

“You’ll Never Walk Alone”

**The Use of Brand Equity Frameworks to
Explore the Team Identification of
the ‘Satellite Supporter’**

Anthony K. Kerr

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University of Technology, Sydney

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student

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Those who know me best know that my favourite film is '*Jerry Maguire*'. A successful sports agent questions his direction in life and pens a mission statement – 'The Things We Think and Do Not Say'. "Sports", a younger Tom Cruise writes, "may never be the pure and simple thing that older men pine for. That ball park in the corn fields of Field of Dreams is, of course, a fantasy that lives in the mind. Sports is a huge operation, always was, but for now that fact is no longer a secret" (Crowe 2003). However, little produces such "an extreme level of breathless delight and helpless despair as swiftly as the movement of a ball across a pitch, chased by two rival teams of 11 players" (Kervin 2008). This is why sport remains an important part of my life and consequently fuelled my enthusiasm for this project. I would therefore like to sincerely thank those supporters who willingly gave of their time to share their thoughts and experiences. For those Reds supporters who showed such passion and pride for 'the Liverpool way', I hope that in 2009 you get to celebrate that elusive English Premier League title.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
GLOSSARY AND LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xv
ABSTRACT	xvi
PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS ARISING FROM THE DOCTORAL RESEARCH	xviii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Introduction	1
1.2. Background to the Research	3
1.2.1. The Age of ‘Sportainment’	5
1.2.2. The Age of Globalisation	7
1.2.3. The Age of Foreign Fandom	9
1.2.4. The Age of Branding	12
1.3. The Research Problem	14
1.4. Justification for the Research	16
1.5. Methodology and Research Design	16
1.6. The Thesis Outline	19
1.7. Definition of Terms	20
1.8. Chapter Review	23
CHAPTER TWO: AN EXAMINATION OF SPORTS FANDOM	24
2.1. Introduction	24
2.2. Notions of Sports Fandom	24
2.3. Sports Spectator Motives	26
2.4. Exploring Sports Team Identification	29

2.4.1. Psychological Factors: Community Affiliation	30
2.4.2. Environmental Factors: Socialisation	32
2.4.3. Team-Related Factors	34
Team Performance	34
Player Attributes	37
Organisational Characteristics	38
2.5. Social Identity Theory	43
2.5.1. Categorisation	44
2.5.2. Identification	45
Geographic Identity	47
National Identity	48
Ethnic Identity	49
Religious Identity	51
2.5.3. Comparison	52
In-Group and Out-Group Bias	53
Self-Esteem Enhancement/Protection	54
2.5.4. Relevance to the Satellite Supporter	59
2.6. Chapter Review	60
CHAPTER THREE: BRAND EQUITY AND THE SPORTS TEAM	63
3.1. Introduction	63
3.2. Brand Equity	64
3.2.1. The Development of Brand Equity	65
3.2.2. Brand Equity and the Sports Team: Conceptual Frameworks	65
Team-Related Antecedents	66
Organisation-Related Antecedents	67
Market-Related Antecedents	68
Consequences of Brand Equity	68
3.2.3. Application to the Professional Sports Team	69
A North American Perspective	70
A European Perspective	71
3.3. Brand Equity in a Global Sports Marketplace	73

3.3.1. Team-Related Antecedents	74
Success	75
Star Player(s)	75
Head Coach	77
3.3.2. Organisation-Related Antecedents	77
Conference and League	78
Stadium or Arena	78
Sponsor Alignment	79
Reputation and Tradition	80
Product Delivery	81
Logo Design and Name	81
Affiliated Others and Celebrity Fans	82
3.3.3. Market-Related Antecedents	82
Geographic Location	83
Competitive Forces	83
International Media Arrangements	84
Existing Brand Community	84
3.3.4. Consequences of Brand Equity	86
3.4. Support for the Brand Equity Antecedents	88
3.5. Brand Equity and Team Identification: A Synthesis	89
3.5.1. The Proposed Relationship	90
3.5.2. Dimensions of Brand Equity	91
3.5.3. Team Identification and Consumption	93
3.5.4. Proposed Link: Antecedents and Perceived Quality	94
3.5.5. Proposed Link: Antecedents and Brand Associations	96
3.5.6. Proposed Link: Consequences and Team Identification	98
3.5.7. The Relationship: An Overview	100
3.6. Chapter Review	105
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY	108
4.1. Introduction	108
4.2. The Research Methodology	109
4.3. The Case Study Approach: a Rationale	109

4.3.1. The Case Selection	112
4.4. The Research Design: Mixed Methods	114
4.4.1. Quantitative Methods	116
4.4.2. Qualitative Methods	117
4.5. The Multiple Methods	119
4.6. The Questionnaire Survey	120
4.6.1. Overview	120
4.6.2. Study One – An ‘Exploratory’ Pilot Survey	122
Participants	122
Materials and Procedure	123
4.6.3. Study Two – The Team Pilot Survey	124
Participants	125
Materials and Procedure	126
4.6.4. Study Three – The Liverpool F.C. Global Survey	127
Participants	128
Materials and Procedure	128
4.7. Semi-Structured Interviews	129
Participants	130
Materials and Procedure	130
4.8. Methods of Data Analysis	132
4.8.1. Quantitative Data	132
Sample Size	133
Factor Loading	133
Communality	133
Rotation	134
Number of Factors	134
4.8.2. Qualitative Data	135
4.9. Limitations of the Research Design	136
4.9.1. The Retrospective Nature of Fandom	136
4.9.2. Self-Selection Bias	136
4.9.3. Generalisation of Findings	137
4.10. Situating the Case Study: the Liverpool F.C. Story	138
4.10.1. The Early Years (1892-1919)	140

4.10.2. The Post-War Years (1920-1958)	141
4.10.3. The Shankly Years (1959-1974)	141
4.10.4. The Glory Years (1975-1983)	142
4.10.5. Triumph and Tragedy (1984-1997)	143
4.10.6. The Globalisation of the Liverpool F.C. (1998-2004)	145
4.10.7. The Emergence of a Global Brand? (2004-Present)	146
4.11. Chapter Review	149
CHAPTER FIVE: QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS	151
5.1. Introduction	151
5.2. The Exploratory (AFANA) Pilot Survey	151
5.2.1. The Participants	151
5.2.2. The Creation of Team Identification	152
5.2.3. Continued (and Possible Cessation) of Team Identification	154
5.2.4. Sports Consumption Behaviour	156
5.3. The Team-Specific (Ajax F.C.) Pilot Survey	157
5.3.1. The Participants	157
5.3.2. The Creation of Team Identification	160
5.3.3. Continued (and Possible Cessation) of Team Identification	162
5.3.4. Sports Consumption Behaviour	163
5.4. The Liverpool F.C. Survey	167
5.4.1. The Participants	167
5.4.2. The Creation of Team Identification	169
Satellite Supporters vs. Expatriate Fans	169
Norwegian vs. Non-Norwegian Satellite Supporters	170
Satellite Supporters: Miscellaneous Reasons	171
5.4.3. First-Tier Themes	174
Media Coverage	175
Style of Play	176
Presence of Particular Player(s)	176
Team Success	176
History of Success	177
Participation in the Highest Division	177

Stadium	178
5.4.4. Second-Tier Themes	178
History of Ethical Behaviour	179
Broadcast Quality of Games	179
Logo Design and/or Name	180
Family or Friend Support	180
Presence of a Particular Manager	181
5.4.5. Third-Tier Themes	181
Famous or Celebrity Fans	182
A 'Connection' to England	182
Presence of a Fellow Countryman	182
High-Profile and/or Quality Sponsors	184
5.4.6. Factor Analysis	184
5.4.7. Continued (and Possible Cessation) of Team Identification	187
5.4.8. Sports Consumption Behaviour	190
5.5. Chapter Review	195
CHAPTER SIX: INTERVIEW RESULTS	197
6.1. Introduction	197
6.2. Satellite Supporter Interviews	197
6.2.1. The Participants	197
6.3. The Creation of Team Identification	199
6.4. Major Themes	201
6.4.1. Media Coverage: "You Have to See Them Somewhere"	201
6.4.2. Family or Friend Support: "Just Natural to Cheer for Them"	203
6.4.3. Presence of Particular Player(s): "He was an Idol"	204
6.4.4. Style of Play: "Football is Entertainment"	206
6.4.5. Participation in the Highest Division: "Among the Elite"	208
6.4.6. Team Success: "Everyone Likes Winners"	209
6.4.7. Presence of a Fellow Countryman: "Good to See One of Your Own Doing Well"	212

6.5. Minor Themes	214
6.5.1. Merchandise: “It Started Out with Just a Football and a Postcard”	214
6.5.2. A ‘Connection’ to England: “I Just Loved My Time in the UK”	215
6.5.3. Club History: “The Big Triumphs and the Tragedies”	215
6.5.4. History of Success: “They Did Rule the 80’s”	216
6.5.5. History of Ethical Behaviour: “They Don’t Stand for Any BS”	217
6.5.6. Game Atmosphere: “The Atmosphere is Fantastic”	219
6.5.7. The ‘Liverpool Way’: “It Was Something Special – The Liverpool Way”	220
6.6. Chapter Review	221
CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	223
7.1. Introduction	223
7.2. Social Identity Theory and the Satellite Supporter	223
7.2.1. Social Identification and Team Identification	226
7.2.2. Social Identification and Brand Equity	227
7.2.3. A ‘Theoretical Lens’ to Examine Foreign Fandom	227
In-Group Bias	228
Self-Esteem Enhancement/Protection	229
7.2.4. Brand Equity and Team Identification	231
7.2.5. The Creation of Team Identification for Satellite Supporters	232
Media Coverage	233
Team-Related Qualities	234
Organisation-Related Qualities	236
7.2.6. The Predictive Nature of the Revised Brand Equity Framework	237
7.2.7. Brand Community and the Psychological Benefits of Fandom	242
7.2.8. The Re-Emergence of the ‘Satellite Fan’	246
7.3. Conclusion	248
7.3.1. Limitations and Future Research	250

REFERENCES	253
APPENDICES	291
Appendix A: AFANA Supporters Fan Survey	292
Appendix B: Ajax F.C. Supporters Fan Survey	298
Appendix C: Liverpool F.C. Supporters Fan Survey	308

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1: Conceptual Framework of Brand Equity	66
Figure 3.2: The Revised Conceptual Framework	74
Figure 3.3: Relationship due to Perceived Quality/Brand Associations	100
Figure 3.4: Relationship due to Shared Consequences	101
Figure 3.5: The Proposed Conceptual Relationship	105
Figure 4.1: Triangulation of Methods	120
Figure 7.1: The Inter-Relationship of SIT and the Research Questions	225
Figure 7.2: The Relationship (Brand Equity and Team Identification)	241

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1: Research Design	18
Table 1.2: Sports Spectator Definitions	20
Table 1.3: Team Identification Definitions	21
Table 1.4: Brand Equity Definitions	22
Table 2.1: Causes of Current, and Former, Team Identification	35
Table 2.2: Possible Antecedents for Team Identification	41
Table 3.1: The Contribution of Team-Related Antecedents	103
Table 3.2: The Contribution of Organisation-Related Antecedents	104
Table 4.1: Case Study Candidates	113
Table 4.2: Research Design	115
Table 4.3: Participating Liverpool F.C. Supporter Clubs	128
Table 4.4: Major Liverpool F.C. Honours	139
Table 4.5: Liverpool F.C.'s 2007-2008 Squad	148
Table 5.1: Demographic Data of AFANA Respondents (N = 39)	151
Table 5.2: Reasons for Originally Supporting their AFL Team (N = 60)	152
Table 5.3: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Importance of Reasons in their Original AFL Team Support (N = 39)	154
Table 5.4: Reasons for Currently Supporting their AFL Team (N = 47)	155
Table 5.5: Reasons to Stop Supporting their AFL Team (N = 44)	156
Table 5.6: Behaviour to Support their AFL Team (During Season) (N = 39)	156
Table 5.7: Demographic Data of Ajax USA Respondents (N = 128)	159
Table 5.8: Importance of Reasons in Original Ajax F.C. Support (N= 128)	160
Table 5.9: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Importance of Reasons in their Current Ajax F.C. Support (N = 128)	162
Table 5.10: Behaviour to Support the Ajax F.C. (During Season) (N = 126)	164
Table 5.11: Behaviour to Support the Ajax F.C. (Out of Season) (N = 126)	166
Table 5.12: Demographic Data of Liverpool F.C. Respondents (N = 1,153)	168
Table 5.13: Mean Scores of the Important Reasons in their Liverpool F.C. Support (Satellite Supporters vs. Expatriate Fans)	169

Table 5.14: Mean Scores of the Important Reasons in their Liverpool F.C. Support (Norwegian vs. Non-Norwegian Satellite Supporters)	171
Table 5.15: Miscellaneous Reasons to Support the Liverpool F.C.	173
Table 5.16: Importance of First-Tier Themes in Original Liverpool F.C. Support (N = 1,153)	174
Table 5.17: Importance of Second-Tier Themes in Original Liverpool F.C. Support (N = 1,153)	179
Table 5.18: Importance of Third-Tier Themes in Original Liverpool F.C. Support (N = 1,153)	181
Table 5.19: Importance of a Fellow Countryman in Original Liverpool F.C. Support	183
Table 5.20: Factor Loadings for Team Identification Using Principal Component Analysis (PCA)	186
Table 5.21: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Importance of Reasons in their Current Liverpool F.C. Support (N = 1,153)	188
Table 5.22: Behaviour to Support the Liverpool F.C. (During Season) (N = 1,128)	191
Table 5.23: Behaviour to Support the Liverpool F.C. (Out of Season) (N = 1,153)	194
Table 6.1: Details of Interview Participants	198
Table 6.2: Interview Themes	200
Table 7.1: The Primary Antecedents of Team Identification	233
Table 7.2: The Secondary Antecedents of Team Identification	237
Table 7.3: Research Contributions to the Body of Knowledge	249

GLOSSARY AND LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFANA	Australian Football Association of North America
A-League	Australia's (national) football (soccer) league
AFL	Australian Football League
Bundesliga	German football's highest division
Champions League	Annual football club competition (usually refers to UEFA)
Championship (The)	English football's first division (2 nd highest behind EPL)
Copa Libertadores	South America's annual football club competition
EPL	English Premier League (its highest football division)
Eredivisie	Dutch football's highest division
FIFA	International Federation of Association Football
IAAF	International Association of Athletics Federations
La Liga	Spanish football's highest division
League One	English football's second division (3 rd highest)
LFC	Liverpool F.C.
Ligue 1	French football's highest division
MLB	Major League Baseball (U.S. and Canada)
MLS	Major League Soccer (U.S. and Canada)
NASCAR	U.S. National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing
NBA	National Basketball Association (U.S. and Canada)
NBL	Australia's National Basketball League
NFL	U.S. National Football League
NFL Europe	National Football League (Europe) (now defunct)
NHL	National Hockey League (U.S. and Canada)
NRL	Australia's National Rugby League
Serie A	Italian football's highest division
Serie B	Italian football's second division
Super 14	South Africa, Australia and New Zealand franchises' rugby union championship
Twenty20 Cricket	Modified (shortened) version of cricket
UEFA	Union of European Football Associations
UEFA Cup	Europe's annual football club competition
WNBA	U.S. Women's National Basketball League
XFL	U.S. X Football League (now defunct)

ABSTRACT

Globalisation and advances in communications technology have greatly expanded the potential marketplace for professional teams, especially for internationally popular sports. Lewis (2001) claimed that fans are now more likely to support a team based *less* on a shared geographic connection than on personal reasons. As Ben-Porat (2000) claimed, for these fans a foreign-based team is like “an ‘overseas sweetheart,’ far away but close to the heart” (p. 344).

These ‘satellite supporters’ (Kerr 2008, in press), or ‘satellite fans’ (Kerr & Gladden 2008) represent significant revenue, especially for those team brands that seek international expansion. In addition, an individual’s decision to purchase the sports product is largely dependent upon their level of identification with a chosen team. Team identification, or “the extent to which a fan feels psychologically connected” (Wann, Melnick, Russell & Pease 2001, p. 3) to a particular team, is critical to the financial viability of a sports organisation. However, despite the increased attention paid to team identification, the reasons why satellite supporters identify with a foreign-based team have been largely unexplored. To address this need this study asks: What are the most important antecedents in the identification of satellite supporters with their chosen sports team? Recent research also suggests that a relationship exists between team identification and brand equity (Carlson, Quazi & Muthaly 2002; Kerr 2008; Underwood, Bond & Baer 2001). Therefore, the study also asks: Can a conceptual brand equity framework predict the determinants of team identification of satellite supporters?

The thesis adopts a case study approach using mixed methods; a strategy that can provide “a fuller understanding of the sports fan” (Jones 1997b). Online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were administered to members of fan organisations dedicated to the English Premier League’s Liverpool F.C. Liverpool F.C. was an appropriate subject for the case study as it has a global fan base, a rich history, and is arguably one of the world’s premier team brands.

This thesis proposes a number of important antecedents in the satellite supporter’s identification with a foreign-based team. These are: media coverage; style of play; the presence of particular player(s); team success; history of success; participation in the

highest division; stadium; history of ethical behaviour; and the broadcast quality of games. Furthermore, a conceptual brand equity framework is shown to shed light on the possible determinants of their team identification. This study also confirms that social identity theory is an appropriate perspective to examine foreign fandom; satellite supporters might derive positive psychological benefits from their fandom; and the existence of a brand community dedicated to a professional sports organisation.

PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS ARISING FROM THE DOCTORAL RESEARCH

Kerr, A.K. 2007, "'You'll Never Walk Alone" - Team ID and the Satellite Supporter (Liverpool F.C.)', paper presented to the *13th Annual Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand Conference*, Auckland, New Zealand.

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Kerr, A.K. 2008, 'Team Identification and Satellite Supporters: The Potential Value of Brand Equity Frameworks', paper presented to the *6th Annual Sport Marketing Association Conference*, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia.

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Kerr, A.K. & Smith, N.F. 2008, 'As American as Mom, Apple Pie and Dutch Soccer? The Team Identification of Foreign Ajax F.C. Supporters', paper presented to the *Targeting the International Audience: Challenges Facing Sports Management Conference*, Heilbronn, Germany.

Kerr, A.K. 2009, 'Online Questionnaires and Interviews as a Successful Tool to Explore Foreign Sports Fandom', in N.K.Ll. Pope, K.L. Kuhn & J. Forster (eds), *Digital Sport for*

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Kerr, A.K. in Press, 'Australian Football Goes for Goal: The Team Identification of American A.F.L. Sports Fans', *Football Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, forthcoming.