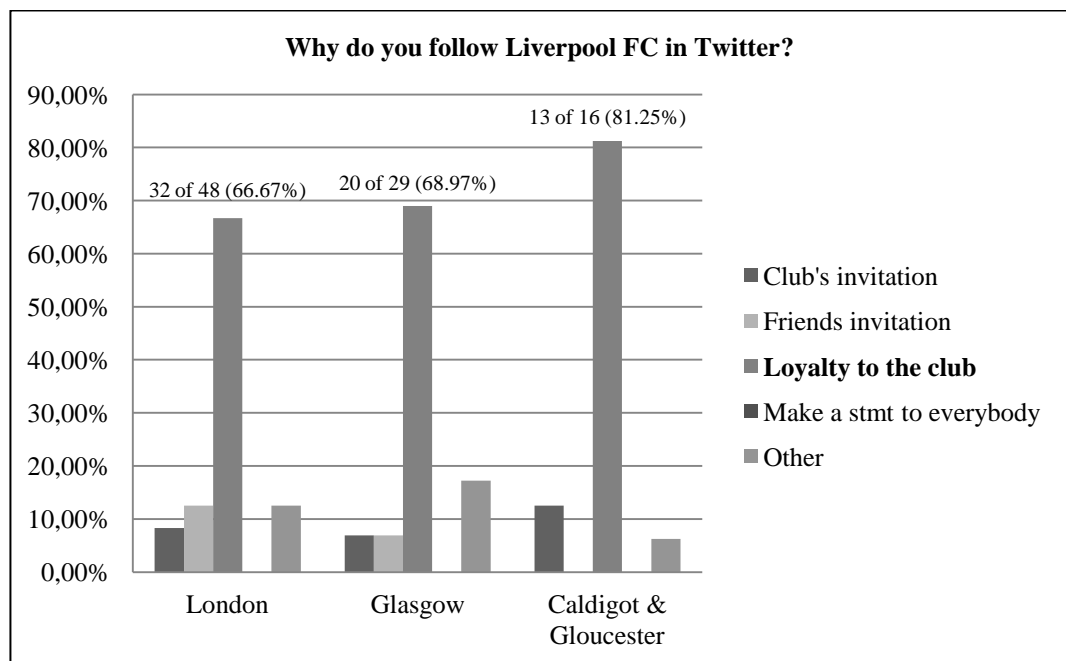


Figure 9.2: Reasons for following Liverpool FC in Twitter - UK fan club members (source: Author)

The results further indicated that “Like” is by far the most common response in Facebook while “Favorite” and “Retweet” are the most common responses in Twitter (Figure 9.3, 9.4).

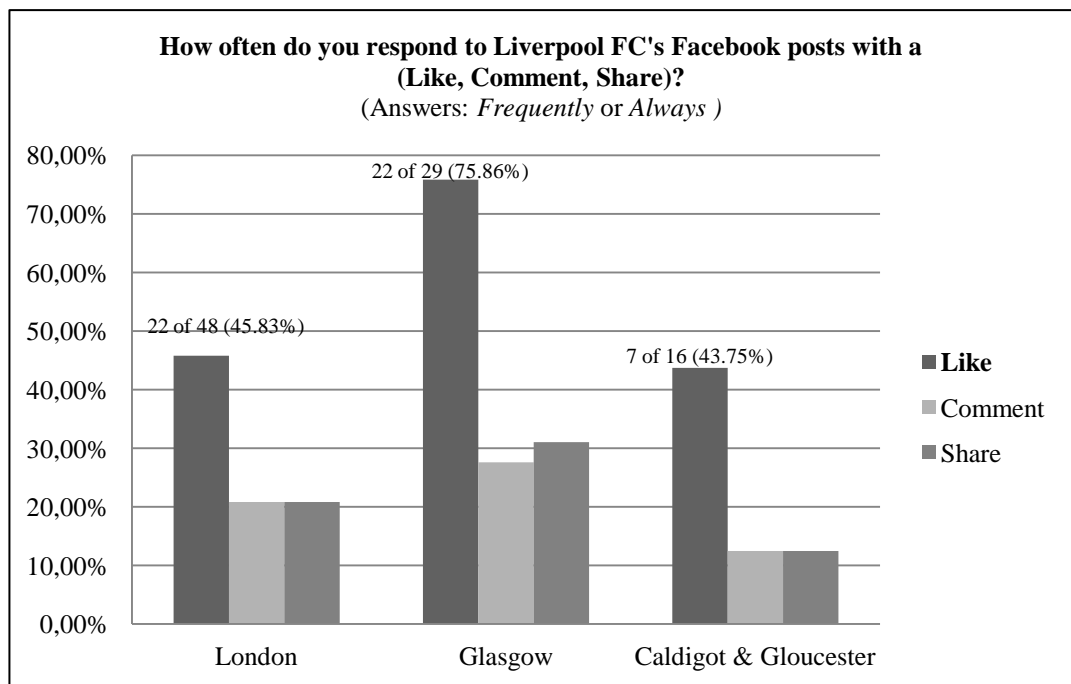


Figure 9.3: Responses to Facebook posts - UK fan club members (source: Author)

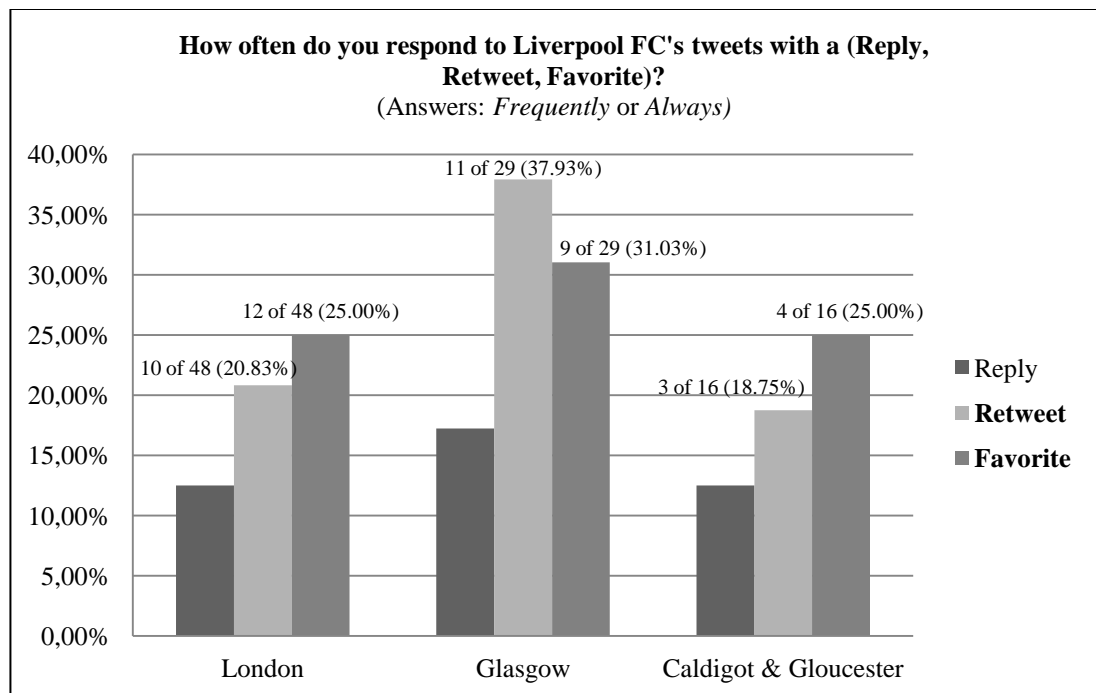


Figure 9.4: Responses to tweets - UK fan club members (source: Author)

Responses to communication tools

The table below shows that the two types of communication tools which UK fans feel mostly attracted to have been pictures and videos (Table 9.28). For all UK fan club respondents, posts that contain visuals (pictures and videos) are mostly preferred, while a certain amount of respondents of all fan clubs stated that the communication feature of the post does not have any impact to them. Polls and Contests also receive a fair amount of responses.

Which of the following features would make a Facebook/Twitter post more attractive to you? (respondents could select up to four choices)						
Communication tool/feature	London (N=48)		Glasgow (N=29)		Caldicot & Gloucester (N=16)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
A simple text post	16	14.81%	10	15.38%	3	7.50%
Picture	20	18.52%	15	23.08%	9	22.50%
Video	18	16.67%	14	21.54%	8	20.00%
Link	12	11.11%	7	10.77%	4	10.00%
Contest	14	12.96%	4	6.15%	4	10.00%
Poll	8	7.41%	8	12.31%	5	12.50%
Auction	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	2.50%
It doesn't matter	18	16.67%	7	10.77%	5	12.50%

Table 9.28: Attraction to communication tools - UK fan club members (source: Author)

Responses to brand attributes

With regard to product related brand attributes, in both Facebook and Twitter, UK fan club members mostly respond to posts about “Team Success” and “Star Player(s)”. These two attributes also generate the most responses among all brand attributes. With regard to non-product related attributes, there is general agreement in Twitter on “Club’s History & Tradition” and “Fans”, while minor differences between the UK fan clubs can be observed in Facebook, where additionally the attributes “Club’s Culture & Values” and “Event’s Image” receive a fair share of responses. Interestingly, posts about sponsors received none to very few responses (Table 9.29, 9.30).

What kind of Facebook posts do you usually Like, Comment, Share? (respondents could select up to four choices)						
Brand attribute	London (N=48)		Glasgow (N=29)		Caldigot & Gloucester (N=16)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Team success	34	20.24%	25	23.15%	4	16.00%
Star Player(s)	30	17.86%	22	20.37%	3	12.00%
Head Coach	12	7.14%	12	11.11%	1	4.00%
Brand Mark	4	2.38%	4	3.70%	0	0.00%
Management	4	2.38%	7	6.48%	1	4.00%
Club's History & Tradition	24	14.29%	13	12.04%	5	20.00%
Club's Culture & Values	12	7.14%	8	7.41%	3	12.00%
Event's Image	12	7.14%	9	8.33%	2	8.00%
Sponsor	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Fans	18	10.71%	6	5.56%	3	12.00%
Stadium/Arena	14	8.33%	2	1.85%	1	4.00%

Table 9.29: Attraction to brand attributes in Facebook - UK fan club members (source: Author)

(To) What kind of tweets do you usually Reply, Retweet, Favorite? (respondents could select up to four choices)						
Brand attribute	London (N=48)		Glasgow (N=29)		Caldigot & Gloucester (N=16)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Team success	28	21.21%	22	23.91%	4	15.38%
Star Player(s)	20	15.15%	19	20.65%	4	15.38%
Head Coach	12	9.09%	6	6.52%	2	7.69%
Brand Mark	0	0.00%	3	3.26%	0	0.00%
Management	4	3.03%	4	4.35%	1	3.85%
Club's History & Tradition	18	13.64%	12	13.04%	5	19.23%
Club's Culture & Values	10	7.58%	6	6.52%	3	11.54%
Event's Image	8	6.06%	5	5.43%	2	7.69%
Sponsor	2	1.52%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Fans	16	12.12%	10	10.87%	4	15.38%
Stadium/Arena	8	6.06%	3	3.26%	1	3.85%

Table 9.30: Attraction to brand attributes in Twitter - UK fan club members (source: Author)

Perceived brand benefits

The questionnaire analysis confirmed that all benefits have a great relevance amongst the sample, while the benefit of escaping from daily routine (“Escape”) to a lower extent than the others. In Facebook, “Fan Identification” was one of the benefits which scored very high in each UK fan club. “Entertainment”, which is mainly expressed as getting up to date information, has been also very often perceived among all UK fan club members. Some differences however can be observed amongst UK fan clubs. That is, “Emotions” is the most perceived benefit amongst London fan club members while “Socialize” that of Glasgow fan club members. Both benefits however score very low amongst Caldigot & Gloucester fan club members. The results are presented in detail in the following table (Table 9.31).

Please rate how much you agree with the next statements: As a Facebook "fan" of Liverpool FC, I am able to...						
(Answers: Agree or Strongly agree)						
Brand benefit	London (N=48)		Glasgow (N=29)		Caldigot & Gloucester (N=16)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
...identify with the team	40	83.33%	24	82.76%	10	62.50%
...associate/socialize with others	26	54.17%	25	86.21%	7	43.75%
...escape from daily stress or routine	32	66.67%	14	48.28%	8	50.00%
...entertain myself	38	79.17%	24	82.76%	14	87.50%
...feel strong emotions	44	91.67%	22	75.86%	9	56.25%

Table 9.31: Perceived brand benefits in Facebook - UK fan club members (source: Author)

In general, the same findings apply also to Twitter, although to a slightly lesser extent (Table 9.32). Noteworthy, the order of the perceived benefits in Facebook and Twitter for each fan club is roughly the same, which suggests that both social media tools are used for the same reasons by UK fan club members.

Please rate how much you agree with the next statements: As a Twitter "follower" of Liverpool FC, I am able to... (Answers: Agree or Strongly agree)						
Brand benefit	London (N=48)		Glasgow (N=29)		Caldicot & Gloucester (N=16)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
...identify with the team	36	75.00%	20	68.97%	12	75.00%
...associate/socialize with others	34	70.83%	18	62.07%	10	62.50%
...escape from daily stress or routine	32	66.67%	10	34.48%	10	62.50%
...entertain myself	36	75.00%	20	68.97%	14	87.50%
...feel strong emotions	40	83.33%	18	62.07%	10	62.50%

Table 9.32: Perceived brand benefits in Twitter - UK fan club members (source: Author)

Consumption behavior

London and Glasgow fan clubs agreed that both match attendance desire as well as memorabilia buying intentions have been increased for about 40% of their fan club members, as a result of their interaction with Liverpool FC through Facebook and Twitter. Memorabilia buying intentions have been slightly greater altered than match tickets buying intentions for the majority of UK fan club members. Caldicot & Gloucester fan club members however stated that their buying intentions were unaffected as only 12.5% responded that they have been (*probably yes* or *definitely yes*) altered as a result of their social media interaction with Liverpool FC (Figure 9.5).



Figure 9.5: Changes in buying behavior - UK fan club members (source: Author)

Satisfaction

The questionnaire responses confirm the overall positive satisfaction as the vast majority of the respondents of all UK fan clubs are “*satisfied*” or “*very satisfied*” with the content produced in either Facebook or Twitter (Figure 9.6).

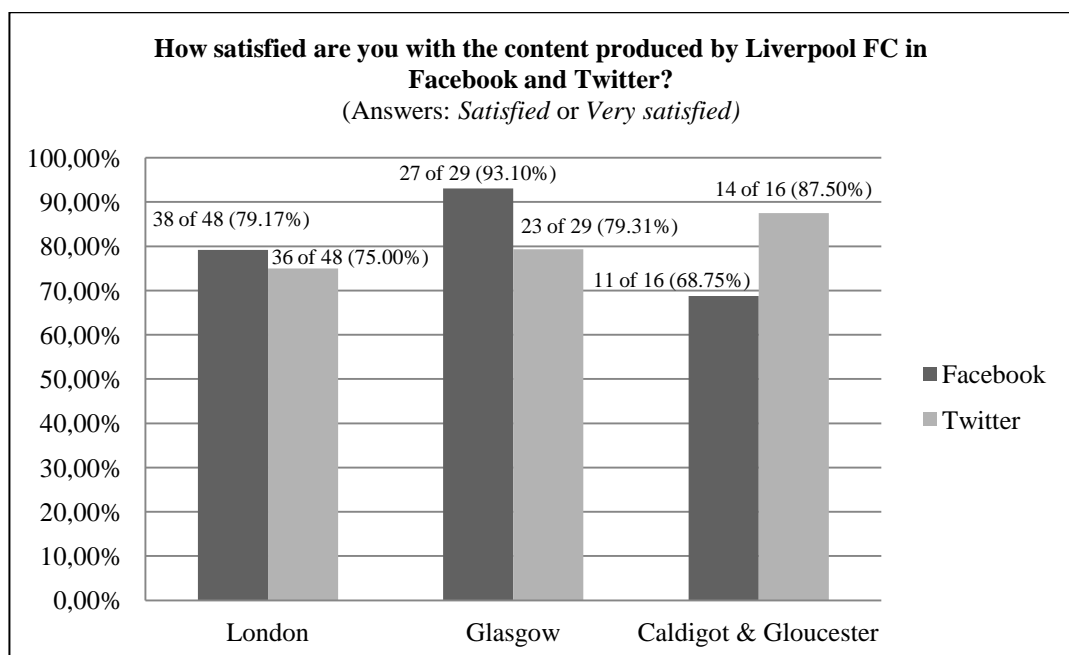


Figure 9.6: Satisfaction regarding the content in Facebook and Twitter - UK fan club members (source: Author)

9.3.2 Greek fan clubs

Demographics

The total number of questionnaire respondents of Greek fan clubs were 114 (Athens fan club: 58 and Thessaloniki fan club: 56). In terms of demographics, Greek fan club members are mainly Greeks (almost 95%), the remaining percentage not indicating their nationality. Interestingly, over 95% of the respondents were male while no respondents were older than 45 years. The next table summarizes the results (Table 9.33).

Demographic		Greek respondents (N=114)	
		Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-24	69	60.52%
	25-34	39	34.21%
	35-44	6	5.27%
	45-54	0	0.00%
	55-64	0	0.00%
	65 and over	0	0.00%
Gender	Male	109	95.61%
	Female	5	4.39%
Marital status	Single	101	88.59%
	Married	12	10.52%
	Divorced	1	0.80%
Yearly income	0-9999 £(€)	98	85.96%
	10000-19999 £(€)	11	9.56%
	20000-29999 £(€)	2	1.75%
	30000-39999 £(€)	1	0.80%
	40000 £(€) and above	2	1.75%

Table 9.33: Demographics of Greek fan club members (source: Author)

Engagement

Greek respondents agreed that there is generally no time frame for visiting Liverpool FC's social media accounts (e.g. offseason or onseason). In addition, the overwhelming majority of Greek fan club members responded that they have been following Liverpool FC in social media because of their loyalty to the club. The results apply to both selected social media tools, the results however being slightly lower in the case of Twitter (Figures 9.7, 9.8).

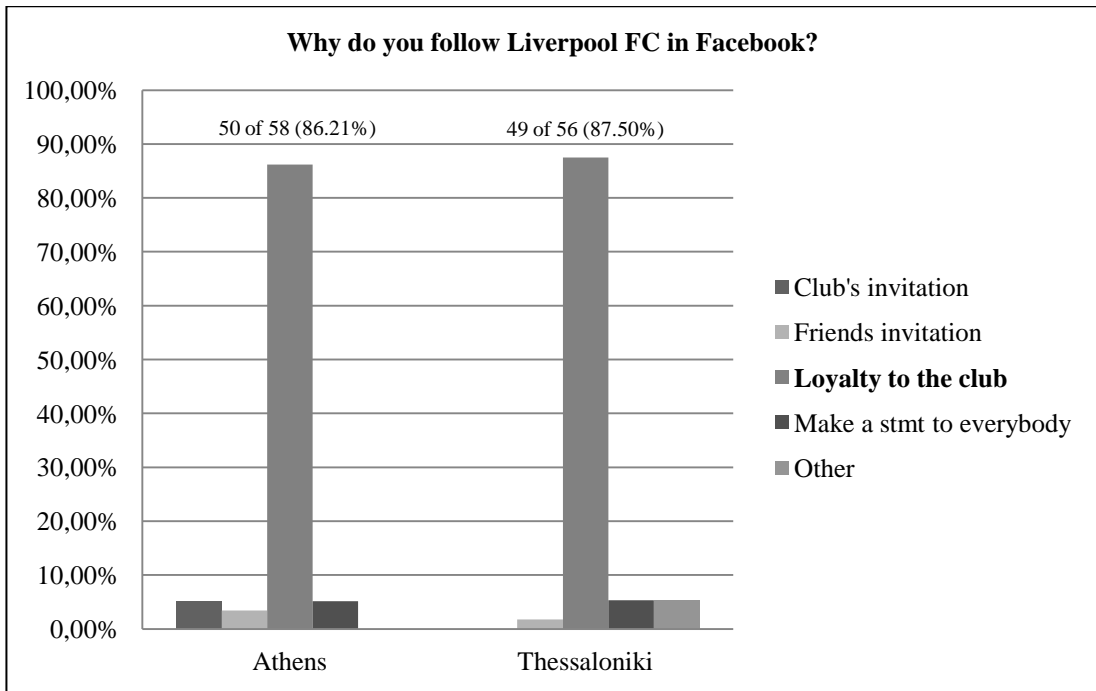


Figure 9.7: Reasons for following Liverpool FC in Facebook - Greek fan club members (source: Author)

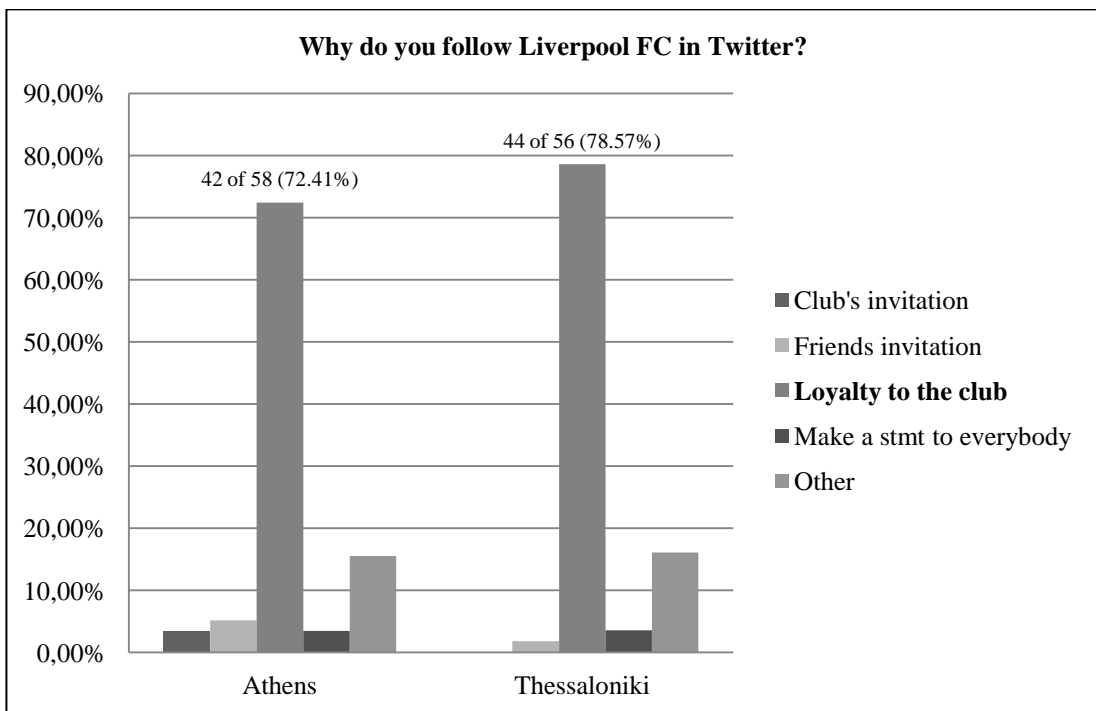


Figure 9.8: Reasons for following Liverpool FC in Twitter - Greek fan club members (source: Author)

In terms of responses, the results indicate that “Like” is by far the most common response in Facebook and “Favorite” the most common response in Twitter (Figures 9.9, 9.10).

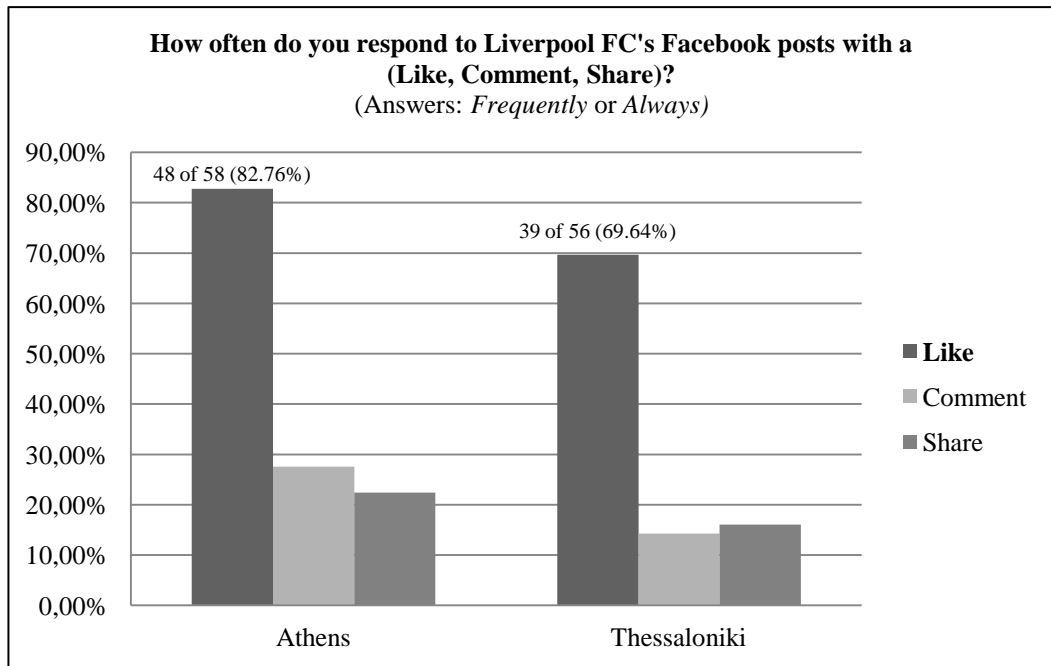


Figure 9.9: Responses to Facebook posts - Greek fan club members (source: Author)

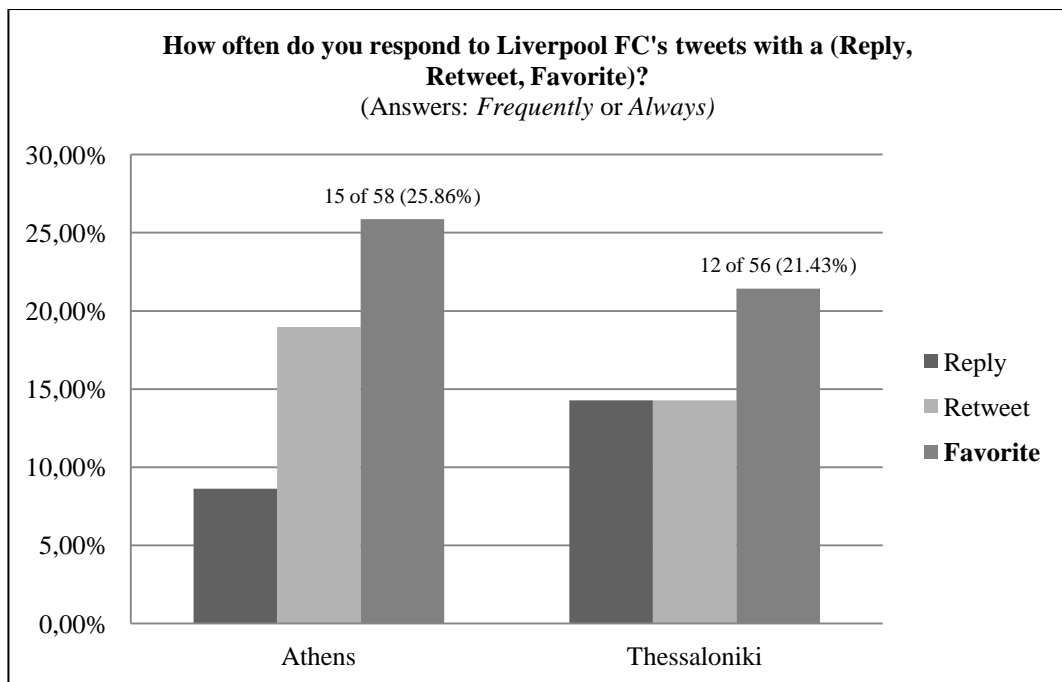


Figure 9.10: Responses to tweets - Greek fan club members (source: Author)

Responses to communication tools

The questionnaire revealed that Greek fan club members would find a post that contains pictures more attractive. Videos and links are the second most attractive communication tools to the Athens and the Thessaloniki fan club members respectively. Polls also seem to be fairly attractive to Greek fan club members (Table 9.34).

Which of the following features would make a Facebook/Twitter post more attractive to you? (respondents could select up to four choices)				
Communication tool/feature	Athens (N=58)		Thessaloniki (N=56)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
A simple text post	22	13.41%	32	18.71%
Picture	46	28.05%	42	24.56%
Video	36	21.95%	25	14.62%
Link	20	12.20%	34	19.88%
Contest	11	6.71%	8	4.68%
Poll	20	12.20%	18	10.53%
Auction	1	0.61%	3	1.75%
It doesn't matter to me	6	3.66%	9	5.26%

Table 9.34: Attraction to communication tools - Greek fan club members (source: Author)

Responses to brand attributes

With regard to brand attributes, the questionnaire responses revealed that in both Facebook and Twitter, the four brand attributes which received the greater amount of interactions have been “Team Success” and “Star Player(s)” amongst product related posts and, amongst non-product related posts, “Club’s History & Tradition” and “Fans” (Table 9.35, 9.36).

What kind of Facebook posts do you usually Like, Comment or Share? (respondents could select up to four choices)				
Brand attribute	Athens (N=58)		Thessaloniki (N=56)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Team success	48	22.12%	49	22.90%
Star Player(s)	35	16.13%	34	15.89%
Head Coach	15	6.91%	17	7.94%
Brand Mark	11	5.07%	10	4.67%
Management	1	0.46%	5	2.34%
Club's History & Tradition	37	17.05%	37	17.29%
Club's Culture & Values	23	10.60%	23	10.75%
Event's Image	5	2.30%	12	5.61%
Sponsor	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Fans	34	15.67%	27	12.62%
Stadium/Arena	6	2.76%	0	0.00%

Table 9.35: Attraction to brand attributes in Facebook - Greek fan club members (source: Author)

(To) What kind of tweets do you usually Reply, Retweet, Favorite? (respondents could select up to four choices)				
Brand attribute	Athens (N=58)		Thessaloniki (N=56)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Team success	41	24.26%	45	23.56%
Star Player(s)	23	13.61%	36	18.85%
Head Coach	10	5.92%	14	7.33%
Brand Mark	13	7.69%	10	5.24%
Management	1	0.59%	6	3.14%
Club's History & Tradition	23	13.61%	25	13.09%
Club's Culture & Values	16	9.47%	20	10.47%
Event's Image	9	5.33%	12	6.28%
Sponsor	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Fans	22	13.02%	21	10.99%
Stadium/Arena	9	5.33%	2	1.05%

Table 9.36: Attraction to brand attributes in Twitter - Greek club members (source: Author)

Perceived brand benefits

The questionnaire analysis confirmed that all benefits identified during the interviews with Greek fan club members representatives have a great relevance amongst the Greek sample, while the benefit of escaping from daily routine (“Escape”) to a lower extent than the others, in both social media tools. Greek fan club members make use of Facebook because they anticipate great emotions (“Emotions”) as well as for socialization purposes (“Socialize”) (Table 9.37).

Please rate how much you agree with the next statements: As a Facebook "fan" of Liverpool FC, I am able to...				
(Answers: Agree or Strongly agree)				
Brand benefit	Athens (N=58)		Thessaloniki (N=56)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
...identify with the team	45	77.59%	42	75.00%
...associate/socialize with others	44	75.86%	47	83.93%
...escape from daily stress or routine	32	55.17%	34	60.71%
...entertain myself	37	63.79%	43	76.79%
...feel strong emotions	52	89.66%	47	83.93%

Table 9.37: Perceived brand benefits in Facebook - Greek fan club members (source: Author)

The benefit of strong emotions is also the main benefit perceived by Greek fans when interacting with Liverpool FC through Twitter (Table 9.38).

Please rate how much you agree with the next statements: As a Twitter "follower" of Liverpool FC, I am able to...				
(Answers: Agree or Strongly agree)				
Brand benefit	Athens (N=58)		Thessaloniki (N=56)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
...identify with the team	32	55.17%	36	64.29%
...associate/socialize with others	35	60.34%	30	53.57%
...escape from daily stress or routine	27	46.55%	26	46.43%
...entertain myself	29	50.00%	32	57.14%
...feel strong emotions	38	65.52%	39	69.64%

Table 9.38: Perceived brand benefits in Twitter - Greek fan club members (source: Author)

Consumption behavior

As a result of their interaction with the club through Facebook and Twitter, match attendance desire as well as memorabilia buying intentions have been increased for over 40% of the Athens fan club members and over 50% of the Thessaloniki fan club members. Memorabilia buying intentions have been altered to a slightly greater extent than match tickets buying intentions (Figure 9.11).

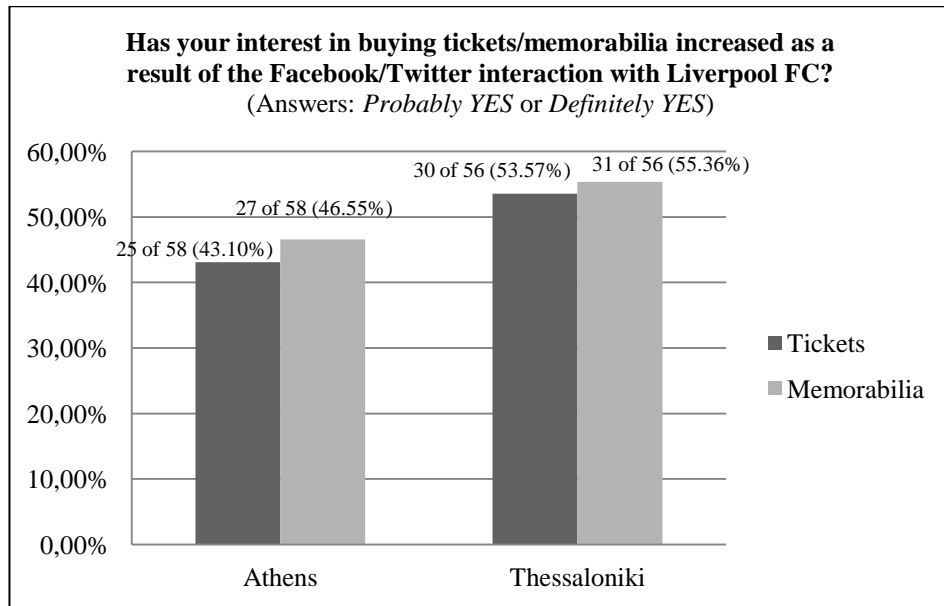


Figure 9.11: Changes in buying behavior - Greek fan club members (source: Author)

Satisfaction

The questionnaire responses confirm the overall satisfaction of Liverpool FC’s social media presence by its Greek fans. In particular, over 85% of the respondents of both Greek fan clubs are “*satisfied*” or “*very satisfied*” with the content produced in Facebook and around 70% in Twitter (Figure 9.12).

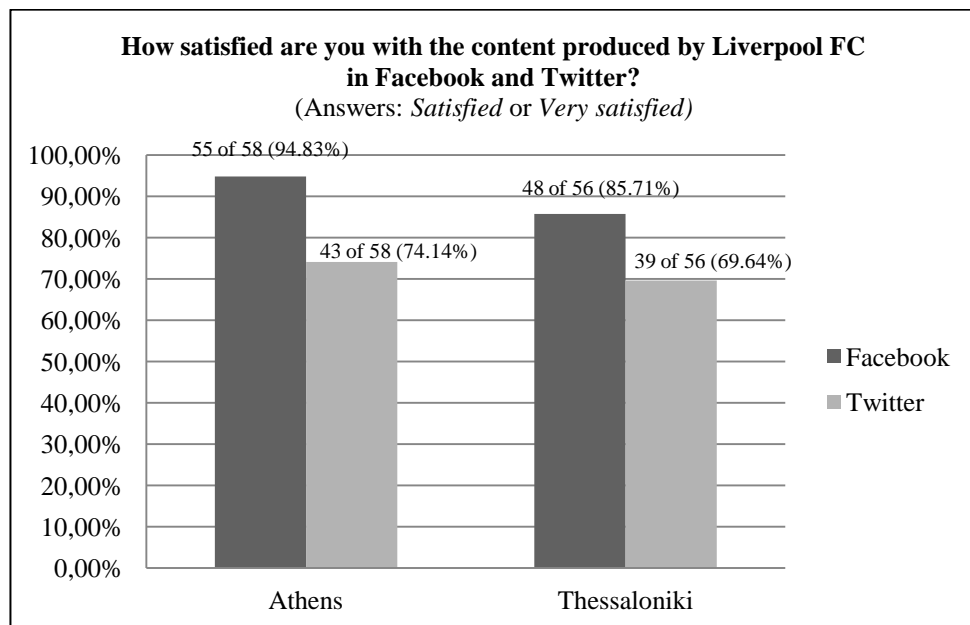


Figure 9.12: Satisfaction regarding the content in Facebook and Twitter - Greek fan club members (source: Author)

9.3.3 Summary of questionnaire results

The self-administered questionnaire has been automatically analyzed through Google Forms for each fan club separately. The questionnaire responses provided a quantification of the views of each fan club in terms of most appreciated communication tools and brand attributes, resonance of the perceived brand benefits, consumption behavior alterations and degree of satisfaction on the content produced by Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter. The analysis revealed that posts which contain visuals and are referred to “Team Success” and “Star Player(s)” are highly appreciated by the majority of fan club members while all brand benefits have a great resonance amongst them. With a minor exception of the members of the Caldigot & Gloucester fan club, all other members’ buying behavior has generally changed, while their level of satisfaction is very high as far as the social media content is concerned.

9.4 Comparison of UK and Greek Fan Clubs

This section compares the responses of the UK and Greek fan clubs as provided by the questionnaires and interviews in terms of demographics, engagement, preferred communication tools, preferred brand attributes, perceived brand benefits, consumption patterns and overall satisfaction of the social media presence of Liverpool FC. Descriptive and inferential statistics have been applied using the software package SPSS v.19. In particular, absolute and relative frequencies have been calculated and tests of significance (independent samples *t*-tests) have been applied to compare differences of UK and Greek fans in terms of engagement and perceived brand benefits in Facebook and Twitter, alterations in consumption behavior because of the interaction with Liverpool FC through Facebook and Twitter as well as degree of satisfaction of the content produced by Liverpool FC in both social media settings.

Demographics

As probably expected, newer generations are more easily involved in social media interactions and, particularly younger male fans use modern communication tools to stay in touch with their club. As such, fans of both countries have been represented in the questionnaires and interviews mostly by their younger, male generations. According to statements of the chairmen of the fan clubs as well as statements from the interviewees, the majority of the members falls indeed into this age and gender category.

UK interviewees came from the age range 20-50 ($M=33.4$, $SD=10.55$), of which 80% were male. Greek interviewees were all male (100%) and came from the age range 21-48 ($M=32.6$, $SD=8.99$).

Questionnaire respondents were mostly fans up to 44 years old (100% for the Greek fan clubs, $M=24.88$, $SD=9.26$ and 85% for the UK fan clubs, $M=36.32$, $SD=15.34$) and male (95% and 85% for Greek and UK fans respectively). A major difference can be observed regarding the income levels of UK and Greek fan club members. Greek fan club members are hugely represented in the lowest income levels (85.96% earn between 0-9.999 €) while UK fans are represented evenly in all income levels mentioned in the questionnaire.

Engagement

All interviewees agreed that they have been early followers of Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter mainly because of their loyalty to the club. One minor exception has been a UK fan club member who did not follow the Facebook account of the club.

The questionnaire respondents confirmed that UK and Greek fan club members are making use of Facebook and Twitter regardless of time period (offseason or onseason) and follow Liverpool FC in both social media settings mainly because of their loyalty to the club (Table 9.39).

UK fan clubs (N=93)		Greek fan clubs (N=114)	
Facebook	Twitter	Facebook	Twitter
72 (77.41%)	65 (69.89%)	99 (86.84%)	86 (75.43%)

Table 9.39: Loyalty as a reason to follow Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter - Comparison of UK and Greek fan clubs (source: Author)

Fans of both countries are more likely to interact daily with Liverpool FC through Facebook rather than through Twitter. In terms of specific responses, “Like” is by far the most common response of fans of both countries in Facebook, which is even more salient amongst Greek fans. Indeed, there is a significant difference ($t=-3.46$, $df=172.41$, $p=.001$) in the frequency of responses in terms of “Like” between UK ($M=3.35$, $SD=1.16$) and Greek ($M=3.86$, $SD=.91$) fans, while no significant differences can be observed as far as the frequencies of “Comment” ($t=-1.55$, $df=177.49$, $p=.12$) and “Share” ($t=1.41$, $df=205$, $p=.16$) are concerned (Table 9.40).

How often do you respond to Liverpool FC's Facebook posts with a...						
	Country	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
...Like	UK	3.35	1.16	-3.46	172.41	.001
	Greece	3.86	.91			
...Share	UK	2.61	1.12	1.41	205	.16
	Greece	2.39	1.09			
...Comment	UK	2.36	1.19	-1.55	177.49	.12
	Greece	2.60	.98			

M calculated from frequencies: 1-Never, 2-Rarely, 3-Sometimes, 4-Frequently, 5-Always

Table 9.40: Comparison of UK and Greek fan clubs in terms of Facebook responses (source: Author)

In Twitter, fans respond generally less frequently than Facebook. “Retweet” and “Favorite” are the most common response of both UK and Greek fan club members. Statistical analysis reveals that UK ($M=2.60$, $SD=1.14$) and Greek ($M=2.18$, $SD=1.14$) fans response significantly different in terms of “Retweet” ($t=2.60$, $df=205$, $p=.01$), while no significant differences can be observed between fan club members of UK and Greece as far as the frequency of “Reply” ($t=1.11$, $df=205$, $p=.26$) and “Favorite” ($t=1.01$, $df=205$, $p=.31$) is concerned (Table 9.41).

How often do you respond to Liverpool FC's tweets with a...						
	Country	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
...Reply	UK	2.21	1.11	1.11	205	.26
	Greece	2.03	1.05			
...Retweet	UK	2.60	1.14	2.60	205	.01
	Greece	2.18	1.14			
...Favorite	UK	2.48	1.23	1.01	205	.31
	Greece	2.31	1.27			

M calculated from frequencies: 1-Never, 2-Rarely, 3-Sometimes, 4-Frequently, 5-Always

Table: 9.41: Comparison of UK and Greek fan clubs in terms of Twitter responses (source: Author)

Responses to communication tools

According to focus group interviews, communication features of posts are generally irrelevant to all fans, both countries showing however a preference to the existence of visuals in Liverpool FC's posts, whether in Facebook or in Twitter. The questionnaire analysis partly confirms these findings (Figures 9.13, 9.14).

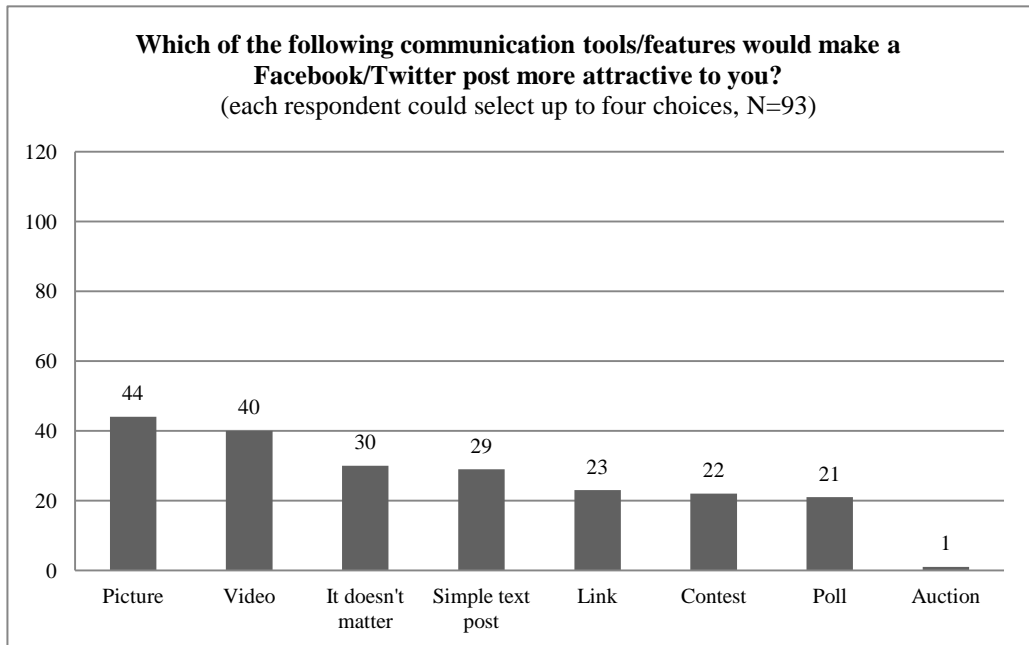


Figure 9.13: Communication tools in Liverpool FC's Facebook and Twitter posts to which UK fans mostly respond to (source: Author)

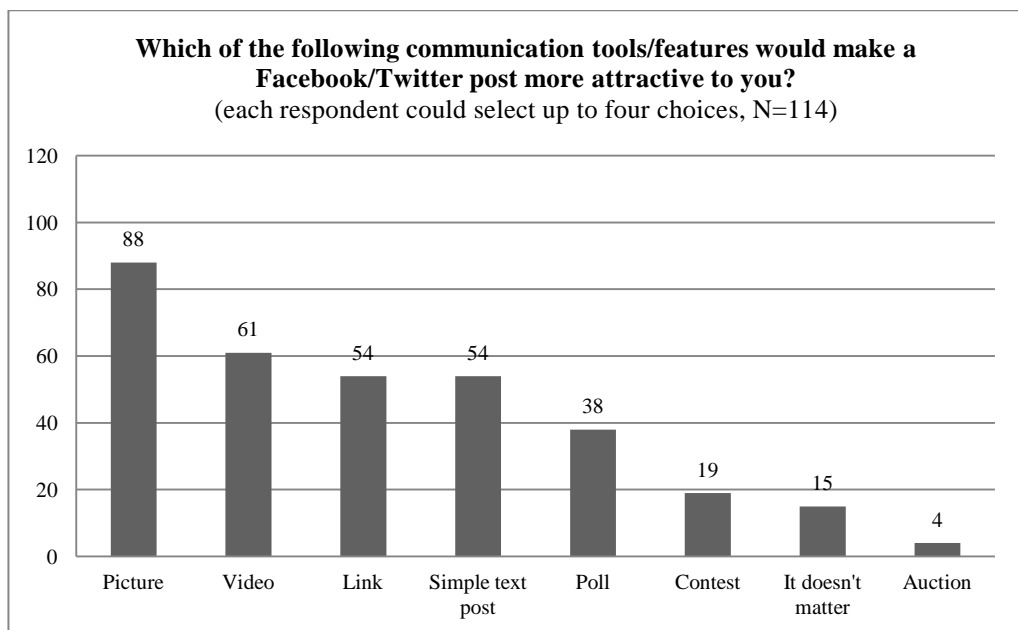


Figure 9.14: Communication tools in Liverpool FC's Facebook and Twitter posts to which Greek fans mostly respond to (source: Author)

Although pictures and videos are mostly preferred by fan club members of both countries, simple text posts also receive high share of preferences. Interestingly, almost one third (32.26%) of the UK fan club questionnaire respondents indicated that any news about Liverpool FC and in any form provided are by default of interest to them. This result is very different compared to Greek fans, where the respective proportion is only 13.16%. Links are also high in the list of preferences for all fans. Given that links are most of the time forwarding fans to the official web site of Liverpool FC, which contains a vast amount of pictures and videos, the attraction by visuals becomes more evident. Polls and contests shared through Facebook and Twitter are the least attractive to all fan club members.

Responses to brand attributes

With regard to responses to brand attributes, interviewees revealed that a great variety of them are of interest to fans, ranging from “Star Player(s)”, “Team Success”, to the “Head Coach”, as well as about the “Club’s History & Tradition”, the “Stadium/Arena” and posts about the “Fans”.

By examining the questionnaire responses, the four brand attributes to which UK and Greek fans mostly respond to in Facebook are “Team Success” and “Star Player(s)” amongst product related posts and “Club’s History & Tradition” and “Fans” amongst non-product related posts. “Team Success” is the brand attribute which receives the most responses by UK and Greek fans as well. Interestingly, neither UK nor Greek fans respond in any form to posts about “Sponsor”, while “Management” ranks also very low in terms of responses for fans of both countries. The results are visualized in the next pages (Figures 9.15, 9.16).

In Twitter, the results are very similar. The four brand attributes to which UK and Greek fans mostly respond to are “Team Success” and “Star Player(s)” amongst product related posts and “Club’s History & Tradition” and “Fans” amongst non-product related posts. “Sponsor” and “Management” are again the least brand attributes to which Greek and UK fans respond to. The results are visualized in the next pages (Figures 9.17, 9.18).

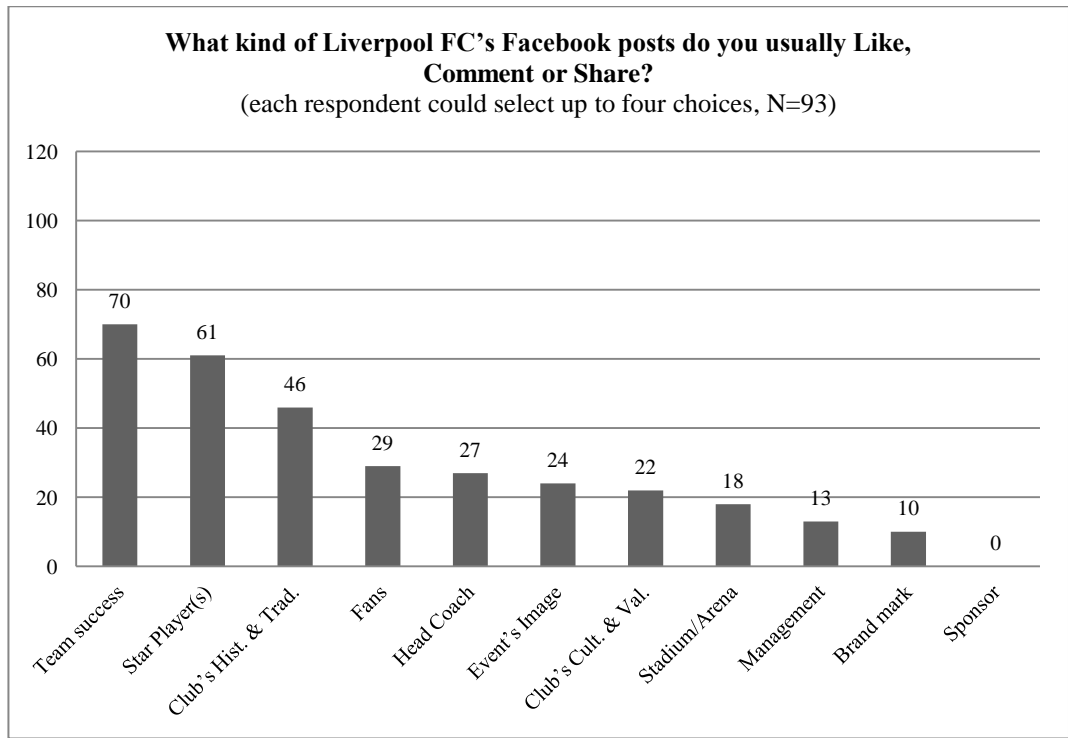


Figure 9.15: Brand attributes in Liverpool FC's Facebook posts to which UK fans mostly respond to (source: Author)

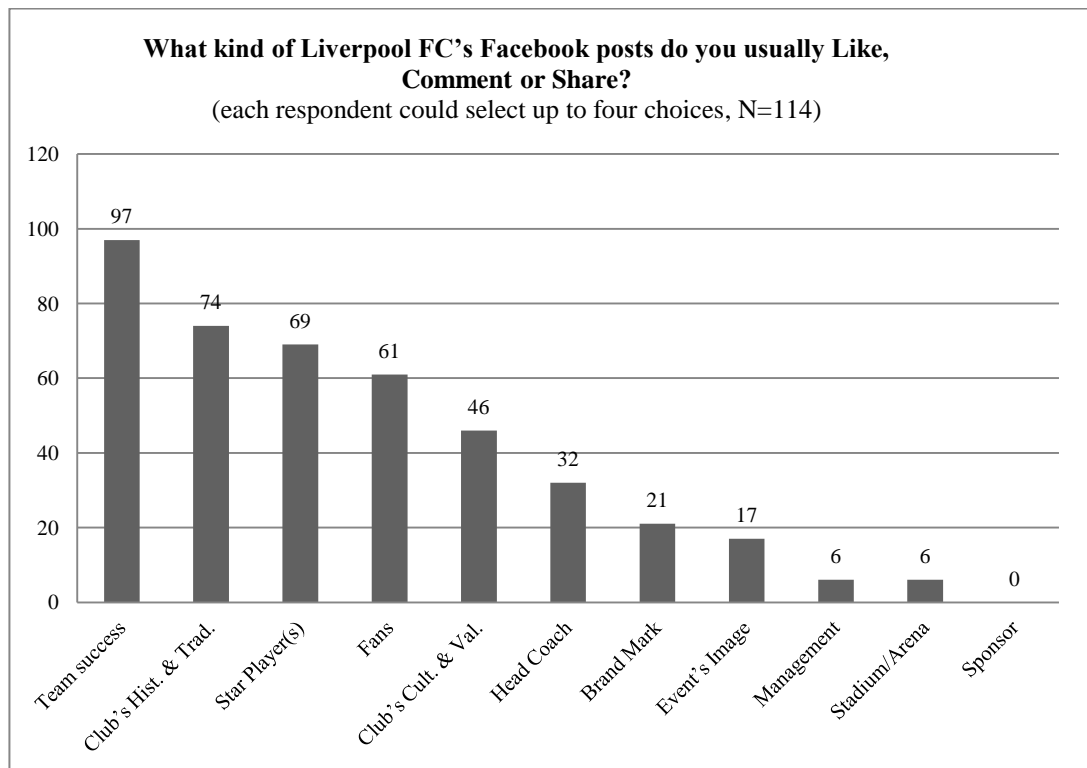


Figure 9.16: Brand attributes in Liverpool FC's Facebook posts to which Greek fans mostly respond to (source: Author)

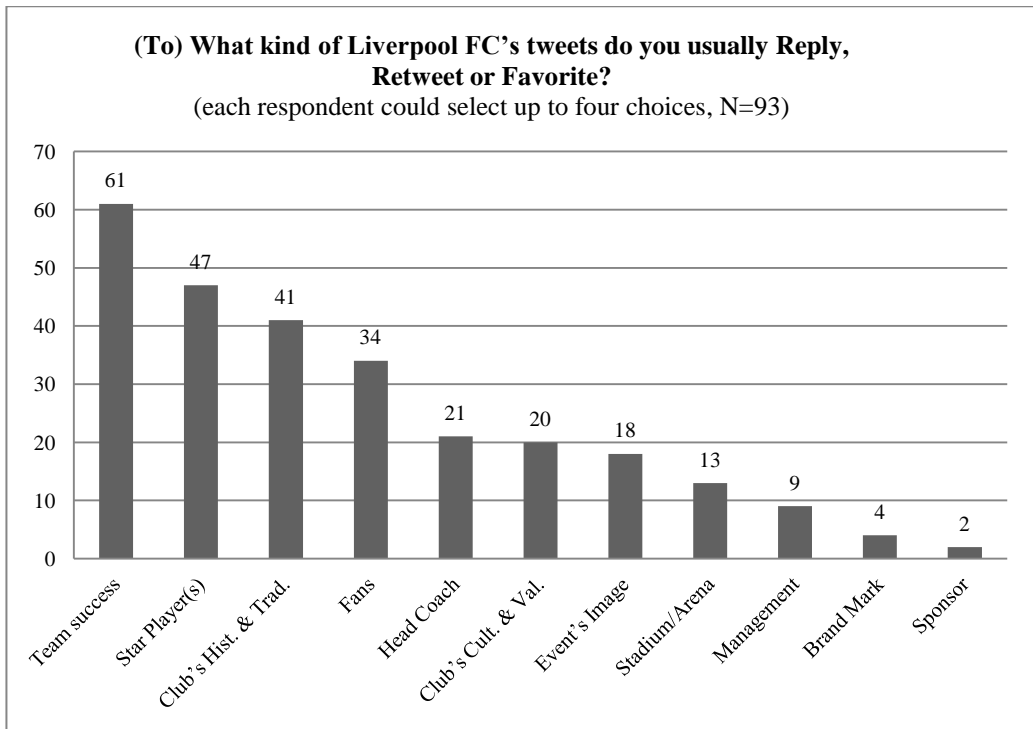


Figure 9.17: Brand attributes in Liverpool FC's tweets to which UK fans mostly respond to (source: Author)

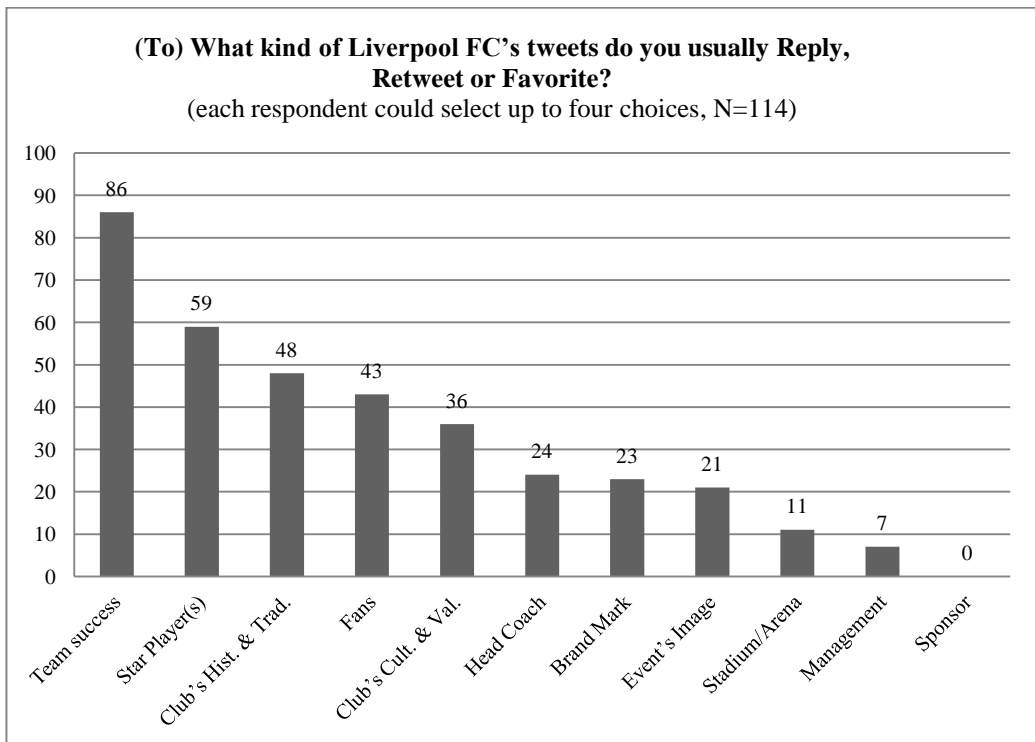


Figure 9.18: Brand attributes in Liverpool FC's tweets to which Greek fans mostly respond to (source: Author)

Perceived brand benefits

It is particularly interesting that all interviewees mentioned that Liverpool FC is “*more than a club*” and expressed their affiliation towards the club using words such as “*passion*”, “*culture*”, “*bonding*”, “*family*” or “*big part of our lives*”. The benefits which have been identified during the interviews with fan club members of both countries include: Identification with the club (“Fan identification”), socialization (“Social interaction”), entertainment (“Entertainment”), escape from daily routine (“Escape”) and experience of strong emotions (“Emotions”). These benefits are exactly the same as those described in the adopted customer based brand equity model. No additional benefits have been identified.

The questionnaire analysis confirmed that all benefits have a great relevance amongst the sample, while the benefit of “Escape” to a lower extent than the others. Greek fan club members seem to perceive those benefits particularly in Facebook, probably because it is more widely used amongst them.

In Facebook, “Fan identification” and “Emotions” scored very high amongst fans of both countries, while the benefit “Escape from daily routine” has been stated as the least perceived benefit by fans of both countries. In general, there are no significant differences between the benefits perceived by fan club members of both countries, with the single exception of the benefit “Entertainment” ($t=3.09$, $df=205$, $p=.002$). The detailed results of the statistical analysis of the comparison of UK and Greek fan club members in terms of brand benefits is presented in the next table (Table 9.42).

Please rate how much you agree with the next statements: As a Facebook "fan" of Liverpool FC, I am able to...						
	Country	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
...identify with the team	UK	4.13	.85	1.16	205	.24
	Greece	4.00	.86			
...associate/socialize with others	UK	3.92	1.06	-1.71	160.86	.089
	Greece	4.14	.75			
...escape from daily stress or routine	UK	3.67	1.15	.485	177.32	.62
	Greece	3.60	.94			
...entertain myself	UK	4.19	.79	3.09	205	.002
	Greece	3.85	.78			
...feel strong emotions	UK	4.11	.89	-1.31	205	.19
	Greece	4.27	.79			

M calculated from ratings: 1-Strongly disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly agree

Table 9.42: Comparison of UK and Greek fan clubs in terms of perceived brand benefits in Facebook (source: Author)

In Twitter, fans of both countries perceive the same benefits but to a lesser extent than Facebook. In addition, significant differences can be observed between UK and Greek fans as far as the benefits of identification (“Fan identification”) ($t=2.42$, $df=205$, $p=.016$), entertainment (“Entertainment”) ($t=3.58$, $df=205$, $p<.001$), socializing (“Social interaction”) ($t=2.2$, $df=205$, $p=.02$) and escape from daily routine (“Escape”) ($t=2.006$, $df=205$, $p=.04$) are concerned, while the benefit of feeling strong emotions (“Emotions”) is perceived by the same extent by fans of both countries ($t=.78$, $df=205$, $p=.43$). The results are presented next (Table 9.43).

Please rate how much you agree with the next statements: As a Twitter "follower" of Liverpool FC, I am able to...						
	Country	M	SD	t	df	p
...identify with the team	UK	3.96	.91	2.42	205	.016
	Greece	3.64	.95			
...associate/socialize with others	UK	3.92	.98	2.2	205	.02
	Greece	3.62	.98			
...escape from daily stress or routine	UK	3.68	1.09	2.006	205	.04
	Greece	3.40	.94			
...entertain myself	UK	4.01	.84	3.58	205	<.001
	Greece	3.54	1.03			
...feel strong emotions	UK	4.00	.88	.78	205	.43
	Greece	3.89	1.02			

M calculated from ratings: 1-Strongly disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly agree

Table 9.43: Comparison of UK and Greek fan clubs in terms of perceived brand benefits in Twitter (source: Author)

Consumption behavior

Some interviewees of UK fan clubs mentioned that they are season ticket holders of Liverpool FC while several of them stated that they are following the club to a huge amount of away matches during the season. This is a rather obvious difference to the Greek fan club members which can be however mainly attributed to objective difficulties (working and family responsibilities, travel, expenses) rather than differences in affiliation. Greek fan club members for example are following Liverpool FC in away European matches and organize trips to Anfield for 5-6 games per season. Greek interviewees stated that were they living in UK, they would definitely become season ticket holders. As a case in point, one Greek interviewee has been a season ticket holder during the years he was studying in Liverpool. Fans of both countries, if they do not attend a match live at the stadium, have a place where they gather to watch every

match of Liverpool FC on TV. In addition, interviewees agreed that social media interaction or particular social media posts have little influence to their buying behavior and acts more as a source of information (for instance when the new kit comes out). Exceptions mentioned by interviewees are posts about the history of the club and posts asking to support a charity or to buy something which could have value for collectors. The statistical analysis of the questionnaire responses reveals that the buying behavior of Greek fans has significantly more changed than the buying behavior of UK fans, both in terms of increased interest in watching matches ($t=-2.47$, $df=205$, $p=.014$) as well as in buying memorabilia ($t=-2.69$, $df=205$, $p=.008$) (Table 9.44).

Has your interest in watching matches/buying memorabilia changed as a result of your Facebook and Twitter interaction with Liverpool FC?						
	Country	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Watching matches	UK	2.72	1.45	-2.47	205	.014
	Greece	3.22	1.42			
Buying memorabilia	UK	2.80	1.31	-2.69	205	.008
	Greece	3.30	1.34			

M calculated as: 1-Definitely no, 2-Probably no, 3-Neutral, 4-Probably yes, 5-Definitely yes

Table 9.44: Comparison of UK and Greek fan clubs in terms of alterations in their consumption behavior (source: Author)

Satisfaction

Finally, as far as the general satisfaction of Liverpool FC’s Facebook and Twitter accounts is concerned, Greek and UK fan club members agree that in both Facebook and Twitter the content and frequency of the posts meets their expectations. The qualitative analysis revealed that some comments which have been made by fan club members of both countries towards improvements on behalf of Liverpool FC have been almost identical and appeared during the interviews as well as in the questionnaire responses. Such comments mainly addressed issues such as treating the fans more as fans and not as customers and integrate them more in decisions about the(ir) club. In

addition, fan club members of both countries mentioned the preference of more “*behind the scenes*” posts as well as the problematic nature of comments in terms of their amount and difficulty to read through them and asked for some sort of administration. The results are confirmed by the questionnaire analysis. Fans of both countries are generally satisfied with the Liverpool FC’s Facebook and Twitter content. No significant differences have been observed regarding the degree of satisfaction of UK fans ($M=4.11$, $SD=.76$) compared to Greek fans ($M=4.19$, $SD=.71$) in both Facebook ($t=-.72$, $df=205$, $p=.46$) and Twitter ($t=1.31$, $df=205$, $p=.19$) (Table 9.45).

How satisfied are you with the content produced by Liverpool FC in ...						
	Country	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
...Facebook	UK	4.11	.76	-.72	205	.46
	Greece	4.19	.71			
...Twitter	UK	4.02	.88	1.31	205	.19
	Greece	3.85	.88			

M calculated as: 1-Very dissatisfied, 2-Dissatisfied, 3-Neutral, 4-Satisfied, 5-Very satisfied

Table 9.45: Comparison of UK and Greek fan clubs in terms of degree of satisfaction in Facebook and Twitter (source: Author)

9.4.1 Summary of comparison of UK and Greek fan clubs

The comparison of UK and Greek fan clubs through the qualitative analysis of the focus group interviews and the quantitative analysis of the questionnaires allows for significant insights, as described next.

Engagement

UK and Greek fan club members have been following Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter as a result of their loyalty to the club. No significant differences can be observed between UK and Greek fan club members in terms of loyalty as a driver to follow Liverpool FC in Facebook.

In terms of specific responses, “Like” is by far the most common response of fans of both countries in Facebook while Greek fans respond significantly more frequently in such a way than UK fans. No significant differences can be observed between fan club members of UK and Greece as far as the frequency of “Comment” and “Share” is concerned. In Twitter, the frequency of “Retweet” is significantly different between fan club members of UK and Greece while no significant differences can be observed between as far as the frequency of “Reply” and “Favorite” is concerned.

Responses to communication tools

As far as the responses specific to communication tools are concerned, there are significant differences between UK and Greek fans in terms of simple text posts, posts that contain pictures and posts that contain links.

Responses to brand attributes

In terms of brand attributes, UK and Greek fans appreciate product related posts to the same great extent in both social media settings. Significant differences have been observed however as far as the non-product related attributes in Facebook are concerned, where posts about the history of the club, its tradition as well as posts about fans are more appreciated by Greek fan club members. An explanation might be that attributes such as the rich history of the club have been the reason to become a Liverpool FC fan in the first place, while posts about fans may be appreciated as a sign of the club that they are considered equally valuable to the club as match attendees or UK based fans. In contrast, the non-product related attribute “Stadium/Arena”, is more appreciated by UK than Greek fan club members. This could be probably explained because UK fans are more likely to see live the upcoming match or visit the home stadium and therefore the response acts as a motivator for the fan himself as well as for other fans. Interestingly, none of these differences are visible in Twitter.

Perceived brand benefits

The analysis confirmed that all brand benefits, as presented in the adopted customer-based brand equity model, have been perceived by fan club members of both countries. No additional brand benefits have been identified by any fan club. All brand benefits have a great relevance amongst the sample, in a slightly more extent in Facebook than Twitter. Statistically significant differences can be observed in Twitter, as far as all

benefits except “Emotions” are concerned. This could explain the lower usage and penetration rates of Twitter amongst Greek fans.

Consumption behavior

According to all questionnaire respondents, both match attendance desire and memorabilia buying intentions have been increased for almost half of the respondents as a result of their social media interaction. Statistical analysis revealed that match attendance desire as well as interest in buying memorabilia has increased significantly more for Greek fans than UK fans.

Satisfaction

With regard to the degree of overall satisfaction of the content produced by Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter, no significant differences have been observed between UK and Greek fans. Interestingly, the qualitative analysis of the focus group interviews revealed that some comments towards the improvement of the content in both social media settings were almost identical between Greek and UK fan club members.

9.5 One to One Interviews

Two one to one interviews have been conducted with Liverpool FC’s social media management staff. Both interviews have been transcribed the same day the interview took place. During the interviews, Liverpool FC’s managers have been asked to explain the club’s rationale of the use of social media, its social media strategy as well as the relation between social media and club revenues. A summary of the findings has been forwarded to the interviewees in order to confirm their accuracy.

9.5.1 Paul Rogers, Head of International Digital Development

According to Mr. Rogers, Liverpool FC recognized that it is a well known football brand worldwide and has to address a multi-million fan base across all continents. However, specific information on countries and followers as well as languages spoken has to be collected and analyzed. Therefore, Liverpool FC’s marketing strategy must first “*identify where the biggest opportunities commercially are*”. In order to do so, the club tried to segment their fan base “*either language or country specific*”. In addition, Mr. Rogers explains that Liverpool FC understands the different cultures of their

worldwide fan base: “...we try to be culture relevant and to post things which are not insulting the different cultures. So, were language isn't a barrier, we try to be cultural relevant. You know, translation is easier but less effective but localized content demonstrates cultural recognition”. This way, Liverpool FC tries to understand its fan base and respond therefore more effectively to its needs. Although fans, no matter where they live, respond to certain posts in a similar way (for instance, a victory is celebrated in similar ways by fans all over the world), this “*cultural recognition*” seems to be the reason for the huge increase of followers, especially in the countries of Asia, where in terms of size of the market is probably the most promising.

Social media seem to fit well in such a strategy as they can be easily adapted to overcome language barriers. As such, Liverpool FC launched several Facebook and Twitter accounts in different countries and languages to increase local engagement. Liverpool FC identified very early the advantages of social media and have been “...*the second football club in the EPL to become active in Twitter and Facebook*”. Given the global appeal of the EPL and Liverpool FC this offered the club the opportunity to penetrate foreign markets and to stay in touch with its huge worldwide fan base: “*you need to have a relationship with those fans ... so we build international sites and different accounts in different languages and we have a huge visitor increase through localization*”. Such a strategy seems to work for the club: “*In Indonesia and Thailand the number of page views raised, localization boosts Likes in Facebook and engagement increasesin Thailand for example we had about 150.000 followers which has now become 2.9 million since 2012, Thailand is now the biggest country in the world for us, then it is also Indonesia, who is now bigger than UK*”. Moreover, Liverpool FC is planning to continue the same strategy in other markets such as Turkey, Pakistan and Bangladesh: “*we are planning to launch for example a localized Facebook and Twitter account in Turkey and there are other countries like Pakistan or Bangladesh which we are trying to address too*”.

Mr. Rogers argues that, although social media “*are definitely a part of Liverpool's overall marketing strategy, I think it is also about content, it is a part of content where you can create conversations*”. Indeed, maintaining a two-way communication avenue with their fans is Liverpool FC's main goal: “...*social media is about getting closer to fans and letting fans getting closer to you, it is about having a conversation*”. Particularly, in terms of engagement, Mr. Rogers stated that Liverpool FC undertakes surveys in order to identify the preferences of its social media followers in terms of types of communication and content of posts: “*We do undertake some studies to see*

what kind of posts generates the most engagement". Engagement, defined by Mr. Rogers as *"the kind of posts (which) are producing the most likes for example, or the most comments, the most interactivity"*. Engagement is recognized as a key success factor for the club in terms of addressing their fan base needs. To put it in the words of Mr. Rogers: *"Social media is not about having the most fans, following numbers don't tell the full story, but you need to have a relationship with that fans, we definitely got more engagement than others"*.

In terms of revenue generation, Mr. Rogers, although acknowledging the difficulties and challenges in establishing a clear connection between social media followers and club's revenues, argues that such a relationship can indeed be identified. In particular, he mentioned that increased merchandize sales and higher match attendance figures can be partly attributed to increased numbers of online followers and interactions: *"We see an increase in web traffic, in engagement, we see sales increase in countries such as Thailand and Malaysia, in Australia we had 95.000 people attending our football match"*. In addition, social media and club revenues are also related indirectly through increased and improved sponsorship deals because of Liverpool FC's high social media penetration. Mr. Rogers explained that, particularly in foreign continents like Asia and Australia this relation becomes more evident: *"we can have some better sponsorship deals in these countries [of Asia and Australia], local partners campaigns perform better when measuring on a click-through rate, so in Thailand for example where both language and content are localized the increase in click-through-rate is even higher, so that give us a hint of how it works"*.

9.5.2 Fernando Maisonnave, Digital Engagement Coordinator

Mr. Maisonnave explained that Liverpool FC's digital marketing strategy is to provide tailored posts to fans across the world by dividing its worldwide fan base geographically: *"In digital media, our main segmentation is geographical. So for example, we have social media accounts across the world, for example in Greece we have a Twitter account for Greek fans, and we have lots of Twitter accounts across the world and Facebook accounts as well and other channels"*. In terms of market size, Asia is according to Mr. Maisonnave probably the most important market, while other continents such as North and South America are following: *"Asia is a big market for Liverpool, North America is a fairly big one, but we also have like South America, Brazil and other parts of the world, but Asia I would say is probably the biggest market"*

for Liverpool FC at the moment". In order to address such followings, Liverpool FC tries to be as culture and language relevant as possible: *"we try to do something relevant to them, it is not only content in Greek for example, it is relevant content for Greek fans, it is not only translated content...Not all messages which go out on main LFC, go also out to other accounts. Just what is relevant for Greece, for Brazil, for Thailand etc."*

According to Mr. Maisonnave, there are several reasons why Liverpool FC invests in social media. At first, the club recognized the huge penetration that such tools have in a worldwide basis. With particular emphasis on Facebook and Twitter, Mr. Maisonnave says: *"these are the most powerful social media tools ... so we use those platforms because this is where our fans are"*. In addition, Mr. Maisonnave admits the lack of interaction which existed with fans of foreign countries where the English language has been a barrier: *"people for example in Brazil or Thailand, people who don't speak English or where English is not the native language, so we know that our fan base is huge, we have fans across the world, but we didn't give them many opportunities to interact with us"*. He highlighted that Liverpool FC's strategy has been to interact and communicate with such fans but also to engage with fans all over the world: *"so we are trying to make our fans part of our life, of the life of the club, we are now giving them this opportunity, we are trying to make them have their voice, we don't only talk at them, we talk to them as well"*.

However, social media are fairly integrated to the club's overall marketing strategy. As such, the content produced every day in Facebook and Twitter originates from every department of the club, such as retail, sponsors or public relations. As Mr. Maisonnave puts it: *"social media is a product for the entire club, a service that we offer to all the parts of the business ... it is for engagement, for our fans but also to leverage all the other departments across the club"*. What is more, Mr. Maisonnave admits that the club looks over social media pages of other rival clubs, in order to get some ideas of highly engaging posts: *"We constantly look at Barcelona or Real Madrid, or Italian clubs as well, we try to get ideas from other clubs as well"*.

In terms of engagement, Mr. Maisonnave mentions the challenges that he, as everyone in a similar job position, faces. In particular, he states that there is no definitive guide of how to measure engagement and every brand uses a different method. Differences are even visible in the football business itself, making benchmarking a difficult task: *"That is a constant challenge we have! There is no specific measure for every club for everyone. In our point of view, engagement is not only a fan who sees something in social media and Like it, but also tries to engage by commenting, by sharing or by*

replying on Twitter for example, by opening this conversation with us". Other ways of measuring engagement include: *"how many people clicked on a video, how many of them saw the video from start to the end..."*. The result of such an analysis drives the club to produce content emphasizing on visuals, because: *"fans are more engage if we post something which is visually appealing, a beautiful image, or a video"*.

In terms of revenues, Mr. Maisonnave admits the difficulties to establish a clear relationship between social media usage and revenue increase: *"We don't have actually a concrete measure for that. I think every club is facing this at the moment"*. However, from the information available, the club can *"imply"* that a part of the revenues can be traced back to social media. For instance, Liverpool FC saw an increase in its retail turnover in all countries that a localized Facebook and Twitter account has been set up. Where however the impact of social media and particularly the amount of followers in those settings are of huge importance to revenues for the club is through the increased importance sponsors add to it. Mr. Maisonnave explains that the penetration of Liverpool FC in foreign markets and huge amounts of followers in Facebook and Twitter are becoming increasingly important for prospective partners: *"I can say that our sponsors are increasingly more interested in our digital activities. It becomes part of deal; we offer them some space in our social media channels to advertise their products"*.

Finally, Mr. Maisonnave pointed out some challenges which all the clubs who communicate through social media will face in the near future. As the platforms are used to serve at the same time fans as well as business activities, there is a high risk of conflicting posts. At the one hand, clubs aim to use social media a tool to communicate with their fans. At the other hand, the tremendous visibility a post can have due to the huge amount of online fans and followers is an excellent opportunity for clubs to use these channels as promotional tools. Fans however generally do not appreciate promotional campaigns or advertising posts of sponsors and there is a risk of losing the interest of fans or even worse, losing the fans to other unofficial channels.

9.5.3 Summary of one to one interviews findings

Liverpool FC has relatively early recognized the huge opportunities that are offered by social media in order to address its worldwide fan base. The overall marketing strategy of Liverpool FC can be described as *"Thinking global, acting local"*. That is, Liverpool FC's strategy is to offer customer-tailored, trying to be as culture and language relevant

as possible. In doing so, the club set up a number of different Facebook and Twitter accounts in several countries worldwide and provides through these channels localized and culture-specific content. Social media are part of the overall marketing strategy in the form of providing a service that covers all business departments. As such, besides content related to the team and the players, a proportion of the posts covers issues from the merchandize, sponsorship and public relations department of the club. In terms of revenues, social media are thought to have influenced merchandize sales (in the form of online sales) as well as ticket sales, especially in countries where localized content is produced. In addition, Facebook and Twitter, the two tools with the most fans, are increasingly used as significant offerings to attract potential sponsors and to increase the value of sponsor agreements.

9.6 Synthesis and Triangulation of Results

The different data collection and analysis tools provided the means to triangulate the results. Addressing the methodological approach as described in the corresponding section of this study (Section 5.3) and comparing the results of the content analysis, the questionnaire as well as the two types of interviews, there are several noteworthy observations:

Customer-based brand equity model vs. Content analysis

The content analysis confirmed the usage of all brand attributes of the adopted customer-based brand equity model in Liverpool FC's Facebook and Twitter posts. "Team Success" and "Star Player(s)" have been the subject of most posts in both social media tools.

Customer-based brand equity model vs. Focus group interviews

The focus group interviews confirmed the existence of all brand benefits described in the adopted customer-based brand equity model: Identification with the club ("Fan identification"), socialization ("Social interaction"), entertainment ("Entertainment"), escape from daily routine ("Escape") and experience of strong emotions ("Emotions"). However, fan club members perceive no other benefits because of their interaction with Liverpool FC through Facebook and Twitter.

Content analysis vs. One to one interviews

The content analysis revealed that Liverpool FC mostly posts about “Team Success” and “Star Player(s)”, while non-product related attributes are mostly about “Club’s History & Tradition” and “Fans”. Simple text posts followed by posts containing visuals (pictures or videos) are heavily used by Liverpool FC. “Like” is by far the most common response of fans in Facebook, while “Retweet” is the most common response in Twitter.

Mr. Rogers explained that Liverpool FC regularly undertakes surveys in order to see what is of interest to its fans in order to maintain the relationship with them. Mr. Maisonnave confirmed the results of the content analysis by acknowledging the attractiveness of visuals to fan. He further explained however the technical difficulties in producing and adding visuals to all posts, as posts cover topics from several business departments of the club and are not only related to the team or the players where such communication tools are more applicable. Furthermore, Mr. Rogers and Mr. Maisonnave confirmed the usage of “Like”, “Comment”, “Retweet” and “Favorite” as key engagement measurements.

Focus group interviews vs. Questionnaire

In terms of posts, fans of both countries are more attracted by the existence of visuals. Although simple text posts receive a high share of responses, interviewees stated and questionnaire respondents confirmed that they are more attracted by “pictures” and “videos”.

In terms of benefits, the questionnaire analysis confirmed that all benefits identified during the focus group interviews have a great relevance amongst the sample, while the benefit of “Escape” to a lower extent than the others. Greek fan club members seem to perceive those benefits particularly in Facebook, probably because it is more widely used amongst them. In Twitter, fans of both countries perceive the same benefits but to a slightly lesser extent than Facebook.

Focus group interviews vs. Questionnaires vs. One to one interviews

The increase in engagement in Facebook and Twitter which is anticipated by Mr. Rogers and Mr. Maisonnave could be attributed to the variety and resonance of brand benefits identified in the focus group interviews and the questionnaires. Indeed, both Liverpool FC managers stated that one of the main goals of their marketing strategy is, besides providing up to date official information (e.g. brand benefit “Entertainment”), to

offer fans a tool to express themselves (e.g. brand benefit “Social interaction”) and to make them feel part of the club (e.g. brand benefits “Escape” and “Emotions”).

Liverpool FC provides posts about match tickets, memorabilia and about its sponsors. Interviewees and questionnaire respondents generally confirmed that buying intentions have been influenced because of their social media interaction with their club. Memorabilia sales are more likely to be affected, especially if fans feel some attachment to the subject of the post. For instance, posts about the history of the club (which includes great victories but also tragedies) are influencing the fans behavior at most. In contrary, there is no indication that fans are influenced or attracted by posts about Liverpool FC’s sponsors. Mr. Rogers confirmed the increase in memorabilia and ticket buying as a result of fan engagement in Facebook/Twitter but also mentioned the huge impact social media has in the sponsoring activities in Asia. Mr. Maisonnave explained the difficulties in establishing a direct relationship between social media usage and revenue increase, but, in line with Mr. Rogers, explained the impact of localized posts in Facebook and Twitter on (online) merchandize sales and the role of these tools in attracting new sponsors.

Finally, in terms of satisfaction, questionnaire and interview responses are in agreement about an overall satisfaction of Liverpool FC’s posts. These results are confirmed by the statements of Mr. Rogers regarding the increased level of engagement as well as the overall satisfaction of Liverpool FC’s social media presence which is anticipated through the surveys the club undertakes.

Chapter 10. Conclusions

10.1 Answering the Research Questions

The purpose of this thesis was twofold: At first, to provide an understanding of how Liverpool FC uses Facebook and Twitter in the context of customer based-brand equity in terms of communication tools and brand attributes and how its fan base responds to this usage in terms of “Like”, “Share” and “Comment” for Facebook and “Reply”, “Retweet” and “Favorite” for Twitter. Secondly, to investigate the responses of UK and Greek fan clubs and make comparisons in terms of engagement, perceived brand benefits, effects in their consumption behavior and overall satisfaction.

The applied research methodology led to the collection and analysis of quantitative as well as qualitative data from different sources which enriched the overall findings and provided the means to verify and triangulate the results. In this section, the results and findings described in the previous chapter (Chapter 9) have been discussed in the context of the research questions.

10.1.1 How does Liverpool FC use Facebook and Twitter in the context of customer-based brand equity?

RQ1a: What types of communication tools are used?

In both social media tools (Facebook and Twitter) and for both periods (onseason and offseason), Liverpool FC makes mostly use of text messages and links, followed by pictures. The links forward the fans in most of the cases to the official Liverpool FC web site and in fewer cases to external sites. Other types of communication tools include videos, contests, polls and Facebook applications, which are however used to a considerably lesser extent.

RQ1b: What brand attributes are used?

The content analysis revealed that all brand attributes of the adopted customer-based brand equity model had been part of the content posted by Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter (Table 10.1). Both social media tools communicated almost identical brand attributes, the only minor exception being the non-product related attribute “Management” which was not part of any Facebook post during both time periods (offseason, onseason) of the research study.

Brand attribute		Facebook	Twitter
Product related attributes	Team Success	Identified	Identified
	Star Player(s)	Identified	Identified
	Head Coach	Identified	Identified
Non-product related attributes	Brand Mark	Identified	Identified
	Management	Not identified	Identified
	Club's History & Tradition	Identified	Identified
	Club's Culture & Values	Identified	Identified
	Event's Image	Identified	Identified
	Sponsor	Identified	Identified
	Fans	Identified	Identified
	Stadium	Identified	Identified

Table 10.1: Identified brand attributes during the research (source: Author)

In terms of product related brand attributes, “Team Success” and “Star Player(s)” are communicated more often in both Facebook and Twitter. In terms of non-product related attributes, “Club’s History & Tradition” and “Fans” form the subject of most posts in both social media tools.

RQ1c: *What are the differences between offseason and onseason posts?*

In Facebook, statistical tests revealed that the number of total posts during offseason were not significantly higher than the number of total posts during onseason. With regard to brand attributes, during offseason, product related posts were not significantly different than non-product related posts, while during onseason, product related posts were significantly higher than non-product related posts.

In Twitter, the number of total posts during offseason was not significantly higher than the number of total posts during onseason. With regard to brand attributes, product related posts were significantly higher than non-product related posts during both time periods.

RQ1d: *How are fans engaging with content in Facebook and Twitter?*

In Twitter, “Retweet” is the most common response of fans while on Facebook, “Like” is by far the most common reaction.

Comparing onseason to offseason, statistical analysis revealed significant differences of fan responses as “Like”, “Comment” and “Share” for Facebook and “Reply”, “Retweet” and “Favorite” for Twitter were all significantly different between time periods.

In terms of brand attributes, statistical analysis revealed that in Facebook, during offseason, “Like”, “Comment” and “Share” for product related posts were not significantly different than for non-product related posts. During onseason, “Like”, “Comment” and “Share” for product related posts were significantly different than for non-product related posts. In Twitter, during offseason, “Reply”, “Retweet” and “Favorite” for product related posts were significantly different than for non-product related posts. During onseason, “Reply” for product related posts were not significantly different than for non-product related posts while “Retweet” and “Favorite” for product related posts were significantly different than for non-product related posts

RQ1e: *How are the revenues affected?*

The findings suggest the existence of a positive relationship between increased Facebook and Twitter engagement and revenues increase of the club. This can be implied by the increase in online sales and pre-season match attendance figures, especially from (in) countries with localized Facebook and Twitter accounts. In addition, the increased interest of sponsors in promoting their products through Liverpool FC’s social media channels as well as the club’s decision to include those channels during the negotiations of new partnerships also strongly suggest the positive effect of social media on overall revenues.

10.1.2 *How do UK and Greek fan clubs perceive Liverpool FC’s usage of Facebook and Twitter?*

RQ2a: *How are fan club members engaging with content in Facebook and Twitter?*

UK and Greek fan clubs are following Liverpool FC in Facebook and Twitter because of their loyalty to the club and are making use of the tools regardless of time period. For fan clubs of both countries, “Like” is by far the most common response in Facebook, while “Retweet” and “Favorite” are the most common responses in Twitter.

Fans seem to enjoy the existence of visuals in Liverpool FC’s posts, whether in Facebook or Twitter. As such, common to all fan clubs is their attraction to posts which

contain pictures, followed in the huge majority of cases by their attraction to posts which contain videos.

Finally, in both social media tools and for fan clubs of both countries, attributes of “Team Success” and “Star Player(s)” receive the vast amount of responses amongst product related posts while, amongst non-product related posts, the attributes of “History & Tradition” and “Fans” lead to the greater amount of responses. “Team Success” in particular is the single one brand attribute which receives the most responses by UK and Greek fans alike.

RQ2b: *What brand benefits do they perceive?*

The benefits which have been identified during the focus group interviews with fans of both countries were the same with those proposed in the customer-based brand equity model and include: “Fan Identification”, “Social Interaction”, “Entertainment”, “Escape” and “Emotions” (Table 10.2). The questionnaire analysis confirmed that all benefits have a great relevance amongst the sample, while the benefit “Escape” to a lower extent than the others.

Brand benefit	UK fan clubs	Greek fan clubs
Fan Identification	Identified	Identified
Escape	Identified	Identified
Social Interaction	Identified	Identified
Emotions	Identified	Identified
Entertainment	Identified	Identified

Table 10.2: Identified brand benefits in the research (source: Author)

RQ2c: *How is their consumption behavior affected?*

Social media channels are used for informational purposes. As such, promotional activities can be spread relatively easily and reach a huge amount of potential buyers. As a result of their social media interaction with Liverpool FC, match attendance desire and memorabilia buying intentions have been increased for fan clubs of both countries (about 40% and 50% of the UK and Greek fan club members respectively). Memorabilia buying intentions is slightly greater than match tickets buying intentions for fan clubs of both countries. A difference has been observed inside UK fan clubs

where buying intentions of the members of the Caldicot & Gloucester fan club has been altered by only 12.5% of its population.

RQ2d: *What improvements do they suggest?*

Fan club members ask for more fan integration by Liverpool FC and claim for more visuals (e.g. pictures and videos) in the posts of Liverpool FC, particularly in the form of “behind the scenes” content. In addition, especially in Facebook, fans are asking for some kind of content administration, although they recognize that the problem is to a certain degree related to the social media tool itself.

10.2 Main Conclusions

The content analysis of Facebook and Twitter revealed that Liverpool FC makes use of several product related and non-product related brand attributes in order to communicate its brand to its worldwide fan base. “Team Success”, “Star Player(s)”, “Club’s History & Tradition” and “Fans” are the mostly covered brand attributes. Furthermore, brand attributes are posted using a number of different communication tools such as text, links and pictures and to a lesser extent using videos, polls and contests. In addition, the content analysis revealed that fans engage mostly by “Like” in Facebook and by “Retweet” in Twitter, while “Comment” and “Reply” are the least used forms of responses in Facebook and Twitter respectively.

UK and Greek fan club members engage mostly by “Like” in Facebook and by “Retweet” and “Favorite” in Twitter and are more attracted by posts which contain visuals (pictures and videos). Furthermore, they perceive a number of brand benefits when interacting with Liverpool FC through Facebook and Twitter. For fan club members of both countries, “Fan Identification” is the benefit which is perceived at most. No additional benefits have been identified to those presented in the literature and included in the adopted customer-based brand equity mode of the study. Overall, despite some differences, fans of both countries showed great similarities in terms of loyalty, engagement, perceived brand benefits, consumption behavior and overall satisfaction of Liverpool FC’s Facebook and Twitter posts.

Finally, the research suggests that there is indeed a link between social media usage and revenue increase for the club. In particular, a change in the consumption behavior of UK and Greek fan club members has been reported in terms of increased desire to attend matches and to purchase team-related merchandise. These results have been confirmed

by Mr. Rogers and Mr. Maisonnave, both of which added the increased interest of sponsors and sponsorship value due to the huge awareness that their promotional posts can reach given the large number of worldwide online followers and interactions in Liverpool FC's social media settings.

10.3 Discussion

In this section, the results and findings of the research are discussed in the context of the applications and theories on social media and sports brand equity provided so far in the literature as well as in relation to fan clubs.

10.3.1 Social media communication and Liverpool FC

The advances in communication technologies have allowed millions of fans to support a foreign based club (Kerr, 2009, p.14), which is particularly the case with Liverpool FC. Besides the actual numbers of Facebook and Twitter followers which can be observed by looking at the corresponding Liverpool FC accounts, Mr. Rogers and Mr. Maisonnave, during the interviews, confirmed the huge penetration and importance of foreign markets, particularly non-English speaking markets such as Asia.

During the interviews, Mr. Rogers and Mr. Maisonnave explained that Liverpool FC tries to break the language barrier and provide not only translated but culture related content to foreign fans. Providing localized and language-specific content is a strategic decision of the club, as Ian Ayre, Managing Director of Liverpool FC, outlined at the Nolan Partners Sport Industry Breakfast Club: *“Central to our international brand strategy is the club’s revolutionized digital output, which is interactive, inclusive and localized to individual territories – delivering content which is tailored to specific markets and accessible in local languages”* (McLaren, 09/2013). Such a strategy has been also adopted by other clubs (Taker, 2012). Nick Coppack, Social Media Manager of Manchester United explained that: *“One of the great advantages of social media is that is allowing us to connect directly to, and engage with these [social media] fans ... we geo-post regularly to countries around the world, in more than 20 different languages”* (McLaren, 10/2014).

The literature further suggests that the community is used as a source of social interaction and relationship building (Kozinets, 1999; McWilliam, 2000; Tan, 2012; Wallace et al., 2011; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Liverpool FC seems to have recognized

the huge opportunities that social media can offer in terms of maintaining relationships as Mr. Rogers and Mr. Maisonnave explained in the interviews. Building relationships is a necessary first step that comes before the exploitation of commercial opportunities (Taker, 2012; Stoll, 2014). In doing so, literature suggest that posting authentic content is key to success. Michael Leavy, Media, Marketing and CRM Director at Arsenal FC stated that “*First you have to look at how we create great content*” while Craig Howe, social media consultant working for NBA club Chicago Bulls said: “*you have to be proactive rather than reactive. You need to make digital lead the conversation*” (Nicholson, 2014). The importance of content has been also highlighted by the one to one interviews with Liverpool FC’s managers, who place particular emphasis on providing content that leads to engagement. The delivery of such content takes many forms. The research identified a number of communication tools which Liverpool FC uses, such as text and links in the majority of the cases, but also pictures and videos. The literature suggests that pictures and videos have greater capacity for fan involvement and interaction than any other communication type and that such offerings enhance the feelings of fun and excitement, shapes brand image and consequently affects customer-based brand equity (Bruhn et al., 2012; Flinck, 2011; Keller, 1993; 2003; Kim & Ko, 2011; Wallace et al., 2011; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Indeed, UK and Greek fans asked for more visual content, which could potentially lead to more fan involvement and interaction and ultimately foster Liverpool FC’s effort in strengthening customer-based brand equity.

Finally, besides the misuse of social media accounts by footballers and fans (Price et al., 2013; Rookie.com, 2014; Stoll, 2014; Woodgate, 12/2012), Mr. Maisonnave pointed out two additional threats for a club: At first, the conflicting nature of promotional activities through online channels which at the one hand serve for better sponsorship deals but at the other hand may not be appreciated by fans. The second challenge deals with the newly announced Facebook policies, applicable from January 2015 on, which will prevent pure promotional posts by brands without paying a particular fee to Facebook.

10.3.2 Customer-based brand equity model and Liverpool FC

Liverpool FC enjoyed high awareness among all interviewees and questionnaire respondents for a substantive amount of time before following the club on Facebook and Twitter. This affirms the author’s reasoning for excluding brand awareness as a

component of brand knowledge in the applied customer-based brand equity model, an approach also adopted by others (Bauer et al., 2008). Hence, the aim of Liverpool FC when communicating through Facebook and Twitter is to create/increase positive associations towards the brand (club), instead of increasing brand recall and recognition as they can be assumed to be relatively strong already.

Statistical analysis of the content posted by Liverpool FC revealed that during onseason, in both Facebook and Twitter, product related content was significantly higher than non-product related content. During offseason, this still holds true for Twitter. According to Kaynak et al. (2008), product related attributes are related with higher purchase intentions. Thus, Liverpool FC's strategy might be to ultimately influence the consumption behavior of its fans.

Both social media tools have been used to post messages from or about the official sponsors of Liverpool FC. The literature suggests that sport fans express higher levels of loyalty towards those companies that financially support their favorite team (Kerr, 2008). This can increase revenues through sponsorship deals as the literature suggests (Coyle, 2010; Wallace et al., 2011). Although Greek and UK fans do not share this view, Mr. Rogers stated that “[Because of the huge fan following in Asia] *local partners campaigns perform better when measuring on a click-through rate*” while Mr. Maisonnave confirmed that “*...it becomes part of the deal, we offer them some space in our social media channels. It is becoming increasingly important for them to get advertised in our channels*”.

With regard to brand benefits, “Fan identification”, “Social interaction”, “Entertainment”, “Escape” and “Emotions” are the benefits that Liverpool FC's fans perceive when interacting with their club through Facebook and Twitter. The existence of such benefits confirms the literature on sports brand equity (Bauer et al., 2008; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Ross et al., 2008), reinforces the “social” dimension of social media suggested by numerous writers (Ballouli, 2010; Constantinides, 2008; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Pegoraro, 2010; Pitta & Fowler, 2005; Smith, 2007) and is yet another way to leverage the sports team's brand (Underwood et al., 2001). As these benefits are mainly cultivated through non-product related attributes, it is probably the reason why all fan club members appreciate content regarding “Club's History & Tradition” and “Fans”. As suggested by Boyle & Magnusson (2007), cultivating a team's tradition is important to enhance the sport's brand. Biscaia et al. (2013) also emphasizes the importance of non-product-related attributes to sport organizations while Bauer et al. (2008, p.221) indicate that “*fans have a long fan history, they have all experienced ups*

and downs of their team such as player and coach changes [...]. Perhaps for that reason contextual factors (i.e., the stadium atmosphere, other fans, club history and tradition) have greater relevance to them". That is, the importance of non-product related attributes is based on their relative consistency over time, unlike product related attributes such as "Team Success". Liverpool FC, particularly because of the lack of sporting success during the last years, can built upon the emotional attachment of its fans and try to positively influence their behavior by emphasizing the importance of the stadium, evoking past memories when promoting the upcoming matches, cultivating the team's history and tradition as well as posting videos about former important players and teams.

10.3.3 Fan clubs and Liverpool FC

Fan clubs and fan club members can be regarded as the more "active" group of supporters and are important stakeholders as they engage with the club at various levels (Cleland, 2010). In the case of Liverpool FC fan club members play an active role in terms of economic (buying tickets, merchandise) and branding (online posts, promoting the values and history of the club offline, etc.) activities. The vast majority of the fan club members who participated in the interviews mentioned that Liverpool FC is "*more than a club*", describing their affiliation to the club using words such as "*passion*", "*culture*", "*bonding*" and "*family*", confirming thereby the literature that sport fans are expressing incomparable levels of loyalty and affiliation towards their club (Bauer et al., 2005; Bauer et al., 2008; Beech & Chadwick, 2007; Richelieu, 2004; Richelieu et al., 2011; Underwood et al., 2001). In addition, several times during the focus group interviews fan club members referred to the club as "we", indicating a sense of moral ownership of the club.

As active supporters they want to be heard by the clubs' officials and to be integrated in the decisions of the club. Liverpool FC's management seem to have recognized this need by making official fan clubs responsible for maintaining the daily online communication of the club on a localized context. For instance, the Thessaloniki fan club is responsible for running the official Twitter account in Greek. Fan clubs also form associations the representatives of which are often guests at official meetings or congresses. However, claims of more fan integration could be addressed by establishing a direct link between fans and the management of the club or between fans and the key actors of the club (coach, players). This way, Liverpool FC could benefit by initiating

and controlling conversations with fans and preventing therefore fans to use other channels to express their concerns or even frustration towards the club.

The claim for more fan integration is also in line with the concept of tribal marketing as presented in the literature. In particular, Richelieu & Boulaire (2005) claimed that the sport product goes beyond mere consumption and involves sharing emotions in groups, feeling a spirit of community as well as co-creation by consumers with respect to the product's meaning. Cova & Cova (2002) used the term "*linking value*", which focuses on establishing a connection between consumers of a product, urging brands to try to connect consumers through the product itself rather than merely focus their marketing activities on the actual product or service. As Facebook and Twitter increase fan involvement - and particularly as far as the more "active" fans are concerned - these tools offer a huge opportunity to create meaning and the linking value between the club and its fans and ultimately provide the club with a means to strengthen customer-based brand equity.

In addition, fan clubs as organizations share characteristics of social enterprises as far as their objectives and their management decisions are concerned (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010). The Greek fan clubs of Liverpool FC for instance organize frequently charitable events as an act to serve the public. Therefore, as the study suggests, buying intentions of fan club members are mainly influenced by social media content if fans recognize an emotional attachment to that content such as charitable events promoted by the club itself or activities related to fan tragedies such as the Hillsborough disaster. With regard to the management of the fan clubs, collective decision making, participative management and pursuing common goals have been key characteristics of all fan clubs of the study. Thus, the claim for more fan integration might originate from the sense of moral ownership of the club as well as from this collectivism in decision making. Finally, one of the key goals of each fan club is to promote the values and history of Liverpool FC. Fan club members have a strong sense of who is an authentic fan and who is not, defining authenticity as knowing the culture, the history and the tradition of the club. This probably explains the appreciation of non-product related brand attributes such as "*Club's History & Tradition*", as showed during the study.

10.4 Research Contribution

This section discusses how the results of the study contribute to the academic and business community and provides the boundaries of their generalisability.

10.4.1 Contribution to the research community

The research added significantly to the current literature of social media, sports and branding by addressing an identified research gap: It used two different social media tools and provided an understanding of their use not only by a professional football club but also by its fans. Thereby, the study contributed to the research community at various levels: At first, in terms of structure, the current study confirmed the operationalized models of sports brand image so far (Bauer et al., 2008; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Ross et al., 2006), in terms of identified product and non-product related brand attributes and brand benefits.

Secondly, it extends the research of Gladden & Funk (2002) and Bauer et al. (2005) by demonstrating that the brand benefits described so far in the literature can be not only perceived by regular match goers but also by fans through their online interaction with the club in Facebook and Twitter.

Thirdly, the current study confirms the assertions made by several researchers (Ben-Porat, 2000; Kerr & Enemy, 2011; Nash, 2000) that high levels of fan identification can be found in supporters living abroad and that fans, regardless of location, are very common in terms of affiliation, behavior and consumption patterns.

Furthermore, the study broadened the current knowledge of the use of Facebook as a brand management tool by providing an understanding of the content produced by a professional football club in terms of communication tools and brand attributes as well as the responses of its fan base in terms of engagement and perceived brand benefits. Finally, no research to date had analyzed the content published by a professional football club in Twitter from a customer-based brand equity standpoint, neither its fan responses nor perceptions as expressed in this social media setting.

10.4.2 Contribution to the business community

From a practical standpoint, the adopted customer-based brand equity model confirmed the theories regarding the impact that brand attributes can potentially have on sport consumer behavior and ultimately on the club's revenues. That is, professional sport clubs could benefit from proportional brand attribute coverage, as product related content mainly influence purchase intentions (Kaynak et al., 2008), while non-product related attributes are mainly responsible for cultivating brand associations and perceived brand benefits, strengthen fan connection with the team und ultimately enhance the

team's sport brand (Bauer et al., 2008; Biscaia et al., 2013; Boyle & Magnusson, 2007; Gladden & Funk, 2002).

In addition, the study provides an evaluation of the clubs' social media presences by its actual customers, its fans, and offers therefore valuable insights that will be of great assistance to identify areas of improvement and to design the most appropriate marketing strategy. Measuring the engagement of the fans to specific posts may lead to reassessments of particular communication tools and/or brand attributes used currently in the posts of the club. For instance, it became apparent that the club should put more emphasis on visuals and on non-product related attributes that strongly focus on the integration of fans in order to strengthen customer-based brand equity. The study also identified a particular challenge that Liverpool FC faces, namely to find the correct balance between posts that generate fan involvement and posts which are related to commercial activities or sponsors.

Furthermore, the results suggest a positive relationship between Facebook and Twitter and the revenues of a football club. This relationship can be affected in many ways: First, the study showed that Facebook and Twitter can directly influence ticket and merchandizing sales. Second, by understanding the type of posts that increase engagement, clubs can influence long-term revenues. Third, the high number of Facebook and Twitter fans of football club has an impact on sponsorship value as companies recognize the commercial opportunities that are offered, particularly in foreign markets. Football clubs can therefore impact their revenues by providing an additional channel for sponsors to promote their product or services.

10.4.3 Generalisability of the outcomes

Knowledge derived from this study can be successfully extrapolated to other cases, particularly to European football clubs of similar size and brand value to Liverpool FC. Although the decision to support a football club is likely to differ, the similarity of fans in terms of loyalty and behavior offers allows for generalizations of the results. For instance, providing "behind the scenes" content to their online fans will most likely impact the engagement of fans of all football clubs. Researchers suggest that professional teams could benefit by studying the online practices of competitors (Ioakimidis, 2010). In fact, the one-to-one interviews revealed that Liverpool FC is actively looking at social media settings of other European football clubs in order to get ideas of posts which might affect fan engagement as it is also anticipated that other

football clubs do the same. In addition, the huge penetration of Liverpool FC in the Asian market and its implications on sponsorship values is expected to be the same for other big EPL or European football clubs which pursue the same globalization brand strategy. Finally, given the very limited previous research on social media and their impact on brand equity, it is anticipated that the results of this research might have relevance and transferability to other industry sectors beyond the specific sector (sport sector) in which the current research is conducted.

However, the generalization of the results may be subject to the following limitations: Liverpool FC has a rich and distinguished history, punctuated by titles as well as tragedies. Perhaps the reasons to identify and support a less popular team may be different. In addition, football clubs started as organizations that represented local communities and towns and are therefore very different to other sport clubs, particularly in the United States, where sport clubs are operating as franchises. Therefore, brand benefits, as perceived by fan club members of Liverpool FC and described in this study may be very different to fans of other sport clubs or franchises.

10.5 Research Limitations

The results of the study are limited in terms of the following factors:

With regard to the content analysis, the frequency of Facebook and Twitter user comments was not considered individual responses or individual fans. For example, two or three fans could comment on one content item and this interactivity could account for numerous responses.

In terms of primary data, the absence of a second researcher during the data collection and analysis process may have prevented the unbiased interpretation of the results.

In addition, due to the adopted sampling technique (snowball sampling), the sample itself may be subject to limitations. That is, the sample is dominated by males of the age group 18-50. However, the research can safely assume that the sample (interviewees and questionnaire respondents) is representative of the total population of each fan club, because of the following reasons: First, according to statements of the interviewees and the records kept by each fan club, the vast majority of the members are male. Second, the same sources confirm that the majority of the fan club members belong to the age group 18-50. Third, the use of Facebook and Twitter has been a prerequisite to take part in the interviewing and questionnaire process and younger populations are more likely to use such tools (Pew Research Center, 2013). For these reasons, despite the rather

weak form of the chosen data collection method, the interviewees and questionnaire respondents are highly likely to be an accurate representation of the total population.

A final limitation is the use of a single case study. Yin (2003) suggests that case studies can be used to develop theories about the case that can then be generalized. Whilst a single case study has its limitations, the quality and depth of the research contributes to the body of knowledge of the research subject. The results of the study may not be easily generalized to all clubs in other European football leagues or in other sports, as they emerge from only one football club. However, they can be generalized to clubs which share the same characteristics as Liverpool FC in terms of fame, brand value and worldwide number of supporters, as explained previously.

10.6 Directions for Future Research

The study investigated the use of Facebook and Twitter for two periods, on- and offseason and a total period of 30 days. Future research could investigate whether or not the results hold for a greater time frame during a season or even to examine trends over years.

Using a worldwide well known club such as Liverpool FC, it would be interesting to conduct a study with more clubs across leagues and sports (top clubs of the same league, top clubs of other European leagues, lower level teams, and clubs of other sports) which would allow for comparisons among marketing and branding techniques.

With regard to fan clubs, it would be interesting to investigate how fan clubs of Liverpool FC in countries other than UK and Greece and particularly in other continents (Asia, Australia) perceive the social media usage of Liverpool FC in terms of brand benefits. In addition, as this study concentrated on the views of fan club members and online followers of Liverpool FC, it would be interesting to see whether fans who are not members of a fan club or do not follow the club online share the same characteristics. In a more socioeconomic related research, the role of fan clubs as significant stakeholders could be further investigated and implications deriving from their role as social enterprises to wider aspects of social responsibility could be discussed.

Finally, apart from the quantitative content analysis of this study, it would be interesting to conduct a qualitative content analysis in order to see what fans actually post in terms of “Comment” in Facebook and “Reply” in Twitter.

Chapter 11. References and Bibliography

Aaker D.A. (1991) *Managing brand equity*. New York: The Free Press.

Aaker D.A. (1996) Measuring brand equity across products and markets. *California Management Review*, 38(3), pp. 102-120.

Alexa (2013) *The top 500 sites on the web*. Retrieved on January 20th, 2013 from: <http://www.alexa.com/topsites>

Allison N. (2013) Going beyond on-pitch success: Fan engagement as a catalyst for growth. *Birkbeck Sport Business Centre Research Paper Series*, December 2013, 6(2)

Anon (2013) *Social networking reaches nearly one in four around the world*. Retrieved on August 14th, 2013, from: <http://www.emarketer.com/Article/Social-Networking-Reaches-Nearly-One-Four-Around-World/1009976#VwRccZvPuqHjDqkb.99>

Avgerinou V. (2007) The Economics of Professional Team Sports: Content, trends and future developments, *Sport Management International Journal*, 3(1), pp. 6-17.

Babac R. (2011) *Impact of social media on brand equity of magazine brands*. Master Thesis in International Marketing 2011, Halmstadt University.

Balaji M.S. (2011) Building Strong Service Brands: The Hierarchical Relationship Between Brand Equity Dimensions. *The IUP Journal of Brand Management*, 8(3), pp. 7-24.

Ballouli K. (2010) Digital-branding and social media strategies for professional athletes, sports teams, and leagues: An interview with Digital Royalty's Amy Martin. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 2010(3), pp. 395-401.

Barnes N.G, Lescault A.M & Andonian J. (2012) *Social Media Surge by the 2012 Fortune 500: Increase Use of Blogs, Facebook, Twitter and More*. Retrieved on January 31st, 2013 from: <http://www.umassd.edu/cmr/socialmedia/2012fortune500/>

Barth L., Fabrikant S.I., Kobourov S.G, Lubiw A., Noellenburg M., Okamoto Y., Pupyrev S., Squarcella C., Ueckerdt T. & Wolff A. (2014) *Semantic word cloud representations: Hardness and approximation algorithms*. Lecture Notes in Computer Science, Volume 8392, 2014, pp. 514-525.

Bascombe C. (2012) *Liverpool Managing Director Ian Ayre fears club's status among world's elite is in danger if the right manager is not found*. Retrieved on July 20th, 2013 from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/teams/liverpool/9273729/Liverpool-managing-director-Ian-Ayre-fears-clubs-status-among-worlds-elite-is-in-danger-if-right-manager-is-not-found.html>

Bauer H.H., Sauer N.E. & Schmitt P. (2005) Customer-based brand equity in the team sport industry: Operationalization and impact on the economic success of sport teams. *European Journal of Marketing*, 39(5/6), pp. 469-513.

Bauer H.H., Stockburger-Sauer N.E. & Exler S. (2008) Brand image and fan loyalty in professional team sport: A refined model and empirical assessment. *Journal of Sport Management*, 22, pp. 205-226.

Beech J. & Chadwick S. (2007) *The Marketing of Sport*. Harlow: Financial Times Prentice Hall.

Beer D. (2008) Social network(ing) sites ... revisiting the story so far: a response to danah boyd & Nicole Ellison, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(2), pp. 516-529.

Ben-Porat A. (2000) Oversees Sweetheart: Israeli Fans of English Football. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 24(4), pp. 344-350.

Berry L.L. (2000) Cultivating Service Brand Equity, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 28(1), pp. 128-137.

Birdsall W.F. (2007) *Web 2.0 as a Social Movement*. *Webology*, 4(2), 40. Retrieved on January 31st, 2013, from: <http://www.webology.org/2007/v4n2/a40.html>

Biscaia R., Correia A., Ross S., Rosado A. & Maroco J. (2013) Spectator-based brand equity in professional soccer. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 22, pp. 20-32.

Blaszka M. (2011) *An examination of sport consumers Twitter usage*. Master Thesis, 2011, Department of Kinesiology and Health, Georgia State University.

Blumrodt J., Bryson D. & Flanagan J. (2012) European football teams' CSR engagement impacts on customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 29(7), pp. 482-493.

- Bodet G. & Chanavat E. (2009) Building global football brand equity. Lessons from the Chinese market. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 22(1), pp. 55-66.
- Bolotaeva V. & Cata T. (2011) Marketing Opportunities with Social Networks. *Journal of Internet Social Networking and Virtual Communities*, 2011, Article ID 409860.
- boyd d.m. & Ellison M.B. (2008) Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13, pp 210-230.
- Boyle B.A. & Magnusson P. (2007) Social identity and brand equity formation: A comparative study of collegiate sports fans. *Journal of Sport Management*, 2(4), pp. 497-520.
- Bradley A. (2010). *A new definition of social media*. Retrieved on December 10th, 2012, from: http://blogs.gartner.com/anthony_bradley/2010/01/07/a-new-definition-of-social-media
- Brand Finance (2014) *The world's most valuable football brands*. Retrieved on September 1st, 2014, from: http://brandirectory.com/league_tables/table/top-50-football-club-brands-2014
- Brand S. & Klein M.J. (2012) *The firms' use and customers' perception of Facebook in the context of customer-based brand equity*. MBA Thesis 2012, Jonkoping Business School.
- Braunstein J. & Ross S.D. (2010) Brand personality is sport: Dimension analysis and general scale development. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 19(1), pp. 8-16.
- Brody J., Gregovits V., Hill N., McGee M., McGee P., O'Neil S. & Schwarzkopf K. (2010) Industry insider: Sport marketing forecast. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 19(1), pp. 4-7.
- Broughton D. (2010, July 26). *Survey: Social-media use builds fan avidity*. Retrieved on August 13th, 2013 from: <http://www.sportsbusinessdaily.com/Journal/Issues/2010/07/20100726/This-Weeks-News/Survey-Social-Media-Use-Builds-Fan-Avidity.aspx>

- Broughton, D. (2011, June 27). *Survey spots social media trends among fans*. Retrieved on August 13th, 2013 from:
<http://www.sportsbusinessdaily.com/Journal/Issues/2011/06/27/Research-and-Ratings/Social-media.aspx>
- Broughton D. (2012) Survey: Social media continues to fuel fans. *Street and Smith's Sports Business Journal*, 16-22, pp. 24.
- Bruhn M., Schoenmueller V. & Schaefer D.B. (2012) Are social media replacing traditional media in terms of brand equity creation? *Management Research Review*, 35(9), pp. 770-790.
- Bryman A. & Bell E. (2011) *Business Research Methods*, 3rd Edition, Oxford University Press.
- Buehler A., Nufer G. & Rennhak C. (2006) *The nature of sports marketing*. Working Paper, Reutlinger Diskussionsbeiträge zu Marketing & Management, No 2006-06.
- Chadwick S. (2007) European football clubs and their Asian supporters: Some implications for international sport marketers. Paper presented to the 15th congress of the European Association for sport management, Torino, September 12-15.
- Chadwick S. & Holt M. (2008) Releasing latent brand equity: the case of UEFA's Champions League. *The Marketing Review*, 8(2), pp. 147-162.
- Cherubini S. (2007) *Co-marketing: A new challenge for football managers*, in *Marketing and Football: An international Perspective*, 1st edition, Elsevier.
- Christodoulides G. & de Chernatony L. (2010) Consumer-based brand equity conceptualization and measurement - A literature review. *International Journal of Market Research*, 52(1), pp. 43-66.
- Christodoulides G., de Chernatony L., Furrer O., Shiu E. & Abimbola T. (2006) Conceptualizing and Measuring the Equity of Online Brands. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 22(7/8), pp. 799-825.
- Clavio G. (2011) Social media and the college football audience. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 4, pp. 309-325.

- Cleland J. (2010) From passive to active: The changing relationships between supporters and football clubs. *Soccer & Society*, 11(5), pp. 537-552.
- Constantinides E. (2008) *The Web 2.0 as Marketing Tool: Opportunities for SMEs*. In: The 16th Annual High Technology Small Firms Conference, University of Twente, Enschede, May 22-23, 2008.
- Constantinides E. & Fountain S. (2008) Web 2.0: Conceptual foundations and marketing issues. *Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice*, 9(3), pp. 231-244.
- Constantinides E., Romero C.L. & Boria Miguel G. A. (2008) Social Media: A New Frontier for Retailers? *European Retail Research*, 22, pp. 1-28.
- Cooper C. (2010) New Media Marketing: The Innovative Use of Technology in NCAA Athletic Department E-Branding Initiatives. *Journal of Marketing Development and Competitiveness*, 5(1), pp. 23-32.
- Couvelaere V. & Richelieu A. (2005) Brand Strategy in Professional Sports: The Case of French Soccer Teams, *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 5(1), pp. 23-46.
- Cova B. & Cova V. (2002) Tribal marketing. The tribalization of society and its impact on the conduct of marketing. *European Journal of Marketing*, 36(5/6), pp. 595-620.
- Coyle P. (2010) Teams active in social media build strategic advantage. *Street & Smith's SportsBusiness Journal*, 12 (35), pp. 18.
- Davis C.J. (2007) A conceptual view of branding for services. *Innovative Marketing*, 3(1), pp. 7-14.
- de Chernatony L. (2009) Towards the holy grail of defining brand. *Marketing Theory Articles*, 9(1), pp. 101-105.
- de Chernatony L., Cottam S. & Segal-Horn S. (2006) Communicating services brands values internally and externally. *The Service Industries Journal*, 26(8), pp. 819-836.
- de Chernatony L. & McDonald M. (2001) *Creating Powerful Brands in Consumer, Service and Industrial Markets*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

de Chernatony L. & Segal-Horn S. (2001) Building on service characteristics to develop successful services brands. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 17, pp. 645-669.

Defourny J. & Nyssens M. (2010) Social enterprise in Europe: At the crossroads of market, public policies and third sector. *Policy and Society* (2010), doi:10.1016/j.polsoc.2010.07.002

Deloitte, 2012. *Deloitte Annual Review of Football Finance*. Retrieved on January 16th, 2012 from: http://www.deloitte.com/view/en_GB/uk/industries/sportsbusinessgroup/sports/football/annual-review-of-football-finance/index.htm

Deloitte, 2013. *Deloitte Annual Review of Football Finance*. Retrieved on August 10th, 2013 from: <http://www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom-UnitedKingdom/Local%20Assets/Documents/Industries/Sports%20Business%20Group/deloitte-uk-sbg-arff-2013-highlights-download.pdf>

Dholakia U.M. & Durham E. (2010). One café chain's Facebook experiment. *Harvard Business Review*, 88(3), pp. 26.

Dionisio P., Leal C. & Moutinho L. (2008) Fandom affiliation and tribal behavior: a sports marketing application. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 11(1), pp. 17-39.

Dolles H. & Soderman S. (2005/1) *Globalization of Sports – The Case of Professional Football and its International Management Challenges*. Working Paper, Deutsches Institut für Japanstudien.

Dolles H. & Soderman S. (2005/5) *Ahead of the Game – The Network of Value Captures in Professional Football*. Working Paper, Deutsches Institut für Japanstudien.

Doyle J.P, Filo K., McDonald H. & Funk D. (2012) Exploring sport brand double jeopardy: The link between team market share and attitudinal loyalty. *Sport Management Review*, 16(3), pp. 285-297.

Edison Research (2012), *The social media habit*. Retrieved on March 31st, 2013 from: <http://socialhabit.com/secure/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/the-social-media-habit-2012-by-edison-research.pdf>

Ehrenberg A. (1997) In search of holy grails: Two comments. *Journal of Advertising Research*, Jan/Feb, pp. 9-12.

Ehrenberg A. & Goodhardt G. (2002) Double jeopardy revisited, again. *Marketing Research*, 14(1), pp. 40-42.

Ehrenberg A., Goodhardt G. & Barwise P.T. (1990) Double jeopardy revisited. *Journal of Marketing*, 54, pp. 82-91.

Eisenberg, B. (2008). *Understanding and aligning the value of social media*. Retrieved on December 12th, 2012 from:

<http://www.grokdotcom.com/2008/11/07/understandingand-aligning-the-value-of-social-media>

Ernst & Young (2011) *Social media: New game, new rules, new winners*. Retrieved on October 21st, 2014 from: [http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/Social_media_-_New_game_new_rules_new_winners/\\$FILE/EY_Social_media.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/Social_media_-_New_game_new_rules_new_winners/$FILE/EY_Social_media.pdf)

Estridge H.L. (2007) *Rangers owner talks sports business*. Retrieved on February 20th, 2014 from:

http://www.bizjournals.com/dallas/stories/2007/05/07/daily47.html?from_rss=1

Eurostat (2012) *Individuals using the Internet for posting messages to social media sites or instant messaging*. Retrieved on February 6th, 2014 from:

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/product_details/dataset?p_product_code=TIN00084

Facebook (2014) *Company information*. Retrieved on June 30th, 2014 from: <http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>

Farquhar P. (1989) Managing Brand Equity. *Marketing Research: A Magazine of Management and Applications*, 1(3), pp. 24-33.

fcbusiness (2013) *Manchester United lead social media League table*. Retrieved on July 29th, 2013 from: <http://fcbusiness.co.uk/blog/?p=587>

Ferrand A. & Pages M.P. (1999) Image Management in Sport Organizations: The Creation of Value. *European Journal of Marketing*, 33(3/4), pp. 387-402.

Flinck P. (2011) *Strategic framework for utilization of social media: establishing link between strategic marketing and social media*, Master Thesis 2011, School of Economics, Aalto University.

Football Industry (2013) *Geographic location of Facebook fans of the Barclays Premier League*. Retrieved on August 11th, 2013 from:

<http://football-industry.com/english/geographic-location-of-facebook-fans-barclays-premier-league-1213/>

Frey L., Botan C. & Kreps G. (2000). *Investigating communication: An introduction to research methods*, 2nd edition, Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Garst K. (2014) *Social media measurement and the only metric that matters*. Retrieved on July 25th, 2014 from: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kim-garst/social-media-measurement-b-4910702.html>

Gibbons T. & Dixon K. (2010) ‘Surf’s up!’: A call to take English soccer fan interactions on the Internet more seriously. *Soccer & Society*, 11(5), pp. 599-613.

Gil-Lafuente J. (2007) *Marketing management in a socially complex club: Barcelona FC*, in *Marketing and Football: An international Perspective*, 1st edition, Elsevier.

Ginesta X. (2013) What is the next step? The champions league clubs and their sponsors. From Bwin to Qatar Sports Investment. *Soccer & Society*, 14(1), pp. 66–79.

Giulianotti R. (2002) Supporters, followers, fans, flaneurs: A taxonomy of spectator identities in football. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 26(1), pp. 25-46.

Gladden J. & Funk D. (2001) Understanding brand loyalty in professional sport: Examining the link between brand associations and brand loyalty. *International Journal of Sports Marketing & Sponsorship*, March/April 2001.

Gladden J. & Funk D. (2002) Developing an understanding of brand associations in team sports: Empirical evidence from consumers of professional sport. *Journal of Sport Management*, 16, pp. 54-81.

Gladden J. & Milne G. (1999) Examining the importance of brand equity in professional sport. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 8(1), pp. 21-29.

Gladden J., Milne G. & Sutton W. (1998) A conceptual framework for assessing brand equity in Division I college athletics. *Journal of Sport Management*, 12(1), pp. 1-19.

Global Sports Media Consumption Report (2012) by PERFORM, KantarSport, TV Sports Markets.

Guenzi P. (2007) *Sport marketing and facility management: From stadiums to customer-based multipurpose leisure centres*, in *Marketing and Football: An international Perspective*, 1st edition, Elsevier.

Gummerus J., Liljander V., Weman E. & Philstrom M. (2011) *Consumer motivations to join a Facebook brand community*, Marketing Fields Forever 2011 Proceedings of the Academy of Marketing Conference 2011, Liverpool.

Hambrick M.E., Simmons J.M., Greenhalgh G.P. & Greenwell T.C. (2010) Understanding professional athletes' use of Twitter: A content analysis of athlete tweets. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 3, pp. 454-471.

Hanna R., Rohm A. & Crittenden V. (2011) We' re all connected: The power of the social media ecosystem, *Business Horizons*, 54(3), pp. 265-273.

Harrigan P. (2011) *Modeling CRM in the social media age*, Marketing Fields Forever 2011 Proceedings of the Academy of Marketing Conference 2011, Liverpool.

Hatfield S. (2003) As Becks suits up for Spain, real action happens in stores. *Advertising Age*, 74(29), pp. 20.

Healey M. (2008) *What is Branding*. Rotovision.

Heinonen H. (2002) Finnish Soccer Supporters Away from Home: A Case Study of Finnish National Team Fans at a World Cup Qualifying Match in Liverpool, England, *Soccer & Society*, 3(3), pp. 26-50.

Helland K. (2007) Changing sports, changing media. *Nordicom Review*, Jubilee Issue 2007, pp. 105-119.

Hoeffler S. & Keller K.L. (2003) The marketing advantages of strong brands. *Brand Management*, 10(6), pp. 421-445.

Hunt K.A., Bristol T. & Bashaw E.R. (1999) A conceptual approach to classifying sports fans. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 13(6), pp. 439-452.

iCrossing, (2008) *What is social media*. Retrieved on January 1st, 2013 from: <http://www.icrossing.com/icrossing-what-is-social-media>

Ioakimidis M. (2010) Online marketing of professional sports clubs: engaging fans on a new playing field. *International Journal of Sports Marketing & Sponsorship*, 11(4), pp. 271-282.

Jansen B.J., Zhang M., Sobel K. & Chowdury A. (2009) Twitter power: Tweets as electronic word of mouth. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 60(11), pp. 2169-2188.

Joachimsthaler E. & Aaker D. (1997) Building Brands Without Mass Media. *Harvard Business Review*, 75(1), pp. 39-41, 44-46, 48-50.

Kapferer, J.N. (1992) *Strategic Brand Management – New Approaches to Creating and Evaluating Brand Equity*, The Free Press.

Kapferer, J.N. (2008) *The New Strategic Brand Management – Creating and sustaining brand equity long term*, 4th edition, Kogan Page.

Kaplan A.M. & Haenlein M. (2010) Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), pp. 59-68.

Kassing J.W. & Sanderson J. (2010). Fan-athlete interaction and Twitter tweeting through the Giro: A case study. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 3, pp. 113-128.

Kaynak E., Salman G. & Tatoglu E. (2008) An integrative framework linking brand associations and brand loyalty in professional sports. *Journal of Brand Management*, 15, pp. 336-357.

Kelk T. (2013) *Interview with Micah Hall: How Portsmouth FC are leading the way in Fan Engagement*. Retrieved on November 1st, 2014 from: <http://www.theuksportsnetwork.com/interview-with-micah-hall-how-portsmouth-fc-are-leading-the-way-in-fan-engagement>

- Keller K. L. (1993) Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57, pp. 1-22.
- Keller K. L. (2001) *Building customer-based brand equity: A blueprint for creating strong brands*. Working paper, Marketing Science Institute, Report 01-107.
- Keller K.L. (2003) Brand synthesis: The multidimensionality of brand knowledge. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(4), pp. 595-600.
- Keller K.L. (2009) Building strong brands in a modern marketing communications environment. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 15(2-3), pp. 139-155.
- Keller K.L. & Lehmann D.R. (2003) How do brands create value? *Marketing Management*, 12(3), pp. 26-31.
- Kerr A.K. (2008) Team Identification and Satellite Supporters: The Potential Value of Brand Equity Frameworks. *Paper presented at the 6th annual conference for the Sport Marketing Association*, Gold Coast, Australia, July 17–19, 2008.
- Kerr A.K. (2009) “You’ll never walk alone”: *The use of brand equity frameworks to explore the team identification of the “satellite supporter”*. PhD Thesis, School of Leisure, Sport and Tourism, University of Technology, Sydney, 2009.
- Kerr A.K. & Emery P.R. (2011) Foreign fandom and the Liverpool FC: A cyber-mediated romance, *Soccer & Society*, 12(6), pp. 880-896.
- Kerr A.K. & Gladden J.M. (2008) Extending the understanding of professional team brand equity to the global marketplace. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, 3(1/2), pp. 58-77.
- Kietzmann J.H., Hermkens K., McCarthy I.P. & Silvestre B.S. (2011) Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media, *Business Horizons*, 54(3), pp. 241-251.
- Kim A. J. & Ko E. (2011) Do social media marketing activities enhance customer equity? An empirical study of luxury fashion brand. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(10), pp. 1480-1486.
- Klouman H. & Beljulji D. (2012) *Branding in the lower level sport club setting*. MBA Thesis 2012, Jonkoping Business School.

- Kotler P. & Keller K.L. (2012) *Marketing Management*, Pearson Education.
- Kozinets R. (1999) E-Tribalized Marketing? The Strategic Implications of Virtual Communities of Consumption. *European Management Journal*, 17, pp. 252–264.
- Kozinets R., de Valck K., Wojnicki A. & Wilner, S. (2010) Networked narratives: Understanding word-of-mouth marketing in online communities. *Journal of Marketing*, 74, pp. 71–89.
- Kuper S. & Szymanski S. (2009) *Soccernomics*, Nation Books.
- Larson R.J. (2009) *The Rise of Viral Marketing through the New Media of Social Media. Faculty Publications and Presentations. Paper 6*. Retrieved on April 1st, 2012 from:
http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=busi_fac_pubs
- Lipsman A., Mudd G., Rich M. & Bruich S. (2012) The power of “Like” – How brands reach (and influence) fans through social-media marketing. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 52(1), pp. 40-52.
- Maddox J. (2013) *Impact of social media on ticket sales*. Retrieved on November 1st, 2014 from: <http://businessofcollegesports.com/2013/01/03/impact-of-social-media-on-ticket-sales/>
- Mailman Group (2013) *Football clubs and Chinese social media*. Retrieved on November 11th, 2014 from: <http://www.mailmangroup.com/project/mailman-red-card-2013-china-digital-champions-league/>
- Malhotra N. K. & Birks D. F. (2006) *Marketing Research - An applied Approach*, 2nd European Edition, Pearson Education.
- Mangold W.G. & Faulds D. (2009) Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix. *Business Horizons*, 52(4), pp. 357-365.
- Martin M. (2005) *The Globalization of Soccer: A Look at the Growth of World’s Game and Its Current Condition in the United States*. Presented to the Conference on Globalization and Sport in Historical Context University of California, San Diego, March 2005.

Martin S. (2012) *Share, like, tweet and cheer: An examination of social media usage and the NFL*. Doctoral Thesis, 2012, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Mason D. (1999) What is the sports product and who buys it? The marketing of professional sports leagues. *European Journal of Marketing*, 33(3/4), pp. 402-419.

Maxwell H. (2009) *Women's and men's intercollegiate basketball media coverage on ESPN.com: A mixed methods analysis of a complete season*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Minnesota.

Mc Alexander J., Schouten J. & Koenig H. (2002) Building brand community. *Journal of Marketing*, 66(1), pp. 38-54.

McCarthy J., Rowley J., Ashworth C.J. & Pioch E. (2013) Managing brand presence through social media: the case of UK football clubs. *Internet Research*, 24(2), pp. 181-204.

McDonald M., de Chernatony L. & Harris F. (2001) Corporate marketing and service brands - Moving beyond the fast-moving consumer goods model. *European Journal of Marketing*, 35(3/4), pp. 335-352.

McLaren D. (2011) *Arsenal – build a banner Facebook app*. Retrieved on November 1st, 2014 from: <http://www.theuksportsnetwork.com/arsenal-build-a-banner-facebook-app>

McLaren D. (2012) *5 reasons Liverpool FC was voted best sports team on Twitter at Shorty Awards*. Retrieved on November 1st, 2014 from: <http://www.theuksportsnetwork.com/liverpool-fc-voted-best-sports-team-on-twitter-at-shorty-awards>

McLaren D. (03/2013) *How Everton FC perform on Facebook*. Retrieved on November 1st, 2014 from: <http://www.theuksportsnetwork.com/how-everton-fc-perform-on-facebook-infograph>

McLaren D. (04/2013) *Hillsborough: LFC Fans Pay Their Artistic Tributes on Facebook*. Retrieved on November 1st, 2014 from: <http://www.theuksportsnetwork.com/hillsborough-lfc-fans-pay-their-artistic-tributes-on-facebook>

McLaren D. (09/2013) *Liverpool outline their global digital expansion plans*. Retrieved on November 1st, 2014 from: <http://www.theuksportsnetwork.com/liverpool-outline-their-global-digital-expansion-plans>

McLaren D. (10/2014) *Manchester United pass 60m fan mark on Facebook, but what does that mean to the club?* Retrieved on November 1st, 2014 from: http://www.theuksportsnetwork.com/?p=11034?utm_source=www.theuksportsnetwork.com&utm_medium=Matchchat%20Recommended%20Content%20-%20Advert&utm_campaign=Matchchat

McWilliam G. (2000) Building stronger brands through online communities. *Sloan Management Review*, 41(3), pp. 43-54.

Meir R.A. (2009) *Tribalism, team brand loyalty, team brand value and personal/group identity in professional Rugbyfootball*. PhD Thesis, Southern Cross University, Lismore, NSW.

Miller A. (2010) *Revealed: The world's best selling club football shirts*. Retrieved on 5th October, 2013 from: <http://www.sportingintelligence.com/2010/08/31/revealed-the-worlds-best-selling-club-football-shirts-310802/>

Moutinho L., Dionisio P. & Leal C. (2007) Surf tribal behavior: A sports marketing application. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 25(7), pp. 668-690.

Muniz Jr. A.M. & O'Guinn T. (2001) Brand community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27, pp. 412-432.

Naik A.Y. & Gupta A. (2013) Illuminating viewer-based brand equity in sports. *International Journal of Engineering and Management Sciences*, 4(2), pp. 160-172.

Nash R. (2000) Globalized football fandom: Scandinavian Liverpool FC supporters. *Football Studies*, 3(2), pp. 6-23.

Nicholson P. (2014) *Digital drives shift in club revenues beyond the club stadium capacity*. Retrieved on November 1st, 2014 from: <http://www.insideworldfootball.com/world-football/15625-digital-drives-shift-in-club-revenues-beyond-the-club-stadium-capacity>

Nielsen (2009) *Global Online Consumer Survey*. Retrieved on December 19th, 2012 from: http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/pr_global-study_07709.pdf

O'Hara E.M. (2004) *Sports brands are different – how to market an unpredictable product*. *Sport Business Journal*, Retrieved on July 4th, 2013 from: <http://www.smebranding.com/content/sports-brands-are-different-how-market-unpredictable-product-0>

O'Reilly T. (2009) *What is Web 2.0: Design patterns and business models for the next generation of software*. Retrieved on September 3rd, 2012 from: <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-Web-20.html>

Ozsoy S. (2011) Use of New Media by Turkish Fans in Sport Communication: Facebook and Twitter. *Journal of Human Kinetics*, 28, pp. 165-176.

Pegoraro A. (2010) Look who's talking – Athletes on Twitter: A case study. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 3, pp. 501-514.

Pew Research Center (2013) *The demographics of social media users*. Retrieved on November 10th, 2014 from: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Social-media-users.aspx>

Piipponen H. (2011) *Enhancing Customer Relations in Team Sport Business*. Master Thesis 2011, Aalto University, School of Economics.

Pitta D.A. & Fowler D. (2005) Internet community forums: An untapped resource for consumer marketers. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 22(5), pp. 265-274.

Pons F. & Standifird S. (2007) *Marketing of professional soccer in the US: Some lessons to be learned*, in *Marketing and Football: An international Perspective*, 1st edition, Elsevier.

Premierleague (2012) *Premier League issues club guidelines on social media*. Retrieved on October 1st, 2013 from: <http://www.premierleague.com/en-gb/news/news/2012-13/jul/premier-league-issues-club-guidelines-on-social-media.html>

Premierleague (2013) *Season review 2012-2013*. Retrieved on October 1st, 2013 from: <http://www.premierleague.com/>

Premierleague (2014) *Season review 2013-2014*. Retrieved on September 1st, 2014 from <http://www.premierleague.com/>

Price J., Farrington L. & Hall L. (2013) Changing the game? The impact of Twitter on relationships between football clubs, supporters and the sports media, *Soccer & Society*, 14(4), pp. 446-461.

Priest S. (2010) *Doing media research: An introduction*, 2nd edition, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pronschinske M., Groza M.D. & Walker M. (2012) Attracting Facebook fans: The importance of authenticity and engagement as a social networking strategy for professional sport teams. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 21, pp. 221-231.

Qualman E. (2009) *Socialnomics*. Hoboken, New Jersey. John Wiley and Sons.

Renbarger D. (2014) *Social media increases ticket sales*. Retrieved on November 1st, 2014 from: <http://ddrenbarger.wordpress.com/2014/09/19/michigan-footballs-social-media-campaign-raises-ticket-sales/>

Rice-Oxley M. (2007) *English fans pool cash to buy their own soccer team*. Retrieved on February 20th, 2013 from: <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0608/p01s03-woeu.html>

Richelieu A. (2004). A new brand world for sports teams. In B. G. Pitts (Ed.), *Sharing best practices in sport marketing* (pp 3-21). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology Publishers.

Richelieu A. & Boulaire C. (2005). A post modern conception of the product and its applications to professional sports. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsor-ship*, 7(1), pp. 23-32.

Richelieu A., Pawlowski T. & Breuer Ch. (2011) Football brand management: Minor League versus Champions League. *Journal of Sponsorship*, 4(2), pp. 178-189.

Richter A. & Koch M. (2007) Social software - status quo und Zukunft. *Technischer Bericht*, Nr. 2007-01, Fakultät für Informatik, Universität der Bundeswehr München.

Roberts A., Wallace W. & O'Farrell P. (2003) *Introduction to Business Research 1*, Pearson Education, Harlow, UK.

Rookie.com (2014) *Social media problems in sports*. Retrieved on October 19th, 2014 from: <http://rookie.com/social-media-problems-in-sports>

Ross S. (2006) A conceptual framework for understanding spectator-based brand equity. *Journal of Sport Management*, 20, pp. 22-38.

Ross S., Bang H. & Lee S. (2007) Assessing brand associations for intercollegiate ice hockey. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 16, pp. 106-114.

Ross S., James J. & Vargas P. (2006) Development of scale to measure team brand associations in professional sport. *Journal of Sport Management*, 20, pp. 260-279.

Ross S., Russell K. & Bang H. (2008). An empirical assessment of spectator-based brand equity. *Journal of Sport Management*, 22(3), pp. 322-333.

Santomier J. (2008). *New Media, Branding and Global Sports Sponsorship*. Business Faculty Publications. Paper 13. Retrieved on November 17th, 2013 from: http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1012&context=wcob_fac

Saunders M., Lewis P. & Thornhill A. (2009) *Research Methods for Business Students*, 5th edition, Pearson Education.

Schade M., Burmann C. & Kanitz C. (2011) The brand image of professional sport teams - an empirical investigation of relevant brand benefits and the relevance of brand personality. *Proceedings of the 7th Thought Leaders International Conference in Brand Management*, University of Lugano, 10-12 March 2011.

Schilhaneck M. (2008) Brand management in the professional sports club setting. *European Journal for Sport and Society*, 5(1), pp. 43-62.

Sharp B., Lockshin L. & Cohen J. (2011) *How do fine wine brands grow?* Paper for the 6th Academy of Wine Business Research (AWBR) Conference, Bordeaux, France.

Simmons G. (2007) "i-Branding": Developing the internet as a branding tool. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 25(6), pp. 544-562.

Smith G. (2007, April 4). *Social software building blocks*. Retrieved June 5th, 2013, from <http://nform.ca/publications/social-software-building-block>

Soccerlens (2012) *"Fans without borders" spend €35 billion playing away each season.* Retrieved on August 10th, 2013 from: <http://soccerlens.com/fans-without-borders-spend-e35bn-playing-away-each-season/93640/>

Socialbakers (2014). *Facebook brand statistics, Twitter brand statistics.* Retrieved on 31st January 2014 from: <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-pages/brands/>
<http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-pages/sports/tag/sports-team/>
<http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-pages/sports/country/united-kingdom/tag/sports-team/>
<http://www.socialbakers.com/twitter/group/sports/tag/sports-team/>

Solomon M., Bamossy G., Askegaard S. & Hogg M. (2006). *Consumer Behavior: Buying: A European Perspective* (3rd ed.). Financial Times Press.

Sport+Markt (2010) *The most popular football clubs.* Retrieved on August 5th, 2014 from: <http://www.goal.com/en/news/12/spain/2010/09/10/2112594/barcelona-and-real-madrid-have-the-most-fans-in-europe>

Stoll B. (2014) *The current status of digital transformation within football at IFA Berlin.* Retrieved on November 10th, 2014 from: <http://www.theuksportsnetwork.com/the-current-status-of-digital-transformation-within-football-at-ifa-berlin>

SyncForce (2013) *Brand rankings.* Retrieved on May 15th, 2013 from: <http://www.rankingthebrands.com/The-Brand-Rankings.aspx?rankingID=239&year=617>

Taker I. (2012) *Social Media & Sport – The importance of interacting with, not just talking at fans.* Retrieved on November 1st, 2014 from: <http://www.theuksportsnetwork.com/social-media-interaction>

Tan W. (2012) *Facebook as a tool for marketing communications and brand building: A content analysis of top global brands' Facebook pages.* Master Thesis, 2012, University of Florida.

Tapp A. (2004) *The loyalty of football fans - We'll support you evermore?* *Database Marketing & Customer Strategy Management*, 11(3), pp. 203-215.

Tapp A. & Clowes J. (2002) From “carefree casuals” to “professional wanderers” - segmentation possibilities for football supporters. *European Journal of Marketing*, 36(11/12), pp. 1248-1269.

Taylor W. (2012) *Fast becoming an essential revenue tool for football clubs*. Retrieved on November 1st, 2014 from: <http://www.footballfancast.com/football-blogs/fast-becoming-an-essential-revenue-tool-for-football-clubs>

Tellis W. (1997a) *Application of a Case Study Methodology, The Qualitative Report*. Retrieved on August 19th, 2013 from: <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR3-3/tellis2.html>

Terrell S. (2012) Mixed methods research methodologies. *The Qualitative Report*, 17, pp. 254-280.

The Stadium Guide (2013), *The 2012-13 Premier League season in attendances*. Retrieved on October 3rd, 2013 from: <http://www.stadiumguide.com/2012-13-premier-league-attendances/>

Thrassou A., Vrontis D., Kartakoullis N.L. & Kriemadis T. (2012) Contemporary Marketing Communications Framework for Football Clubs. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 18(3), pp. 278-305.

ToffeeWeb (2013) *Everton's origins*. Retrieved on June 20th, 2013 from: <http://www.toffeeweb.com/club/folklore/origins.asp>

Tuominen P. (1999) Managing Brand Equity. *Liiketaloudellinen Aikakauskirja*, 48(1), pp. 65-100.

Tuominen P. (2000) Customer-based brand equity: Delivering value to the firm, trade and customer. *Management expertise for the new millennium. Publications of the Turku School of Economics and Business Administration*, Series A-1:2000, pp. 305-316.

Twitter (2014) *Company information*. Retrieved on June 30th, 2014 from: <https://about.twitter.com/company>

UEFA (2014) *Worldwide reach of the Lisbon final*, Retrieved on August 6th, 2014 from: <http://www.uefa.com/uefachampionsleague/news/newsid=2111684.html>

Underwood R., Bond E. & Baer R. (2001) Building service brands via social identity: Lessons from the sports marketplace. *Journal of Marketing*, 9(1), pp. 1-13.

Ventura K. & Dedeoglu A. (2013) Do marketing programs of Turkish football teams really affect the customer mindset? *Pamukkale Journal of Sport Sciences*, 4(1), pp. 16-35.

Villarejo-Ramos Angel F. & Martín-Velicia Félix A. (2007) A proposed model for measuring the brand equity in sports organizations. *EsicMarket*, 123, pp. 63-83.

Wallace L., Wilson J. & Miloch K. (2011) Sporting Facebook: A Content Analysis of NCAA Organizational Sport Pages and Big 12 Conference Athletic Department Pages. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 4, pp. 422-444.

Walsh S. (2012) *43 million Twitter users follow a football club as football social media grows in 2012*. Retrieved on May 20th, 2013 from: <http://digital-football.com/news/43-million-twitter-users-follow-a-football-club-as-football-social-media-grows-in-2012/>

Walsh S. (2013) *How are football clubs combating Twitter misuse by players?* Retrieved on October 19th, 2014 from: <http://wallblog.co.uk/2013/11/13/how-are-football-clubs-combating-twitter-misuse-by-players/#ixzz3H45rI1AB>

Wann D.L, Melnick M.J, Russell G.W. & Pease D.G. (2001) *Sport Fans. The Psychology and Social Impact of Spectators*, Routledge, New York, NY

Weinberg, T. (2009) *The new community rules: Marketing on the social web*. New York: O'Reilly.

Williams J. & Chinn S.J. (2010) Meeting relationship-marketing goals through social media: a conceptual model for sport marketers. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 3(4), pp. 422-437.

Wood L. (2000) Brands and Brand Equity: Definition and Management, *Management Decision*, 38(9), pp. 662-669.

Woodgate S. (11/2012) *Sportsmen and Twitter: how they influence their communities*. Retrieved on October 21st, 2014 from: <http://www.theuksportsnetwork.com/sportsmen-and-twitter-how-they-influence-their-communities>

Woodgate S. (12/2012) *Why do fans follow sport stars in social media*. Retrieved on October 21st, 2014 from: <http://www.theuksportsnetwork.com/why-do-fans-follow-sports-stars-on-social-media>

Woodgate S. (01/2013) *Sport Communicators and Social Media – Next Steps*. Retrieved on October 21st, 2014 from: <http://www.theuksportsnetwork.com/sport-communicators-and-social-media-next-steps>

Yan J. (2011) Social media in branding: Fulfilling a need. *Journal of Brand Management*, 18(9), pp. 688–696.

Yin R. (2009) *Case Study Research*, 4th Edition, SAGE Publications.

Yoo B., Donthu N. & Lee S. (2000) An examination of selected marketing mix elements and brand equity. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 28(2), pp. 195-211.

Yukio T. & Moeller O. (2008) *The Digital Playing Field: Commercial Opportunities for FC Copenhagen*. Master Thesis 2008, Copenhagen Business School.

Zeithalm V., Parasuraman A. & Berry L. (1985) Problems and strategies in services marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 49, pp. 33-46.

Chapter 12. Appendices