

The socialisation of football fans – a grounded theory study.

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## Abstract

Sport fans have been studied extensively. However, the field of sports fan socialisation, specifically socialisation into a team, is under researched. This study therefore addresses the question 'how do people become football fans?', focusing on the socialisation of three groups of fans: expansion club, female and long-distance.

This thesis adopts constructivist grounded theory, gathering rich empirical data through interviews (n=33) and netnographic data. The study focuses on eight football clubs; Liverpool FC, Everton FC, Manchester City FC, Manchester United FC, New York City FC, New York Red Bulls, LA Galaxy, and Los Angeles FC. In keeping with grounded theory principles (Glaser, 1967; Charmaz 2014), data were analysed upon collection.

This thesis makes three key contributions. The first is identifying the socialisation agents that impact expansion club, female, and long-distance fans, surfacing a broader range of agents than previously identified. The second explores the role played by each agent, going beyond detecting their relevance. Both contributions answer calls from previous work. Finally, in synthesising the socialisation agents identified, this thesis develops the *Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework*, which categorises the agents according to the extent to which they are **Person-Person** or **Club-Person** in focus. This allows socialisation agents to be operationalised by clubs in a bid to increase the fan base.

## **Abbreviations**

AEG: Anschutz Entertainment Group

AYSO: American Youth Soccer Organisation

CFG: City Football Group

DP: Designated Player

EFC: Everton Football Club

EFL: English Football League

EPL: English Premier League

GT: Grounded Theory

GTM: Grounded Theory Methodology

LA: Los Angeles

LAFc: Los Angeles Football Club

LAG: Los Angeles Galaxy

LFC: Liverpool Football Club

MCFC: Manchester City Football Club

MLB: Major League Baseball

MLS: Major League Soccer

MUFC: Manchester United Football Club

NBA: National Basketball Association

NFL: National Football League

NYCFC: New York City Football Club

NYRB: New York Red Bull

UEFA: Union of European Football Associations

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This thesis assesses the socialisation of football fans using a grounded theory approach. The introduction chapter has an important role in understanding the context, rationale and methodological approach of the present thesis. Firstly, the context behind the study and an overview of the literature surrounding fans is provided to set the scene. Following this, the rationale for undertaking this study is laid out, situating this research within the extant literature. The introduction then puts forward the crucial aim and objectives of this thesis. This is followed by the methodological approach, constructivist grounded theory (CGT; Charmaz, 2014), highlighting the data collection methods and analysis adopted. The structure of this thesis is then summarised.

### *1.1. Context of this thesis*

Fandom can occur across various settings such as music, film, TV, and sports clubs (e.g., Kozinets, 1998; Hills, 2018; Yoon, 2019). This means there are wide-ranging experiences and behaviours that contribute to fandom, leading it to be a complex subject area. Some authors therefore believe that to make comparisons between the various areas (e.g., music, film, sport) to be conceptually difficult. For instance, there is an uncertain outcome to sport that does not exist elsewhere, thus “to many sport seems ‘real’ in comparison to entertainment television, Bollywood film productions, or songs on an iPod playlist” (Schimmel et al., 2007: 581). However similarities between the various forms of consumption have been identified.

One of the key similarities between sports fans and fans more widely is dress up. This is through cosplay in relation to TV shows and films, whilst sports fans often wear team merchandise. A further parallel is found through the co-creation of materials related to their fandom, whether that be fanfiction or creating and contributing to club material, such as programmes or zines related to their sports clubs. Furthermore, fans of sport clubs and fans more generally tend to congregate either in person at events or matches and / or on the internet.

Focusing on sports fans specifically and authors have struggled to settle on a term when discussing fans or characteristics of them with the terms 'fan', 'supporter' and 'spectator' often used interchangeably. This is further exemplified by Wann and James (2019) who suggest that if you were to ask an individual interested in sport to define a typical 'fan' or 'spectator', their answers would differ greatly. Consequently, more recent research has allowed fans to self-define (e.g., Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000; Pope, 2017; Tamir, 2020; Fenton et al., 2021), an approach this thesis adopts.

In addition to the comparisons between sport fans and fans more generally, there is extensive theory specific to sports fans. For instance, there is *team identification*, a voluntary, psychological membership to a group (Dimmock et al., 2005), *motivations*, the needs, values, and goals that lead to sport consumption (Trail and James, 2015), *sport fan segmentation* or *psychological connection to sports objects* (de Groot and Robinson, 2008; Wann and James, 2019), through the *Psychological Continuum Model (PCM)* (Funk and James, 2001). Despite this, little work has specifically



addressed how an individual becomes aware of sports clubs, and therefore a sports fan, a conclusion identified by researchers of fandom more generally (Duffet, 2013).

With extensive work assessing sport club fandom generally, there is limited academic scrutiny in how female, long-distance and expansion club fans become sports fans. However, each category of fan has increased in importance (Lock et al., 2011; Mewett and Toffloetti, 2011; Davies et al., 2021), therefore they represent fruitful avenues of research. For instance, the increase in the number of long-distance fans “provides an example for us to rethink the role of ‘place’ in the creation of fandom” (Pu and James, 2017: 435). There are noticeable exceptions where researchers have considered how individuals become *expansion club fans* (see Lock et al., 2009; 2011; 2012), *female fans* (see Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011; Allison and Pope, 2021) or *long-distance fans* (see Pu and James, 2017; Theodorakis et al., 2017; Bodet et al., 2020). What many of these researchers have suggested is for deeper, qualitative research into these categories of fans, a gap this thesis seeks to address.

Expansion club fans are worthy of investigation as they pose questions as to why they were not a fan of an existing club previously, with some maybe new to the sport. A league which has seen a significant increase in the number of expansion clubs is Major League Soccer (MLS) in the USA. The league has introduced ten new clubs since 2013, with one additional club to join in 2023. In some cases, these clubs have been formed in cities previously lacking a professional club (e.g., Atlanta United and Nashville SC). Whilst in others, due to the scale of the expansion, their creation has

resulted in two competing clubs within the same city (e.g., New York City FC [NYCFC] and their rivals New York Red Bulls and Los Angeles FC [LAFC] and their rivals LA Galaxy). MLS is therefore an interesting focus of inquiry. This thesis chose to focus on two cities who hold two clubs within them, Los Angeles (LA) with LAFC and LA Galaxy and New York (NY) with NYCFC and New York Red Bulls, to understand the uniqueness of how fans become aware of clubs in two club cities / areas.

Football has largely been a masculine space (Caudwell, 2011; Cleland, 2015). However, female football fans are now viewed as legitimate audience members (Dixon, 2015; Toffoletti, 2017), yet, in academic work, were previously underrepresented (Crawford, 2004; Pope, 2013). Many of the women who attend games, experience sexist abuse when watching or consuming football (Fenton et al., 2021; Lillicrap, 2021) and are deemed the 'other sex' in football fandom (Cleland et al., 2020). Additionally, female fans are viewed as gendered, sexualised, and hyper feminised subjects in media and marketing (Esmonde et al., 2015; Toffoletti, 2017). It is therefore pertinent to explore whether these factors impact how females become fans.

Long-distance fan's ability to access sport clubs has increased due to globalisation and media enhancements (Pu and James, 2017). There are various forms of long-distance fans, however in the context of this study they are classed as non-local, non-displaced fans, with no previous geographical connection to the metropolitan areas of the club's city or town (Reifurth et al., 2019). A notable aspect of long-distance fans is

how do individuals in countries like China, America, and India, for example, choose a foreign club when they have clubs within their own country? Therefore, identifying factors that assist in long-distance fans becoming aware of clubs is important to assess.

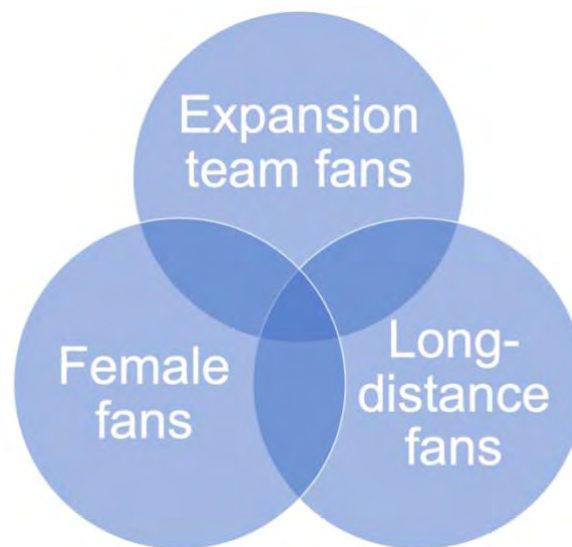
The unique contexts surrounding each of these three categories of fans and how they become fans is interesting to understand, with potential for this to differ between each of the categories of fans.

### *1.2. Rationale of the study*

In addressing how an individual becomes aware of a sports club, socialisation and socialisation, agents are key. Socialisation is the “induction of an individual into the objective world of a society or a sector of it” (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 271). In this case, socialisation was studied from a specific point in time, as the process is something that is ongoing, therefore this thesis focuses upon when an individual became a fan of a football club. How socialisation occurs is through socialisation agents. Funk and James (2001) state that socialisation agents are how a fan learns about the attitudes, values, and actions of a sports club (Funk and James, 2001). These agents and the role they play emerged through the data collection of this thesis. Originally, spouses, parents, siblings, friends, school, community, geographic proximity, media, and promotions were identified as socialisation agents that brought awareness to sports consumers of the sports object (Funk and James, 2001).

However, work on socialisation agents has largely adopted a quantitative approach (e.g., Melnick and Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014; Theodorakis et al., 2017), meaning there is a lack of deep exploration of socialisation agents and the significance fans attach to them. As has been suggested previously, there is a lack of overt focus on socialisation in the context of female, long-distance and expansion club fans, with limited exceptions (such as Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011 for female fans and Theodorakis et al. (2017) for long-distance fans). These three categories of fans were highlighted for this study due to various factors, however they all shared a limited amount of research in the socialisation field. The first was expansion club fans, who were used due to the clubs used and the researcher's interest in them. For instance, when an expansion club holds their first game, where do the first 20,000+ fans come from? Who did they support beforehand? If they did not support any club, why did they not support a club? These questions were a key part in the research wanting to understand expansion club fans. Finally, due to the number of long-distance and female fans that emerged in the data these categories were deemed to be important. Additionally, it is not just the number of long distance and female fans that makes them important but also that clear patterns emerged about the nature of socialisation agents specific to those categories. Figure 1 highlights this thesis in a Venn diagram and suggests how there may be overlaps between categories in identified socialisation agents, alongside unique agents that may emerge. What will then be discussed is more specific characteristics in relation to the three fan categories.

**Figure 1: A Venn diagram displaying the fan categories of this thesis and how overlaps may occur between fan categories**



Expansion club fans have a strong attachment to the team's area (Lock et al., 2011; Heere and Katz, 2014). In developing a connection to the club, fans use brand devices such as players, club name, brand identity, and novelty (James et al., 2002; Lock et al., 2009; Shapiro et al., 2013; Kunkel et al., 2014; McDonald et al., 2016). Despite this, there has been a lack of focus on socialisation. Greenwood et al. (2006) identified parents or family members, players, coaches, geographical connection to the club and matchday activities which resemble socialisation agents, however, do not state as such. This lack of overt emphasis on socialisation, with the growing number of new clubs, provides justification to identify how fans become socialised into expansion clubs.

Similarly, socialisation research into female fans is limited (excluding Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011) to the cross-cultural work which included women within their sample (e.g., Melnick and Wann, 2004; 2011; Parry et al., 2014). Mewett and Toffoletti (2011) identified family, partners and geography as socialisation agents, which was dominated by males socialising females. However, there is inadequate knowledge of how females socialise other females and if club agents play a role in their socialisation. Theodorakis et al. (2017) identified club focused agents, such as players and the club, as being prominent for female fans, with their work focused on club socialisation rather than sport. This shows the existence of agents beyond personal relationships, therefore identifying a broader range of socialisation agents, specific to female fans, is explored by this thesis.

For fans outside of the club's geographic proximity, there is limited research identified for long-distance fans (Kerr and Emery, 2011; Theodorakis et al., 2017). This represents a rationale for this study, with this thesis exploring specific agents in relation to long-distance fans. Players have been identified as socialising long-distance fans (Theodorakis et al., 2017; Sullivan et al., 2021), however not in a socialisation specific study. Outside of socialisation, nationality of players was identified as factors in fandom (Hong et al., 2005; Bodet and Chanavat, 2010; Yu, 2010; Kerr and Emery, 2011; Pu, 2016). Identifying nationality in regards to socialisation, alongside roles played by other agents, would allow clubs to understand how to operationalise this agent and any others, as fans are out of physical reach of the club.

For ease and clarity, Table 1 highlights the various concepts discussed above in relation to each category of fans.

**Table 2: Existing concepts identified for each fan group**

Prominent factors in fandom	Category of fan		
	Female	Expansion Club	Long-distance
Attachment to the city		Greenwood et al. (2006), Lock et al. (2011), Heere and Katz (2014), Davies et al. (2021)	
Players	Melnick and Wann (2011), Mewett and Toffoletti (2012), Esmonde et al. (2015; 2018)	Greenwood et al. (2006), Lock et al. (2009), Shapiro et al. (2013), Kunkel et al. (2014)	Theodorakis et al. (2017), Sullivan et al. (2021), Pu and James (2017), Hong et al. (2005), Bodet and Chanavat (2010), Yu (2010), Kerr and Emery (2011), Pu (2016)
Team name		James et al. (2002), McDonald et al. (2016)	
Family	Mewett and Toffoletti (2011)	Greenwood et al. (2006)	Theodorakis et al. (2017), Delia and Katz (2019)
Brand identity		James et al. (2002), McDonald et al. (2016)	
Novelty		James et al. (2002), McDonald et al. (2016)	
Coaches		Greenwood et al. (2006)	
Matchday activities		Greenwood et al. (2006)	
Club	Theodorakis et al. (2017)		
Cultural immersion			Delia and Katz (2019)



In highlighting the rationale of this thesis, a range of socialisation agents have been identified, however, there is restricted knowledge in exploring how they play a role. Therefore, researchers have advocated for qualitative socialisation research in a bid to unearth new agents and identify their role and meaning (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Theodorakis et al., 2017), a clear rationale for conducting this research. Such an approach also allows for the identification of unique agents at play on expansion club, female and long-distance fans. In doing so, there are two gaps in the literature; identify the agents relevant to the three fan categories and explore each agent's role.

Further justification for this study is the lack of operationalisation of club-initiated agents, with previous studies focusing on fan-initiated socialisation (e.g., family, school or peers) (Mastromartino et al., 2020a; 2020b). This is due to the previous quantitative approach of socialisation research, which limited the number of agents uncovered. Furthermore, research to date has focused on sport fan socialisation, rather than club (except for Theodorakis et al., 2017). The qualitative and GT approach of this study facilitates the development of a framework, as fans can express agents freely with additional detail provided too. The framework aims to operationalise the socialisation agents identified, an evident gap in the literature (Mastromartino et al., 2020a; 2020b). This contribution to practice would allow sports clubs and organisations to understand their fans socialisation, with a clear approach to identifying sport fan socialisation, thus facilitating their efforts to grow their fan bases. This is particularly prominent in the case of expansion club, female and long-distance fans, due to the contextual factors identified in this chapter.

### 1.3. Research aim and objectives

The aim of this study is to consider the socialisation of football fans into becoming a fan of their team. From this, the following three objectives emerged as the study developed:

1. To **explore** the socialisation agents that impact:
  - a) Expansion club fans
  - b) Female fans
  - c) Long-distance fans
2. To **identify** the role that the identified socialisation agents play in the socialisation of:
  - a) Expansion club fans
  - b) Female fans
  - c) Long-distance fans
3. To create a framework which **operationalises** the socialisation agents identified and the roles they play.

These research objectives, alongside socialisation agents as a core category, emerged from the data collection and subsequent analysis, identifying the need to explore socialisation in relation to the three fan categories. These objectives emerged as data was collected and eventual reference to the literature. In addressing these objectives, this thesis advances three contributions. **The first contribution** identifies

the unique socialisation agents that impact expansion club, female, and long-distance fans, responding to a gap in the literature into becoming a fan of their team. In doing so, the study extends extant work (e.g., *expansion club fans*: Lock et al., 2009; 2011, *female fans*: Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011, *long-distance fans*: Theodorakis et al., 2017; Delia and Katz, 2019), while also surfacing a broader range of socialisation agents than previously identified through qualitative research.

**The second contribution** responds to calls in the literature to study socialisation into becoming a football fan qualitatively to understand the meanings behind agents (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Theodorakis et al., 2017; Mastromartino et al. 2020a). By this study employing a CGT approach (Charmaz, 2014) and exploratory methods, interviews and a netnography, a more in-depth exploration of the role socialisation agents play was permitted. This study therefore goes beyond identifying agents' significance, completed by previous quantitative work (e.g., Melnick and Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014; Theodorakis et al., 2017), and instead identifies their role, alongside the identification of unique agents also.

As has been previously identified, a rationale for this study is the limited nature and need to identify how sports clubs can operationalise socialisation agents (Mastromartino et al., 2020a). Therefore, to achieve this, this thesis develops a framework, named the *Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework*; **the third contribution**. The model categorises agents according to the extent to which they are **Person-Person** or **Club-Person** in focus. **Person-Person** agents are interpersonal,

which are initiated by an individual onto a fan. In contrast, **Club-Person** agents involve the club, but are split on whether they are **directly** or **indirectly** initiated by a club. This offers sports practitioners a means of informing future marketing decision-making surrounding socialisation. The contributions made by these research objectives are discussed in Chapter 6.

#### *1.4. The research approach*

A qualitative, exploratory research approach is required to understand the processes by which an individual becomes a football fan and to answer the objectives of this thesis. Additionally, the under-researched fan categories (expansion club, female, and long-distance fans) necessitate open dialog with participants. Therefore, Charmaz's (2014) CGT approach was adopted and is discussed in Chapter 4. Using CGT enabled the researcher to study the nebulous subject of fandom and the three fan categories. Furthermore, the approach allowed for a better understanding of the processes involved in fan socialisation, such as the relevant social, historical, and temporal factors (Charmaz, 2017). With open dialog with participants, CGT allows for the researcher's position, privileges, perspectives, and interactions, in this case as a football fan also, to become part of the GT, constructing the emergent theory alongside the fan.

In addressing how individuals become football fans, and answering the research aim and objectives, fans of eight male football clubs were studied: Manchester City FC, Manchester United FC, Liverpool FC, Everton FC, NYCFC, New York Red Bulls, LAFC

and LA Galaxy. All these clubs are in two club cities: Manchester, Liverpool, NY and LA. This may be contested by fans of NYCFC and Manchester City FC (MCFC), as New York Red Bulls (NYRB) play in New Jersey state and Manchester United FC (MUFC) in the borough of Trafford, yet these clubs use the name of the main city. Similarities can be found between these eight clubs, for instance MCFC and NYCFC are both owned by the City Football Group (CFG). Another comes from success, with Liverpool FC (LFC) and MUFC historically winning significantly more trophies than their city rivals, until recently in the case of MCFC. Finally, NYCFC and LAFC are expansion clubs with a playing history of six and eight years respectively.

The eight clubs were chosen firstly due to the above-mentioned similarities between the clubs within these two club cities, specifically between Manchester and Liverpool clubs and LA and NY clubs. US expansion clubs were chosen due to the researcher's interest in them and their league, MLS. Additionally, the four English clubs play in the English Premier League, making them a viable choice due to the spread of fans around the world. Finally, male clubs were used in this case due to the size of men's football and the growth of MLS in the last 10 years. Therefore, female clubs were outside the scope of this study. Lower league clubs were not considered due to the size and reach of their fanbase.

As has been stated, interviews and a netnography was conducted with fans from these eight clubs. This process began and ended prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Fans were primarily sampled through social media and all interviews were conducted

virtually due to the geographic location of participants. Interviews allowed the researcher to fully explore a broad range of topics related to sports fandom. This was more prominent as prior work on fandom has argued for rich data to be applied in the field rather than just simply rating topics presented by the researcher (Stewart et al., 2003; Melnick and Wann, 2011; Theodorakis et al., 2017; Delia and James, 2018). A netnography, or an ethnography of the internet, adapts ethnographic techniques and applies them to online spaces (Kozinets, 1998; 2002; 2015; Costello et al., 2017). It has been referred to as an online ethnography, cyber-ethnography or virtual ethnography (Grincheva, 2014). The netnographic approach started with the discovery of existing Reddit posts where fans highlighted their fandom journeys, which the researcher used as archival data. Once this process was completed and the core category was identified, elicited netnographic data was gathered, asking fans **“how did you become a fan of [insert club here?]”**. Fans were then probed further depending on their response. A netnographic approach was beneficial in this study as it is not time consuming, more naturally occurring, lower in cost (Kozinets, 1998; 2002; Costello et al., 2017; 2019) and can be done in the participants own time. Finally, due to the geographic spread of this research, it allowed for a greater number of respondents from various countries.

The resulting data was then analysed immediately after the first interview, with initial coding and data collection being simultaneous. Once saturation was reached, analysis moved to focused coding, however the researcher can, and did, return to data collection at a later point. The resulting analysis led to the emergence of three groups

of socialisation agents; **Person-Person** and **Club-Person: Direct** and **Club-Person: Indirect**, this then formed the *Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework*. Without the qualitative approach conducted, this could not have been achieved, answering calls from existing literature (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Theodorakis et al., 2017).

### 1.5. Structure of thesis

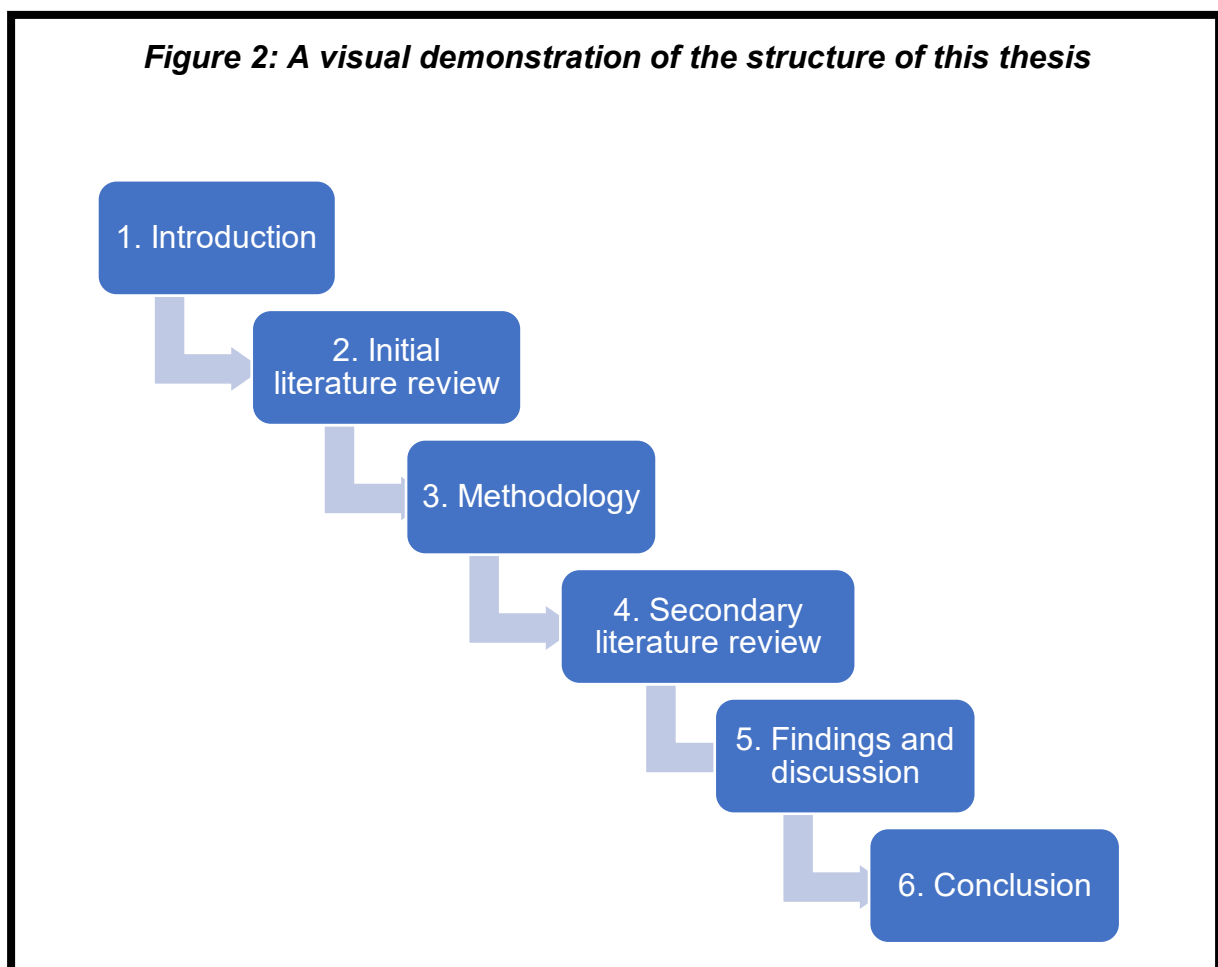


Figure 2 visually demonstrates this thesis' overall structure. Consistent with CGT (Charmaz, 2014), this thesis contains two literature reviews and the first follows this

chapter (Chapter 2). This review provides an overview of the extant literature around fandom, both sport and more widely, allowing the researcher to build a broad understanding of the field. Following Chapter 2 is the methodology chapter (Chapter 3), which provides an overview of GT and how the data collection methods, netnography and interviews, were applied in the study. The second literature review (Chapter 4) is more specific to the core category; socialisation, and socialisation agents and the three fan categories.

Following the secondary literature review, Chapter 5 presents the findings and discussion. This chapter is where the research objectives are answered by identifying the agents found and the role they play in socialising the three groups of fans: expansion club, female and long-distance fans. In this chapter, the developed model, the *Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework*, is presented. Chapter 6 concludes this thesis, highlighting the specific contributions made, the implications of this research and reflections of this thesis.



## **Chapter 2: Initial literature review**

Completing a literature review in a GT study is a contentious topic. It is believed that conducting one can cause interpretation of the data collected to be influenced by a prior reading of the literature, known as forcing theory onto data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) strongly suggest that a GT should not be completed with extensive knowledge of the specific literature prior to data analysis being conducted. Instead, it should be read in general terms. However, once the study is well underway then researchers are encouraged to read the literature, but as a further data source. Strauss and Corbin (1990) state that we all bring background literature to the research and CGT suggests it is impossible to have no familiarity with the literature (Charmaz, 2014).

The current chapter, therefore, concentrates on the broad literature on fandom and to avoid forcing the extant literature on the emerging theory, the researcher waited until the analysis was complete before conducting an extensive literature review in Chapter 4 (in line with Charmaz, 2014). The topics covered in the two literature reviews differ greatly. The first surrounds topical frameworks pertinent to fandom, both of sport and more generally, motivations, psychological connections, identification, and customer segmentation. These topics were identified by a search of significant areas of sport fandom research and assist in setting the scene more widely. The secondary literature review (Chapter 4) is targeted around the core category, socialisation, which emerged through the collection of data.

## *2.1. Fandom*

There are many objects of which someone can become a fan, with fandom a heavily researched area. A search of the extant literature discovers research into fandom areas including, but not limited to, music (Obiegbu et al., 2019; Yoon, 2019), TV (Mead, 2010; Hadas, 2013; Hills, 2015; Johnston, 2015; 2018; Vieira and França, 2018), film (Kozinets, 1998), and the focus of this research, sport clubs. However, making direct comparisons between sport and TV, film, or music, has been found to be conceptually difficult “because, to many sport seems ‘real’ in comparison to entertainment television, Bollywood film productions, or songs on an iPod playlist” (Schimmel et al., 2007: 581). However, this could be contested, as there are unpredictable elements to TV shows or film for instance, although these have been preset by writers.

Additionally, sports fans have a major bearing on how the game is played, presented, and sold (Davis, 2015), whether that is through the atmosphere they create in stadia or the money that they spend. Parallels could be made with fans of musical artists or TV shows, where the atmosphere their fans create could be a major draw for others to attend concerts or comic con. Therefore, there are similarities between sports fans and fans of other objects through their behaviours and the processes they go through in becoming a fan, which this chapter will assess.

Duffett (2013) states that fans are just people, who have a special and affectionate relationship with a brand. All that differs to non-fans in which they display elevated levels of engagement towards that which they are a fan of (Obiegbu et al., 2019). Academics often attempt to treat fans differently to the general public, when in reality they simply have an extra passion, sometimes viewed as irrational to others (Duffett, 2013). For example, they have connotations of being fanatical. However, Chung et al. (2018) believe that this complicates fandom, and it should simply be seen as being passionate and enthusiastic towards a brand. However, there are negative behaviours that have been attached to fans of sport including aggression (Wann et al., 1999; Wann et al., 2001a) and their characterisation as “beer-drinking couch-potatoes possessing a pathological obsession with a trivial and socially disruptive activity” (Wann and James, 2019: 1). There is also a disparity with how fans identify with their fandom. Jones and Lawrence (2000) discovered how Star Trek fans identify more strongly with the show than football fans identify with their club but demonstrate lower levels of social identity than football fans. This highlights that sports fans outwardly state their support more openly than Star Trek fans, showing how sport fandom is potentially viewed as more socially acceptable. What follows are some of the key behaviours of what delineates a fan from a non-fan.

Where sports fans experience their fandom comes broadly, and traditionally, from within the stadium, but due to the global nature of sport, it often occurs at home, on television or at bars (Porat, 2014). Football fan’s lives often revolve around the sport, with the outcome of a game having heightened significance (Tamir, 2019a). Part of a

sports fan's identity means they may meet with others to watch a game (Dixon, 2014a; Yoshida et al., 2015), resulting in shared experiences, whether with strangers, friends, or family members. For fans of TV shows, musicians, and films, there is little difference. Fans can demonstrate their identity at conventions, concerts and through cosplay. A study of U2's fans found that brand loyalty is not just about behaviours and attitudes but also that experiences at concerts, feelings and expenditures are vital in developing loyalty (Obiegbo et al., 2019). Similarly, sports stadiums create a platform for bonds to be formed between sports fans. It allows fans to perform and ultimately become accepted or rejected by other fans based upon their performance, whether that be through the songs they sing or how they display their fandom (Guschwan, 2016). Furthermore, conventions are compared to family reunions and a chance to meet people who fans have previously only interacted with online (Booth and Kelly, 2013).

Further behaviours identified within fandom is dress up, cosplay or merchandise. Cosplay is a play on the words, costume, and play (Shin, 2018; Nichols, 2019) and can bring people closer to the larger fandom community (Booth and Kelly, 2013). Dressing up, makeup and purchasing merchandise are seen as rich forms of fan production, where individuals attempt to replicate what they have seen on their TV and film screens (Scott, 2015). The work that goes into cosplay is viewed as a demonstration of passion and dedication but can also create a hierarchy of authenticity and develop, establishing legitimacy between fans (Affuso and Santo, 2018; Nichols, 2019), akin to the role of merchandise for sports fans (Guschwan, 2016). For instance,

the act of purchasing and consuming is seen as a key predictor of a highly passionate sports fan (Sutton et al., 1997; Dietz-Uhler and Murrell, 1999; Kwon and Armstrong, 2002; Aparna and Santhosh, 2016). This suggests merchandise, cosplay and/or dress-up as markers of passionate and potentially authentic fans, differing to those who passively engage, but who may not partake in such behaviours.

Further, co-creation and textual production are two key differences between a viewer and fan (Oh, 2017). Fanfiction is another way through which fandom is performed, with fans becoming creators and co-creators of material related to their fandom (Millward, 2008; Booth, 2017; Reimann et al., 2017). Many of these interactions have now moved online (Obiegbu et al., 2019), including authors of fanfiction related to TV and film, who go to extreme lengths to set up and maintain fanfiction sites (Reimann et al., 2017). For example, online interaction with fans occurred during Peter Jackson's development of Lord of the Rings, and this was largely seen as key to the films' success (Booth, 2017).

Naturally, there are those who cannot engage face-face due to the long-distance nature of their fandom (Hognestad, 2006; Yoon, 2019) or because the brand does not belong to a physical location (Smith, 2017). The increase of media platforms has led to a growth in the number of passive, sports supporters (Redhead, 1993), as "consumers spend most of their time engaging in sport chatter trawling the internet, while others display their fandom by watching pay television sport channels" (Samra and Wos, 2014: 263). This demonstrates a need to better understand the various

online and offline behaviours (Gibbons and Dixon, 2010). Owing to this, researchers have moved to use online research methods, including netnographies, to study fan communities. However, one of the challenges with using such methods is the likelihood of being limited to a greater number of highly identified fans (Kozinets, 2015). Online engagement in fandom can be seen as a positive and more authentic form of fandom (Kozinets, 2002; Oh, 2017; Smith, 2017), yet for sports fans, it is viewed as an inauthentic practice (Giulianotti, 2002), despite calls to take these activities more seriously (Gibbons and Dixon, 2010).

What has been identified so far are many of the extensive differences and similarities between the behaviours of sports fans and non-sports fans. What follows is a discussion of the difference in the process of them becoming a fan, with one way being through media platforms. Yoon (2019) identified examples of how fans of Anime and Manga were directed to K-Pop through YouTube algorithms, demonstrating how media practices can create awareness to fans. Additionally, social media allows fans to engage and form direct connections with the person or object of their fandom (Stever and Lawson, 2013; Teng et al., 2020). Digital media is often used by sport fans to gain greater knowledge about their favourite club and engage with message boards, users, club websites and online forums (Pegoraro, 2013). In this regard, sports fans have been found to be motivated to use social media for expressing passion, hope, esteem, and camaraderie (Stavros et al., 2014).

Our social networks will have been infiltrated by people who do follow a sport (Dixon, 2016), meaning that people are more likely to become impacted by individuals who could turn them into a fan. The same applies to the context of non-sports fandom. For example, people can be lured, charmed, or seduced into fandom, with something or someone setting fandom in motion, however slowly this may occur (Mead, 2010; Duffett, 2013). Similarly, in sports fandom it has been suggested that there are individual and social processes that occur within fandom (Wann and James, 2019). This is significant as it implies that someone may become aware of a TV show, sports club, or film, but not immediately become a fan, suggesting it may be a negotiation, either conscious or unconscious, between the fan and the object under fandom, however, as will be explored, this may not occur for everyone. An additional aspect is contagion (Duffett, 2013), where individuals catch fandom through their surroundings, such as music being hummed or sung on public transport or even waiting room music (Adorno and Bernstein, 1991). This further demonstrates how our social networks are infiltrated. However, this suggests that nobody is immune to the fandom process of any phenomena, something arguably impossible due to our individual tastes (Bourdieu, 1984). This therefore explains why we are all not fans of the same TV show, band, sport, club, or film series.

Additional factors in becoming a fan of non-sport related phenomena include rediscovering previous 'fannish' pleasures, searching for something to display passion for, camaraderie, compatibility, and cultural capital (Duffett, 2013). For sports fans, factors include strong social bonds, pastimes, benefits to society, and joyousness

(Wann and James, 2019). The examples of how and why people become fans share similarities with motivations for engaging on social media (Stavros et al., 2014). Additionally, sport fandom plays a role in the creation and development of social solidarity (Porat, 2014) and is a powerful force for community identification and cohesion (Bale, 1994), enhancing arguments around camaraderie.

It has been suggested that sports fandom is a lifelong project that begins at an early age and ends at the end of life (Ben-Porat, 2009). This fits the notion of family passing fandom through generations, a feature of sports fandom (Wann, 1995; Funk and James, 2001). Compatibility centres around the idea that a person can become a fan of an object to get closer and intimate with someone, and for deepening of bonds (Duffett, 2013). An example of this within sport fandom is sexually transmitted fandom (STF), derived by Mewett and Toffoletti (2011), where fandom is passed from one partner, typically male, to another, typically female.

To summarise, this section covering both sport fandom and fandom more broadly, identifies many similarities and differences between the behaviours and processes of fans. One of the differences found from a review of the literature, was the low level of social identity displayed by fans of popular objects, such as Star Trek, compared to fans of sports clubs (Jones and Lawrence, 2000). However, all forms of fandom share the practice of congregation, either at stadiums, pubs or at home, when considering sport fans (Dixon, 2014a; Porat, 2014; Yoshida et al., 2015; Guschwan, 2016) or at conventions for fandoms of tv shows or films (Booth and Kelly, 2013), however the



frequency congregation is higher for sports fans. Additionally, both sets of fans purchase merchandise (Sutton et al., 1997; Dietz-Uhler and Murrell, 1999; Kwon and Armstrong, 2002; Aparna and Santhosh, 2016), or similarly, fans of TV shows or films engage in cosplay (Scott, 2015; Shin, 2018; Nichols, 2019). Equally, both gather in online areas (Gibbons and Dixon, 2010; Pegoraro, 2013; Stavros et al., 2014; Smith, 2017; Yoon, 2019; Teng et al., 2020) and co-create material related to the object being fanaticised over (Millward, 2008; Oh, 2017; Reimann et al., 2017).

Furthermore, there are processes, both individual and social, at play in how individuals become fans, such as contagion, luring, compatibility, or camaraderie (Mead, 2010; Duffett, 2013; Dixon, 2016; Wann and James, 2019). How someone becomes a fan, and the various processes involved, becomes the direction of this thesis, and the associated literature is covered in Chapter 4. However, despite clear similarities between aspects of the literature, Schimmel et al. (2007) concluded that they are too different to understand in the same way, as to many, sport fandom is viewed as being 'real' and unpredictable. Therefore, the next sections will address the various theoretical frameworks related specifically to sports fans, highlighting the key areas of levels of identification, then how and why people become sports fans. Firstly, it is key to define sports fans, a not an inconsiderable challenge given the complexity of fandom.

## *2.2. Defining sport fans*

Hills (2002) posits that everyone knows what a fan is: they are obsessed or have an intense interest in a band, show or brand. Yet, in the sporting context, Wann and James (2019) suggest that if one was to ask a sports fan or spectator, to define a typical 'fan' or 'spectator', their answers would differ greatly. Thus, it is challenging to define sports fans due to their diverse behaviours, values, and attitudes (Holt, 1995). Therefore, a one size fits all approach was applied to football 'fans' that focused upon the fanatical nature of spectators and the importance football has in their lives (Dixon, 2016). This is demonstrated by the varied markers of fans and non-fans of both sport and of broader popular cultures. Yet, people can be fans of shows, bands, films, and sports clubs, but not obsess about their existence. Such individuals are often named in a sporting context as spectators. However, football fandom is too complex to assume such a one size fits all belief, with factors including age, gender, family / economic status, education, occupation (Porat, 2010) and sexuality (Lee and Cunningham, 2016) all impacting fan experiences, consumption, and processes. Nevertheless, researchers have attempted to define fans in various ways (e.g., Cleland, 2010; Wann and James, 2019).

Early literature suggested various, uncomplicated, two-sided approaches to fandom, one side being traditional, emotionally attached, and tribal fans, compared with consumptive, entertainment focused. Fans were either direct or indirect (McPherson, 1976), highly or lowly identified (Wann and Branscombe, 1993), or active or passive

(Cleland, 2010). Additionally, authors have proposed delineating genuine fans and others (Clarke, 1978), core and corporate fans (Nash, 2000), traditional and modern fans (Boyle and Haynes, 2000), and irrational and rational fans (Ferrand and Pages, 1996; Quick, 2000). The idea was that the passive, less engaged group of fans would not, for example, participate in debates with other clubs' fans and their own about the direction of the club, while more engaged fans would regularly engage with supporter organisations (Cleland, 2010). These fan 'types' create arguments around elements of authenticity and traditionality of sports fans, contrasted with more consumer type relationships, a feature further explored in section 2.3.3.

There is a lack of continuity in how the term 'fan' is viewed, with spectators for instance being people who merely observe a sports event (Wann, 1995). Historically, the difference between fans and spectators was that spectators simply watched games, and fans were enthusiastic and devoted to the club outside of a game (Sloan, 1989). Some researchers have added consumer connotations to the term fan. Crawford (2004: 4) finds that "being a fan is primarily a consumer act" supported by Samra and Wos (2014). Similarly, Giulianotti (2002) defines a 'fan' as a warm consumer who attaches themselves to specific clubs or players and moves clubs, as players do. Smith (1988) noted the terms sport spectator, sport fan and sport follower. Yet, all three have "strong emotional involvement in the actual outcome, basically who wins and who loses... spend considerable time, effort, and money to read about, listen to, and watch sporting events" (Smith, 1988: 55). Furthermore, fans have been known to put the club at the centre of their schedules, time, health, and family (Porat, 2010;

Dwyer et al., 2018). The term 'fan' can therefore, be seen as highly contested, leading to a lack of clarity within extant literature.

Consequently, several studies have refused to define fans, allowing fans to self define, to avoid authenticity issues and placing narrow definitions upon fans (e.g., Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000; Pope, 2017; Tamir, 2020; Fenton et al., 2021). This thesis follows the example of these studies, by simply accepting participants based upon whether they self-identify as a fan of one of the clubs in the study. The justification for this choice is covered in greater detail in Chapter 3, however it surrounds the contrasting conceptualisations of a fan, as highlighted above. Placing firm definitions on fans would prove difficult in sampling, especially where fans were asked to voluntarily participate in the research. Additionally, consistent with the researcher's constructivist philosophy (see Chapter 3 for a fuller discussion), self-definition allows fans to construct their own view of fandom, and in coming forward for this research, self-identify themselves as fans, rather than having to comply with strict defined criteria.

### *2.3. Theoretical Frameworks in Sports Fandom*

To situate this study into the context of sport fandom, and more specifically football fandom, several seminal theoretical frameworks have been considered. These are: team identification, sport fan motivations, fan segmentation, and the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM).

### **2.3.1. Team Identification**

Team identification is a voluntary, psychological membership to a group (Dimmock et al., 2005) and is the degree to which fans feel a psychological connection to a club (Wann et al., 2001a). Team identification originates in Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Wann and Branscombe, 1990; Fink et al., 2009), which is an influential framework for assessing sports fans (Wann and Branscombe, 1993; Fink et al., 2002). SIT revolves around the idea that a person's identity is reflected by their membership of various groups (Tajfel, 1974). Additionally, it highlights how membership of a group contributes to a person's overall self-concept, based upon the emotional importance they place upon being a group member (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). For sports fans, SIT contributes to how fans view the club as an extension of themselves (Cohen, 2017). SIT explores how individuals in groups share common characteristics, leading to normalised behaviours within them (Lock and Heere, 2017; Rhee et al., 2017). Individuals' social identities can also be linked to demographic classifications (e.g., sex or race) or organisational membership (e.g., religious, educational, and social institutions) (Porat, 2010; Lee and Cunningham, 2016; Cohen, 2017), showing the diversity within groups (Crawford, 2004).

Positive social identity depends on the positive evaluations between ingroups (i.e., other fans of your club) and outgroups (i.e., fans of other clubs) (Delia, 2015). Identification with a group becomes visible when individuals use the terms 'us' to refer to the group and 'them' to compare with other groups (Rhee et al., 2017), alongside

using the pronoun 'we' to further contribute to the notion of group belonging (Cialdini et al., 1976; Delia, 2015). Previous work has found that fans have a stronger connection to those they attend with, individuals within the club, rather than with the actual club (Katz and Heere, 2013), suggesting that the presence of others and group belonging is key (Wann et al., 2008), further highlighting the importance of camaraderie amongst fans as a motive for fandom.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) posits there are three key tenets of SIT. The first is that individuals join groups they view as being equal to, or better than, their own self-concept (Cialdini et al., 1976; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). This is in the belief that joining the group will positively impact their life. Second, group belonging is sustained if individuals assess the in-group as being positively diverse from rivals (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Lastly, because individuals associate themselves with others to reinforce, represent, and improve their own self-concept and image (Tajfel, 1974; Turner, 1975; Cohen, 2017; Wang et al., 2020), if they begin to reflect negatively upon their self-concepts, individuals may seek to leave or alter the group, in a bid to protect themselves (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Previous research has found membership of a group to influence thoughts, behaviours and day-to-day planning (Lock et al., 2012). For this to occur, individuals must cognitively establish that they belong to a social group, evaluate it based on the value to them and the intergroup status (Heere and James, 2007), or by categorising themselves as group members (Turner, 1981). However, Lock and Funk (2016) suggest there can be multiple identities, as fans may be a part of smaller sub-groups, meaning they are not homogeneous. These smaller

sub-groups may include supporter groups, causing groups to contain multiple identities (Lock and Funk, 2016).

Team identification is often measured through the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS), which measures a person's level of identification with their favourite club (Wann and Branscombe, 1993). The SSIS is a seven-item measure, where participants rate each item on an eight-point Likert scale, from 1 (low identification) to 8 (high identification) (Wann and Branscombe, 1993). The seven-items include importance of the club winning, strength of being a fan, levels of contact with the club and dislike of the club's rivals (Wann and Branscombe, 1993). Further contributing to the ingroup and outgroup concepts with SIT, highly identified individuals are expected to be more involved with, and committed to, a sports club than those who are lowly identified, sharing a strong social identity with other fans (Wann and Branscombe, 1993).

There are a range of behaviours that highly identified fans tend to engage in as compared with lowly identified fans. These were synthesised by Greenwood et al. (2006), and include attending more games (Wann and Branscombe, 1993; Pease and Zhang, 1996; Wann et al., 1999), spending more money and time on the club (Wann and Branscombe, 1993; Wann et al., 1999), being more optimistic about future success (Wann and Branscombe, 1993), favouring higher attendances (Madrigal, 1995; Wann and Schrader, 1997), being less likely to distance themselves in defeat (Wann and Dolan, 1994), and ego satisfaction (Wann and Branscombe, 1993). There

is a suggestion that geographic distance from the club is likely to cause lower levels of club identification. However, this has been contested (Collins et al., 2016; Reifurth et al., 2019), yet these studies were with displaced fans, a fan who no longer resides in the club's location, meaning that attachment to the club had already occurred. Unlike studied in this thesis. It is therefore assumed that geographic factors may supersede other factors, with media viewed as one way that positively affects team identification of displaced fans (Collins et al., 2016).

As discussed previously, people choose to support successful clubs as it can reflect positively upon them, meaning that it becomes an image improvement tactic, known as basking-in-reflected-glory (BIRG-ing; Cialdini et al., 1976). The majority of these studies have been conducted through SIT and how it contributes to an individual's self-concept. This can explain why people identify with successful groups to boost their self-esteem (Heere and James, 2007), however, attachment to a club can also influence social well-being and self-esteem (Wann et al., 1996; Wann, 2006; Wann and James, 2019). Further examples of highly identified fans and self-esteem can be found with college students who felt lower levels of depression or loneliness by identifying with a club (Branscombe and Wann, 1991), yet they would feel greater sadness at defeats (Wann and Dolan, 1994). This is where lowly identified fans would aim to protect their self-esteem by CORF-ing (cutting off reflected failure), denouncing their association to the club. However, as discussed above, highly identified fans tend to avoid such behaviours (Wann and Dolan, 1994).



### 2.3.2. Sport Fan Motivations

Sport fan motivations attempt to identify the needs, values and goals that lead to sport consumption (Trail and James, 2015), relying on internal feelings and acting as a “second sense-of-self” (Wann and James, 2019: 92). This is key in understanding why people create psychological connections to sports clubs (Wann and James, 2019). Trail and James (2016) highlight that over 40 different motives have been identified, yet one of the first scales to measure motivation is the *Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS)*, established by Wann (1995). It detailed eight factors, **entertainment, eustress, self-esteem, escape, group affiliation, economic gains, family, and aesthetics** (Wann, 1995). Wann (1995: 378) stated that the *SFMS* would solely focus upon the term fan because “many behaviours and motives of fans occur beyond the bounds of the stadium and television”, with spectators viewed as merely observers. It is key to highlight here that the *SFMS* only covers the motivation of sport fans in general, not fans of clubs. As a result of the *SFMS*, Trail and James (2001) developed the *Motivation Scale of Sports Consumption (MSSC)*, borne out of what the authors believed as issues with the *SFMS*. The *MSSC* highlighted vicarious achievement, acquisition of knowledge, aesthetics, social interaction, drama / eustress, escape, family, physical attractiveness, and physical skill (Trail and James, 2001). Newly identified motives included acquisition of knowledge and social interaction, with economics, entertainment and group affiliation not carried forward from the *SFMS*.

The issues with SFMS, according to the MSSC, included a lack of understanding of where the SFMS derived motives from. For the SFMS, Wann (1995) synthesised the terms from various research into sport motivations, however, this work has been critiqued for failing to specify where the identified motivations were generated (Trail and James, 2001). In contrast, the MSSC chose to focus upon psychological motivations that influence attendance and purchase intentions, therefore only accounting for those who spend money on sport, which is in itself a critique of that scale. The remainder of this section will address key motivations and their application.

Motivation literature suggests that people follow sport to enhance their own self-esteem (Gantz, 1981), as the club or sport provides them with feelings of achievement, vicariously, when successful (Wann, 1995). Fans increase their feelings towards a successful club for this reason (Cialdini et al., 1976). Sport fandom is heavily related to increases in self-esteem when their club is successful, yet there is no link between levels of identification and the motivation (Cohen and Avrahami, 2005). However, Branscombe and Wann (1991) believe supporting a club can be independent from success, instead suggesting that self-esteem has the potential to motivate through group affiliation, as well as providing a sense of community (Zillman et al., 1989). Furthermore, membership of a group is where identities are formed and therefore links to social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). However, success can also help form group affiliation and therefore group identity, highlighting the overlaps between the different bodies of work used to explain sports fan motivation. Group affiliation is largely viewed as the most prominent influence in becoming a sports fan, as people

seek belonging to a group (Harasta, 2021). BIRG-ing (Cialdini et al., 1976: 366) suggests that “people appear to feel that they can share in the glory of a successful other”. This forms a sense of belonging, enhancing self-esteem, and reaffirms their perceived in-group membership (Delia, 2015).

Eustress is another commonly cited motivation (Wann, 1995), with the term viewed as attempting to increase of senses and enjoyment of sports (Zuckerman, 1979). Outside of sport motivations, it is viewed as a positive form of stress (Selye, 1975). Wann et al. (2008: 7) believe “fans with high levels of eustress motivation become involved with the pastime because they enjoy the excitement and arousal they experience watching sport”. Similarly, the MSSC highlights drama and eustress as where fans want to experience pleasurable stress and stimulations (Trail and James, 2001). Eustress has a strong and positive relationship with active fandom (Cohen and Avrahami, 2005). Similarly, the term escape suggests that fans can be taken away from the normal and mundane activities of everyday life to reduce levels of boredom (Smith, 1988; Trail and James, 2001). Individuals who are motivated by escape are often frustrated by their home life, work, or education, and consequently view fandom as an ‘escape’ from these issues (Wann et al., 2008).

Further motivations for becoming a sports fan include economics, aesthetics, and spending time with family. The latter argues that people become sports fans to spend more time with their family (Gantz, 1981; Guttman, 1986; Fink et al., 2002; Cohen, 2017). Both Wann (1995) and Trail and James (2001) uncovered a correlation

between family and high levels of team identification. For individuals motivated by economics, there is an entertainment factor too (Wann, 1995). Economics considers the monetary gain of fandom, often through gambling (Chorbajian, 1978; Guttman, 1986; Wann, 1995). Additionally, entertainment and economics were found to be highly correlated with passive engagement, suggesting they may be more pertinent to lowly identified fans. This highlights issues surrounding fans and spectatorship, as economics may not actually influence someone to become a fan of a club but encourage them to watch as a spectator (Wann et al., 2008).

Aesthetics suggests that performance is an art form, and that spectators or fans are motivated by the inherent beauty of performance (Duncan, 1983; Guttman, 1986; Smith, 1988; Trail and James, 2001). Smith (1988) states fans may be moved by excellence, beauty, and creativity of sport, but arguably when first being motivated, they may not be aware of such features. Trail and James (2001) believe that physical attractiveness of the athletes would also motivate people to watch a sport, alongside the physical skills of the participants, drawing similarities to aesthetics. Yet for both the MSSC (Trail and James, 2001) and SFMS (Wann, 1995), aesthetics surrounds the sport rather than athletes.

What has been demonstrated is links between team identification and sport fan motivations, although there remain issues with the measurement scales for these concepts. For instance, existing scales do not show how someone becomes aware of a sport and instead focus on what motivates them to become a fan that sport. This

surfaces a need for club-focused research. Additionally, extant work does not highlight any nuance behind each term included, with only single motivations highlighted and no discussion of how each one motivated each fan. The next concept to be considered is fan segmentation and the various models that group fans on their behaviours surrounding their fandom.

### 2.3.3. Fan Segmentation

Like all businesses, it is essential for sports clubs to segment their consumers. Researchers have therefore developed specific typologies to identify types of sports fans (e.g., Giulianotti, 2002; Tapp and Clowes, 2002; Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011; McDonald et al., 2016). For clarity in this section, any reference to a specific fan type will be put in bold.

The dualistic approach is the most simplistic and oldest form of fan segmentation and suggests two opposite fan types. For example, **genuine** and **others** (Clarke, 1978), **core** and **corporate** (Nash, 2000), **traditional** and **modern** (Boyle and Haynes, 2000), and **irrational** or **rational** fans (Ferrand and Pages, 1996; Quick, 2000). However, authors believe these to be too rigid in defining a diverse group of people (Wann et al., 2001b). In these examples, there are fans who use fandom for commercial or professional gain and / or entertainment purposes, with some authors labelling them as inauthentic fans. Despite this, Dixon (2014b: 426-427) believes that researchers “tend to speculate about the concept of authenticity but fail to identify how

perceptions of authenticity are formed, maintained, managed, altered, and ultimately practiced by agents in the field". Therefore, there are practical issues that ranking levels of authenticity through consumption can cause (Crawford, 2004; Dixon, 2014b), ignoring the self-identified 'authentic' fan (Gibbons and Dixon, 2010), whilst Davis (2015) believes that authenticity is borne out in many ways. Additional to this, to be 'traditional', largely viewed as masculine, patterns of support, such as chanting, group solidarity, hostility and defiance (Crawford, 2004), is one not all fans partake in. For instance, female fans in Iran, in attempt to defy the laws against them watching football live within stadiums, would find different ways to access an 'authentic' fan identity beyond stadiums (Toffoletti, 2012). This is through mediated forms and the local goes global as Iranian players move clubs and through Iran competing in the FIFA World Cup (Toffoletti, 2012), showing how 'authenticity' has changed and been adapted based on access and circumstances. Therefore, this research focused on the self-identification of fans, rather than placing problematic, contested authenticity markers upon fans, as this may have lost fans from all forms of fan groups.

Dixon (2016) states that although typologies are useful, they spend too much time compartmentalising fans into small groups. These groups are also difficult to place individuals into, highlighted firstly by significant overlaps in typologies (Stewart et al., 2003) and secondly, as highlighted above by contrasting and contested definitions of sports fans. Furthermore, as will be highlighted at a later point, fandom and journeys into it, are fluid due to the many changes to social life (Crawford, 2004; Dixon, 2016), therefore placing fans into groups would need regular updating, showing further issues

with fan typologies more generally. Table 2 demonstrates the many terms found across the various typologies. As a side note, Giulianotti (2002) created a taxonomy which groups the content, whereas a typology structures the content.

<b>Table 2: The varying sport fan types identified in the existing literature</b>			
<b>Author/s</b>	<b>Sport</b>	<b>Fan types</b>	<b>Citations (Google Scholar, June 2022)</b>
<b>Hunt et al. (1999)</b>	All sports	Devoted, Fanatical, Dysfunctional, Temporary and Local	718
<b>Tapp and Clowes (2002)</b>	Football	Quantitative research: Fanatics, Regulars and Casuals Qualitative research: Mines a Pint, Juggling the Kids, Thermos at Row D, Season Ticket Friendlies, Loyal Cash and Chanters, Dads and Sons	306
<b>Giulianotti (2002)</b>	Football	Supporters, fans (hot fans), followers and flaneurs (cool fans)	1107
<b>Mewett and Toffoletti (2011)</b>	AFL	In-the-blood, Learner, Convert and Sexually transmitted fandom (STF).	63
<b>Samra and Wos (2014)</b>	Football	Temporary, devoted and fanatical	89
<b>McDonald et al. (2016)</b>	AFL	Instant fanatics, community focused, independent triers, social theatregoers and casuals	33

The remainder of this section addresses key features of the typologies. Firstly, **supporters** are traditional-warm fans who have developed strong emotional ties and demonstrate whole-hearted cohesion (Giulianotti, 2002), who see supporting the club



as above all else in their life (Tamir, 2019a). This fan type is the closest description to the stereotypical, traditional fan (Davis, 2015), believing players, owners, and coaches will come and go, but the club remains constant (Tamir, 2019a). **Supporters** will attend home games and demonstrate cohesion with the club, even throughout defeat (Tamir, 2019a). However, this presents match attendees as demonstrating higher commitment levels in comparison to other types of consumption (e.g., watching from home) (Stewart et al., 2003; Crawford, 2004; Gibbons and Dixon, 2010; Dixon, 2011), something which may be impossible for a long-distance fan. **Supporters** (Giulianotti, 2002) and **devoted** fans (Hunt et al., 1999; Samra and Wos, 2014) both spend significant amounts of time on the club and demonstrate prominent levels of loyalty towards it. The latter begin their support as a temporary fan, before becoming **devoted** (Hunt et al., 1999).

**Followers** identify strongly with their club, with knowledge on their history and traditions (Giulianotti, 2002). They are viewed as being a traditional-cold fan. In contrast to **devoted** fans, **followers** consume sport in a less traditional manner, collating information, and interest about the club. Unlike **supporters**, their identification is generally formed through the information they have collated and not through experiences (Tamir, 2019a). Furthermore, **followers** view themselves as against the consumerist changes within football (Giulianotti, 2002), causing them to become activists against such phenomena (Davis, 2015).

**Fanatical / fanatics** are terms used across many of the typologies, apart from that of Giulianotti (2002). Samra and Wos (2014) define a **fanatical** fan as someone who shows true devotion, passion, and enthusiasm towards their favourite club, with their fandom self-sustaining. **Fanatical** fans are also useful in helping to attract new supporters to a club as they outwardly represent the club (Samra and Wos, 2014). Similarly, **instant fanatics** of expansion clubs advocate the club amongst their own networks with several fans reaching this level of involvement before a game has even been played (McDonald et al., 2016). **Fanatical** fans go to great personal and financial efforts to support their club (Samra and Wos, 2014). This can lead to the wearing of body paint and costumes and consuming the club through websites, emails, forums, supporter groups, newsletters, and fanzines (Samra and Wos, 2014). **Fanatics** live and breathe the club (Tapp and Clowes, 2002), often being one club fans (Tapp and Clowes, 2002), whereas **fans** according to Giulianotti (2002) swear allegiances to several clubs but know that they cannot follow certain clubs together.

**Fans** are viewed as warm consumers, who are attached to specific clubs or players, often moving clubs, as the player does, viewing players as celebrities (Giulianotti, 2002; Tamir, 2019a). This is explained by **fans** being “first and foremost, consumers” (Tamir, 2019a: 235), rather than seen as traditional fans. As a result of their attachment to players, **fans** purchase memorabilia with a player’s name on, and “even name their children after the players” (Tamir, 2019a: 235). Following multiple clubs helps **fans** maintain consumption of the game (Giulianotti, 2002). This raises issues around semantics and the choice of words around the term **fan** and **fanatical /**

**fanatics**. For instance, **fanatical** fans are extremely passionate and devoted to the club, yet **fans** pledge allegiance to various clubs. Secondly, use of the term **fan** suggests a fanatical nature (Samra and Wos, 2014), however Giulianotti's (2002) taxonomy suggests this is not the case, viewing this group instead as cool fans. The varied use of the term **fan** and **fanatical / fanatics** demonstrates the complexity of fan segmentation and the potential challenges with placing fans into specific groups, as per Dixon (2016).

**Flâneurs** want immediate entertainment and attachment to a winning brand and are cold consumers, who are stereotypically affluent, middle-class males (Giulianotti, 2002; Tamir, 2019a). They consume a wide spread of cultural offerings, explaining the switch of gaze between clubs, players and sometimes even nations (Giulianotti, 2002). Allegiance to a club for **flâneurs** is limited as they view football clubs as fashionable clothes enjoyed over a short period (Tamir, 2019a). The **flâneur** lives in a 'cosmopolis of consumption' (Giulianotti, 2002: 41) of both information (Davis, 2015) and cultures (Lee, 2018). Authors such as Giulianotti (2002) made generalised statements on their engagement, such as use of the internet, stating that engagement through the internet is being a cool consumer while **supporters** may attend games, buy merchandise, and engage online (Dixon, 2016). However, Crawford (2004) believes the practices of contemporary fans, like **fans** and **flâneurs**, or those who engage from afar, who do not or cannot conform to the traditional behaviours associated with football, to be important. Equally, the introduction of the middle-class to a historically working-class

sport, and the commercialisation of the game, has shown how fans can demonstrate minimum or maximum commitment to a club (Giulianotti, 2002).

McDonald et al.'s (2016) typology, categorising expansion club fans, is assessed in greater detail in Chapter 4, however it identified **instant fanatics**, **independent triers**, **social theatregoers** and **casuals**. Firstly, they found “that **instant fanatics** perhaps represent the most attractive segment, characterised by the highest levels of commitment, loyalty and private evaluation” (McDonald et al., 2016: 144), consequently marketing should consider sustaining and maintaining **instant fanatics**. Secondly, **independent triers** attend games but demonstrate lower levels of public evaluation compared to **instant fanatics**. Their support tends to be derived out of the club being an underdog, which unifies and galvanises a fan base, due to a lack of success at the beginning. McDonald et al. (2016:145) believe that if holding the underdog status is key to **independent triers**, then improving the “broader acceptance of the club might be counterproductive”, meaning maintaining an ‘us against them’ mentality may be beneficial in how expansion clubs are marketed. Finally, **social theatregoers** and **casuals** are generally described as having low attachment and viewed as modern fans (McDonald, et al., 2016). **Social theatregoers** require social connections and activity. They demonstrate support for other clubs around the world, are not deterred by the expansions club’s arrival, and demonstrate low attachment, commitment, and loyalty (McDonald et al., 2016). **Casual** fans generally live outside of the club’s geographic region, suggesting why engagement towards the team may be lower. McDonald et al. (2016: 146) believe that clubs need

to better understand **casuals** as they are more “likely to churn as supporters or consumers (McDonald, 2010), and it is likely that growth will come from the ranks of light users like these (Sharp, 2010)”.

Despite the merits to such segmentation approaches, they do have their drawbacks and are contested and problematic. As stated earlier, Giulianotti (2002) regards those based on the internet as inauthentic as they engage in information about their club from afar, since then Gibbons and Dixon (2010) have argued that internet-based fans should be taken more seriously. This may assist in understanding fans who have been displaced from their favourite club (Greenwood et al., 2006; Cohen, 2017; Baker, 2018a; 2018b; 2019) or generally consume from a distance (Pu and James, 2017; Theodorakis et al., 2017; Delia and Katz, 2019) (considered further in Chapter 4). Crawford (2004) believes sport fans are located within wider consumerism, and sports fans have always involved consumptive practices, “be this simply attending ‘live’ games or reading sport related stories and results in the local and national press” (Crawford, 2004: 11). Additionally, authenticity is seen as a masculine trait, therefore the works of Giulianotti (2002), and others, judges that masculine traits must be achieved in fandom and feminine ones would not be accepted. This goes further into highlighting the contested nature of Giulianotti’s (2002) work.

Similarly, typologies do not account for the fluidity of fan experiences (Crawford, 2004; Dixon, 2016) and the changes within football and society. These include the emergence of football fans in markets such as India, America, and Brazil (Bolsmann,

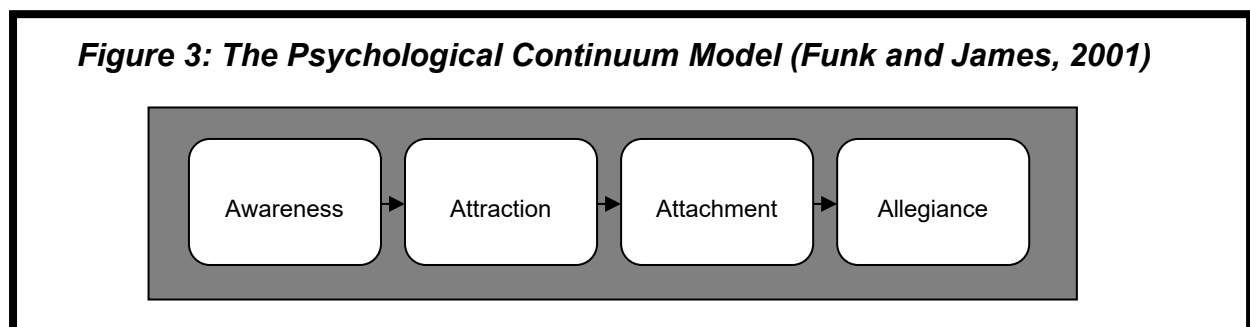
2016; Maderer et al., 2016; Menary, 2018), increases in female audiences (Dixon, 2015; Toffoletti, 2017), and fans supporting multiple clubs (McDonald et al., 2010; Hognestad, 2012; Maderer et al., 2016). Consequentially, by celebrating traditionality and authenticity, we are unlikely to understand what the named 'inauthentic' fan could be, by downgrading and ignoring their activities (Grossberg, 1992; Crawford, 2004). Furthermore, fan segmentation models do not assist in understanding how people become a fan (Stewart et al., 2003) apart from the work by Mewett and Toffoletti (2011), which is covered in more detail in Chapter 4. Considering this even further, Davis (2015) believes that authenticity is borne out in many ways, fandom should not be judged as a binary comparison of authentic and inauthentic, like early works suggest (Giulianotti, 2002).

This process of becoming a fan is addressed in the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM), which is discussed below.

#### **2.3.4. Psychological Continuum Model**

The Psychological Continuum Model differs from previous frameworks as in Funk and James' (2001: 121) own words, it is "a conceptual model grounded in theoretical and applied research", that aims to understand the psychological connections and mental associations an individual has with a sports object (de Groot and Robinson, 2008; Wann and James, 2019). Funk and James (2001) argued that previously there was no theoretical framework assessing the process of a person's move from awareness

of a sport or club to subsequent allegiance, therefore the PCM bridged this gap in theory. The PCM contains four floors, **awareness**, **attraction**, **attachment**, and **allegiance** (as can be seen in Figure 3) (Funk and James, 2001). The use of floors suggests the individual moves up one level at a time, however Funk and James (2001) argue that it does not have to be a linear, vertical movement and people can in fact go up, or down, more than one floor at a time. This finding was echoed by authors in expansion club research which identified fans who moved straight through to allegiance (Lock et al., 2012; McDonald et al., 2016). This fluidity appeases concerns identified with fan segmentation, with fans able to move between floors of the PCM.



What is important to note, is that in 2006, Funk and James revised the PCM, as they stated that it does not sufficiently answer how individuals progress through, and between, the four stages. The authors themselves state that it is better understood as a framework rather than a model. With the revised model now focusing specifically on how allegiance develops and can focus more on unique processes to this goal, there are seven stages, Awareness Process, Attraction Process, Attachment Process and

Allegiance Outcome, with Level 1, 2 and 3 Outcomes in-between the first three stages (Awareness, Attraction and Attachment Process).

Significantly, and what justifies a focus on the 2001 model, or framework, within this literature review, rather than the 2006 model, is that Funk and James stated that “beyond references to the socialization process, Funk and James (2001) offered limited discussion on how individual processes create distinct outcomes as one moves up the hierarchy” (Funk and James, 2006: 191). Furthermore, it seems that the key focus of the newest version of the PCM was to focus on Allegiance, which is not the focus of this thesis, with the 2001 version of the PCM having greater focus and discussion of socialisation. Therefore, this thesis focuses on the socialisation that occurs within the awareness stage, rather than how movement occurs throughout the model.

In understanding the process of becoming a fan, researchers have applied other frameworks with the *PCM*, such as team identification and social identity theory (Hyatt and Andrijew, 2008; Lock et al., 2012), brand development (Kunkel et al., 2014), motivations (Pu and James, 2017), attachment to a club (de Groot and Robinson, 2008), constraints upon consumers (Alexandris et al., 2017) and customer segmentation (Doyle et al., 2013; McDonald et al., 2016). Similarly, the continuum has been applied to a variety of contexts, such as non-local fans (Hyatt and Andrijew, 2008; Pu and James, 2017), expansion clubs (Lock et al., 2012; McDonald et al., 2016) and



participation in leisure activities (Alexandris et al., 2017). The remainder of this section examines each stage of the *PCM* in more detail.

Awareness surrounds the recognition that the sport and club exist (Funk and James, 2001) and the accrual of knowledge of the sport and club (Pu and James, 2017), before a person's engagement with the sports object (Chung et al., 2022). There are two questions to understand in the awareness stage "(1) When do people become aware of sports and clubs? (2) How do people become aware of sports and clubs?" (Funk and James, 2001: 125). The model states the ages for consideration when assessing awareness are childhood (0-5 and 6-12 years), adolescents (13-19 years) and adulthood (20-25, 36-54, and 55+ years). In this stage is where socialisation occurs. Socialisation is the "comprehensive and consistent induction of an individual into the objective world of a society or a sector of it" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 271). It happens early in life, with parents encouraging their children through the purchase of merchandise or by taking them to sport sessions. However, they may not become attracted or pledge allegiance until adulthood. In this stage, individuals are found to have an externally driven identity (Lock et al., 2012), showing links between the *PCM* and team identification.

Funk and James (2001), state that how people learn about sports and clubs is through socialisation agents. Typically, they are spouses, parents, siblings, friends, school (teachers or coaches), community, geographic proximity, media (news and programming) and promotions (advertising and special events) (Funk and James,

2001). Socialisation agents influence an individual's attraction towards a sports organisation (Funk and James, 2001). They guide prospective fans to the attitudes, values, and actions of a sports club (Funk and James, 2001; Wann and James, 2019). Many of these draw similarities with the SFMS and MSSC, such as family and friends (through group affiliation), however motivations focus on the internal benefit to the individual by becoming a sports fan. An additional problem with socialisation agent research, assessed in greater detail in Chapter 4, is that the agents are often assessed alongside, or confused with, motivations and factors that lead to team identification. A further issue is that it cannot be assumed that all socialisation agents can be applied to all fans, such as those under discussion in this thesis. This could be due to geographic factors (long-distance fans) and family history (expansion club and long-distance fans). These factors will also be explored in Chapter 4.

As part of their analysis of these agents, Funk and James (2001) do not define or state how they are impactful, leaving them open to interpretation. For example, de Groot and Robinson (2008) highlight friendships at primary school, heroes in the club, first attendance at a game and first exposure to the club from parents, providing some, but limited detail about the agents. However, which of these categorically encourage fans to make the next step to be a fan and move them to attraction becomes an additional point to consider. An understanding of sports fans therefore either needs to be extended or provide detailed but operationalised information about how individuals become fans, potentially uncovering new agents (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Theodorakis et al., 2017).

The socialisation process continues in the attraction floor, but socialisation becomes less important (de Groot and Robinson, 2008). What becomes more important are a hedonic need fulfilment and the social-situational aspects of sport. Hedonic motives assess entertainment, escape and excitement as reasons why people become attracted to a club, sharing similarities with some of the motives identified in the SFMS (Wann, 1995). This is alongside the social-situational aspects of sport, which include for example, watching games with, supporting the same club as, or connecting with fathers. However, these hint at the idea that the club is not the focal point, but their father is instead, despite the club being a part of this process (Funk and James, 2001). Additionally, work into those beginning to participate in a sports programme found that the instructor would help to foster attachment to the programme (Chung et al., 2022). The individual would start to acknowledge that a specific club is their favourite (de Groot and Robinson, 2008), yet will not communicate this to others (Lock et al., 2012). Similarly, moving to a new city and supporting the club in that city to fit in, contributes to establishing relationships with others (Funk and James, 2001).

Several types of expansion club fans, such as social theatregoers and community focused, all tend to be in the attraction phase, with low engagement but high levels of psychological attachment developing (McDonald et al., 2016). “This low level connection of attraction may develop into a stronger, more meaningful connection characterised by the attachment stage” further down the line (Doyle et al., 2013: 24). The aim of this stage is to make the club the focal point, often completed through price promotions and giveaways, a tool to try and satisfy both hedonic and social needs.

Further factors that contribute to individuals moving towards the attraction phase also include joining the local football club and feeling increased self-esteem through supporting the club (de Groot and Robinson, 2008), with BIRG-ing being a factor within this stage (Funk and James, 2001). The PCM states that the level of psychological importance and connectedness to a club occurs when a fan moves from attraction to awareness (Funk and James, 2001).

The third floor is where the sporting object takes on intrinsic importance for an individual, with attachment to the object forming (Funk and James, 2001). Here begins an increased complexity, as the fan becomes attached to the networks of the object and forms relationships with others (Funk and James, 2001). Extrinsic influences begin to reduce here (Funk and James, 2001; Doyle et al., 2013). In terms of behaviours, fans begin to consume through the purchasing of merchandise and buying tickets, spreading positive word of mouth about the club (Funk and James, 2001). Similarly, 'instant fanatics' of expansion clubs become a fan immediately (McDonald et al., 2016), showing the ability of individuals to move through the stages quickly. In this stage, fans welcome discounts on tickets and special events (Wann and James, 2019) and identify with the clubs' players (de Groot and Robinson, 2008; Lock et al., 2012).

The final floor is allegiance, which is the most attractive for clubs (Doyle et al., 2013), with the term used to cover loyalty to the club (de Groot and Robinson, 2008). Funk and James (2001) demonstrate four factors in allegiance, consisting of persistence,

resistance to change, biases in cognitive process and guides to behaviour. Persistence encompasses frequency of thoughts about the club and evaluative responses developed over a period, meaning a more stable, durable and a strong psychological connection (Funk and James, 2001; de Groot and Robinson, 2008). Similarly, resistance to change is where the individual blocks out negative information about the club or sport, balancing prior attitudes and new information garnered (Funk and James, 2001). In leisure practices, this is the point where individuals participate frequently, develop a psychological connection, and self-identify as a participant of a sport (Alexandris et al., 2017).

Once fans pledge allegiance and have a strong connection, it is hard for behaviours to change (Wann and James, 2019). Doyle et al. (2013) found that as participants moved through the stages of the PCM, their attitudes towards the club or sport became increasingly stronger. This is demonstrated by long-distance fans showing high levels of psychological connection being motivated by interest in a specific club (Pu and James, 2017), showing preference and allegiance towards one club. Biases begin to occur in cognitive processing as further information is gained and decisions are made on how to process it (Funk and James, 2001). Similarly, fans begin to promote their identification to others, allowing it to positively alter group image (Lock et al., 2012). The last part of allegiance is guides to behaviour, where the individual engages in consuming the game with these engagements lasting longer in duration as the individual reaches this stage (Funk and James, 2001). Similarly, as identification increases, fans begin to arrange their game day plans, rather than relying on others

(Lock et al., 2012). To further contribute to a positively distinct group image (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), Lock et al. (2012) found that through spruiking, fans in the latter stages of the PCM can become socialisation agents themselves, introducing new fans.

What this section has demonstrated is the PCM follows a process for fans from awareness to allegiance. Yet this raises several issues around authenticity and labelling fans as being allegiant, or whether they are just attached or attracted to a sports club. Therefore, greater research is needed investigating the earlier stages in this process, focusing on what creates awareness and how sports clubs can therefore leverage this, especially within the early stages of a person's fandom. This is conducted by this thesis and addressed by the emerging concept of socialisation, which is identified with the awareness stage of the PCM.

#### *2.4. Summary of the initial literature review*

This chapter, in accordance with GTM, is intended to set the scene surrounding the extant literature around fans generally and sports fans specifically. In this chapter the similarities and differences between fans of wider phenomena and sports were made clear. For instance, both often engage in dress up, with cosplay popular with fans of TV and films and purchasing merchandise with sports fans. Similarly, both sets of fans consume with others, either in the stadium, pub or at home or at conventions. This demonstrates shared experiences as a similarity of both sets of fans. Additionally, they share similar media practices, as both groups of fans engage with what they fantasise

over through the internet. However, for fans of a TV show, film, or band, engaging on the internet is seen as traditional and authentic, whereas for sports fans this is viewed as inauthentic (Giulianotti, 2002).

The primary literature review then moved onto discuss the PCM and what became clear from this discussion was the range of theoretical frameworks that share similarities with the PCM. This includes team identification and social identity theory, brand development, motivations, attachment to a club, constraints upon consumers and customer segmentation. The *PCM* considers fandom from awareness to a point of allegiance (de Groot and Robinson, 2008), which relies upon an individual's identification with the sports object. Furthermore, there are currently a lack of details attached to the identified socialisation agents, with no definitions surrounding each agent. Yet, many of the motivations bear similarities to socialisation agents, with motivations often used instead of, or confused with, socialisation agents. This will be discussed more fully in Chapter 4. Equally, customer segmentation models are critiqued for not identifying how people become fans, instead focusing on identifying how various types of fans demonstrate levels of connection to the club.

This review of literature has highlighted several gaps that require full exploration. Notably, as highlighted by Duffett (2013), little research has assessed *how* people become fans (of sport clubs or otherwise). Furthermore, our understanding of how individuals become sports fans needs to be extended to potentially uncover new agents and their meanings. It is for this reason that a GT approach is used, to allow

for an open, constructive discussion with the participants about their experiences in becoming a fan.



### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter explains how the study was conducted. It outlines the fundamental principles of grounded theory (GT) and provides a justification for why these were particularly appropriate in this instance. The approaches used for data collection are then outlined. Illustrative examples are provided at key junctures to demonstrate the use of the methods in a practical sense. Additionally, there is a detailed reflection of the PhD process in appendix A, which highlights how key decisions throughout the PhD were made and the researcher's thoughts on them. What is important to highlight here is that this research was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the emergence of the later quashed European Super League in April 2021, meaning these topics never emerged. Before progressing, for the aid of clarity, the research objectives are restated:

1. To **explore** which socialisation agents impact:
  - a) Expansion club fans
  - b) Female fans
  - c) Long-distance fans
  
2. To **identify** the role that the identified socialisation agents play in the socialisation of:
  - a) Expansion club fans
  - b) Female fans
  - c) Long-distance fans

3. To create a framework which **operationalises** the socialisation agents identified and the roles they play.

Highlighting the objectives again is useful to justify the decisions taken within this research and the processes gone through to address them. Furthermore, the objectives were developed and emerged throughout data analysis. This chapter begins by outlining the researcher's philosophy. This is crucial as it is believed that there should be a congruence between the method and the researcher's world views (Lauridsen and Higginbottom, 2014), putting an emphasis on the philosophy of the researcher. Following this, GT, the methodology of choice for this research, is discussed providing context around its development and some of the key debates in the field. This leads into a discussion of the methods of data collection used in this research, assessing the strengths and limitations of interviews and netnographies, with details on how previous researchers have used these methods. Firstly, a netnography adapts ethnographic techniques and applies them to online spaces (Kozinets, 1998; 2002; 2015; Costello et al., 2017) and was a useful tool in investigating the research aims of this study. Encompassed within this section are details around how each method was conducted, alongside details on the participants, sampling and ethics. The various GT frameworks are then discussed before ending on Charmaz's (2014) framework due to its use in this thesis, detailing why it is a suitable choice. Finally, how the data was analysed in relation to Charmaz (2014) is discussed, including worked examples of coding, memoing, theoretical sampling and how saturation was reached.

### *3.1. Research philosophy and GT*

The first factor to consider regarding the methodology of this thesis is the philosophical positioning that underpins the research. The methodological design of any research differs based upon its underlying philosophy and underpins any PhD (Gibbs, 2002; Baldwin, 2014); essentially the researcher's theoretical lens (Rowlands, 2005). The researcher identifies as having a relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology. This section will address the philosophy and application to the methodology chosen.

Charmaz (2014) argues that constructivist research starts with the experience and asks how members constructed it, with the researcher's interpretation of the studied phenomena being itself the construction. Constructivism takes multiple forms, including psychological constructivism, social constructivism, and radical constructivism (Constantino, 2008). This thesis lends itself to social constructivism, as it prioritises the study of phenomena within their social settings. This allows the researcher to construct interpretations of human action and meanings, supposing that human experiences vary across social contexts. Bringing this into this thesis, furthermore, social constructivism provides an interesting point to consider as it cannot or should not be assumed football fan socialisation, will occur in the same way as rugby fans for instance. It may also differ within football fandom too; between males and females, long-distance and local fans and expansion and established club fans, meaning social constructivism and CGT is a useful approach to follow.

Methods such as netnographies and interviews allow for these interpretations to occur, with discussions and immersion between the researcher and participants. CGT sits ontologically as relativist and epistemologically as subjectivist (Mills et al., 2006). Charmaz (2000: 510) states “constructivism assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretive understanding of subjects' meanings” adding to the need to approach the research together, both researcher and participant, alongside the need to consider the multiple realities of various sports fans.

In relation to CGT, it is accepted that GT is a suitable methodology when the research questions “focus typically on discovering participants' patterns of action/interaction” (Holt, 2016: 27). In this case discovering people's interactions and actions in becoming a fan of a football club. This suits a realist approach, where the individuals under study discuss what they feel, see, and hear, which is direct realism (Žukauskas et al., 2018), or their experiences, which is critical realism (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). Holding a relativist ontology implies there is a real world in which the participants and the researcher access parts of this to form and explain the theory but are not representations of the reality around it (Levers, 2013). Crotty (2003) describes a constructionist epistemology as having no objective truth, with meaning constructed through conversation and not discovered, with this research applying these principles. This is highlighted further by constructivist grounded theorists believing that to ignore the author's influential role in the research is seen as impossible (Charmaz, 2014; Ramalho et al., 2015).

The idea of constructivism, making sense out of fans experiences and lives, understanding that there are multiple realities surrounding socialisation agents, allows for a nuanced understanding of theory, especially when the core category that emerged was found as lacking in nuanced detail. CGT allows the researcher to understand the processes, considering social, historical and temporal factors (Charmaz, 2017), rather than just simply considering what participants' views are.

What will now be highlighted is how GT was developed and some of the debates within the GT field.

### *3.2. The Development of GT*

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss are the founding fathers of GT. They justified publication of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967) as they were “unhappy with the mainstream of research in the social sciences and in particular in sociology” being developed at the time (Flick, 2018: 5). Theories in GT methodology (GTM) are grounded in data which researchers interpret, frame, and retell (Strauss and Corbin, 1997; Charmaz, 2014; Corbin and Strauss, 2015). This is completed by unearthing relationships between concepts (Urquhart, 2013) and integrating these with literature, with the view of creating a theory embedded in the participants' experiences (Creswell and Poth, 2016). A further feature of GT is that the collection of data should start with broad and simple sampling that seeks to maximize variations of experiences and descriptions through participants (Hallberg, 2006), bringing in theoretical sampling,

covered in section 3.5.4. GT encourages researchers to conduct simultaneous data collection and analysis in an integrated and broad way (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Hallberg, 2006; Flick, 2018), with Urquhart (2013) asserting that data collection can only stop once theoretical saturation has occurred. The simultaneous nature of this process brings more focus to the research, as the collection of data can be refined by the analysis (Charmaz, 2014).

One of the bases for GT sits within the idea of how theory should emerge. Glaser (1992) focused upon "Emergence vs. Forcing: Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis" and accused Strauss and Corbin of straying away from the common purpose of GT. Strauss and Corbin introduced axial coding and coding paradigms which provided a structure for novice researchers and allowed them to have a framework to guide their research and analysis. However, Glaser (1992) debates, contrary to Corbin and Strauss (2015), that researchers must approach their field without any precise research questions or problems, putting it rather poignantly that the researcher "moves in with the abstract wonderment of what is going on that is an issue and how it is handled" (Glaser, 1992: 22).

An additional key fundamental idea surrounding GT is the role of literature, which differs from its role in other methodologies. GT is built upon managing preconceptions throughout the research process (Glaser, 1998; Gratton and Jones 2010; Urquhart, 2013; Glaser and Strauss, 2017). Charmaz (2014), Strauss and Corbin (2015) and Glaser (1978; 1992) all agree that a theory developed through GTM should be

grounded in the data and not in existing literature. However, their approaches differ and will be discussed in section 3.4. This aims to avoid viewing the data through the lens of the literature and prevent contamination of the data (Glaser, 1992; 1998). However, Glaser and Strauss were expert researchers in their respective fields and therefore literature use should depend on the needs of individual researchers (Flick, 2018).

### *3.3. Data collection techniques*

When considering how data was collected for a GT study, authors state that theory generation can occur through collecting data from interviews, observations, or documents (Gratton and Jones, 2010; Urquhart, 2013). Furthermore, Glaser (1992; 2001: 145) states that “all is data”, adding that “it is not only what is being told, how it is being told and the conditions of it being told, but also all the data surrounding what is being told”. In the context of this thesis, a netnography and interviews were adopted. Firstly, it is useful to introduce what a netnography is. A netnography adapts ethnographic techniques and applies them to online spaces (Kozinets, 1998; 2002; 2015; Costello et al., 2017) and in this case was conducted using Reddit and a club forum. This section addresses the merits and drawbacks of both approaches. How each method was conducted in relation to this study is also covered. Despite these methods being discussed separately, they were conducted and analysed simultaneously, with analysis discussed in section 3.5.

### **3.3.1. Interviews**

Interviews assist in understanding the why and how of a phenomenon (Hannabuss, 1996; Gratton and Jones 2010; Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012). Interviews can be used as a stand-alone research method or, like this research, in conjunction with other methods (Hannabuss, 1996). In this case the intensive interview method was chosen, a preferred approach by Charmaz (1991) and will be further discussed in regard to its application in section 3.3.1.2. Developing a rapport allows participants to feel comfortable (Hannabuss, 1996) and provide rich data, which is a key requirement for developing a robust GT (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012). A key factor supporting the use of interviews in this study is that prior work on fandom has argued for rich data to be applied in the field rather than just simply rating topics presented by the researcher (Stewart et al., 2003; Melnick and Wann, 2011; Theodorakis et al., 2017; Delia and James, 2018). It is argued that an interviewer has more control over the data than other methods, such as ethnography or textual analysis (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012). However, the method allows for the researcher to dig beneath the surface and encourage the participant to go into as much detail as possible (Charmaz, 2014). These require starting with the research problem and exploring it further with respondents who have shared relevant experiences, a form of theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 1991). Charmaz (2014) prefers a one-sided discussion of a participants' own stories in a bid to see the world through their eyes, with only prompts and probing from the interviewer. The purpose of intensive interviews is to gain insight into experiences, reflections, and information (Charmaz, 1991). Furthermore, intensive



interviews are useful for maintaining participants' focus and can slow or quicken an interview up (Charmaz, 2014). They break silences, allow participants to tell and share their stories, be experts in their event and receive affirmation and understanding.

Intensive interviews allow for an in-depth assessment of a certain topic, which venture under the surface of a simple general discussion (Charmaz, 2014). The participant is asked to describe and reflect upon their experiences in ways that rarely happen in everyday life (Hallberg, 2006). Introductory questions are used at the start of the interview, followed by probing and follow-up questions for the remainder of the discussion (Hallberg, 2006). The participant should be active in this process, whereas the interviewer should be passive, encouraging the participant to clarify details where necessary (Charmaz, 2014). They also allow the participant to choose what they tell and how they tell it, with the researcher gaining views about the participant's world, constructed with the researcher (Charmaz, 2014). Scheibelhofer (2008: 407), who adopted intensive interviews, provided an example of its use:

*“Could you please tell me everything that is involved in your coming to New York and how your life went on since then? I will listen and make some notes and I will not interrupt you until you have finished. Please take as much time as you feel necessary and tell me all the details you remember that, in your opinion, are connected to your living in New York”.*

This strategy is useful as, according to Charmaz and Belgrave (2012), it allowed for the participant to engage and the researcher to listen. After the participant answered, the researcher would then delve deeper into the topics mentioned and found detailed responses in return, a technique attempted in this study.

What will be covered next is how participants for interviews were sampled and detail on these participants.

#### *3.3.1.1. Sampling and participants*

This section focuses upon the sampling of participants for interviews, with sampling for the netnography highlighted in section 3.3.2 and detail the participants. Firstly, sampling in GT is “where to go to obtain the data” (Corbin and Strauss, 2015: 201). Morse (2007) is of the belief that researchers must find brilliant participants to be able to discover brilliant data and theoretical sampling is a technique suitable to completing this process. Theoretical sampling is a process in data collection which helps the researcher work out where to go next in the form of incidents, participants, and groups to study (Hallberg, 2006; Corbin and Strauss, 2015; Glaser and Strauss, 2017). It should occur straight after the first analytical session and can continue or start again once writing up starts if there are gaps in the data (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). The researcher “jointly collects, codes and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them” through theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 45). The researcher selects individuals and groups depending on the levels of

insights for developing a theory, which may be based on gender, age and variables that require more insights.

The criteria for taking part in this research was that each individual personally identified as a fan of one of the eight clubs (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000; Pope, 2017; Fenton et al., 2021) and provided consent, either on paper or by commenting on posts. As part of the researcher's philosophy and methodology, setting limited criteria on participants was crucial to gain a wide variety of fans. In this case, it was clear that the population would be self-identified fans from the eight clubs. When it came to recruitment of participants in this study, they were primarily recruited through convenience sampling, with the researcher posting on Twitter (Figure 4) to reach fans. Convenience sampling is likely to only be received by people who may be in the researcher's circle and therefore is not preferred (Gratton and Jones, 2010) as it is less rigorous and purposeful (Marshall, 1996). Therefore, to reduce this and to increase the audience of the tweet, hashtags were used to attract more respondents, with all MLS clubs having their own official hashtag developed by the league (Evans, 2019). For EPL clubs the generally accepted initialised names for example 'MUF' were used as hashtags. Similarly, supporter groups for each club were tagged for further shareability, however there is an acknowledgement that this may recruit more extreme fans.

**Figure 4: Example of a tweet the researcher sent out to recruit participants for interviews**



Secondly, several fans were recruited through referrals from participants to acquaintances who support one of the eight clubs, by tagging others or retweeting the post. This therefore developed into snowball sampling, where those who shared the Tweet became indirect gatekeepers to other participants (Gratton and Jones, 2010).

Researchers can return to sample participants even when they believe they have completed all data collection if they believe a concept is not fully saturated (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). Charmaz (2014) believes that theoretical sampling does not occur on the way to the data but on the way from data to theory. Therefore, theoretical sampling is not where the researcher starts but it should be based on elaborating and

consolidating the developing theory. It is not sampling to address initial research questions, reflect population distributions and find negative cases (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin and Strauss, 2015). Instead, it should be used for checking hunches, to saturate properties, to distinguish between categories, to clarify relationships, to increase participants (Hallberg, 2006), and for variation (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). Variation is key when building theory as it increases concepts (Corbin and Strauss, 2015).

Theoretical sampling in this thesis occurred throughout. For example, when the researcher gained a significant number of long-distance fans, the researcher attempted to seek out local fans to contrast. Additionally, after going back to female fans to understand whether saturation had occurred, the researcher identified that the same agents and roles were emerging and decided that saturation was reached. This was not conducted to address population distributions or research objectives (Hallberg, 2006; Charmaz, 2014), but to distinguish between categories and clarify relationships, such as the example highlighted above where relationships were first sought out between long-distance and local fans. Additionally, data must be collected in phases to facilitate theoretical sampling. This allows the researcher to move iteratively between data gathering and data analysis. In this study, data was gathered across three phases (interviews-> archival netnography data-> elicited netnography data) which provided guidance on where to go next with data collection based off analysis.

A total of 31 interviews were conducted with fans from the eight clubs chosen between June and December 2019, with most conducted through video over internet protocol (VoIP) and recorded, as recommended by Charmaz (2014). Appendix B provides various information about the eight clubs. 11 interviews were conducted with female fans and 20 with male fans. Appendix C provides details of interview participants, including age, job and whether they are a season ticket holder. Participants were asked about their football fandom and involved some context on the eight clubs based off research prior to the completion of interviews. More information surrounding these topics highlighted in the next section.

#### *3.3.1.2. Conducting the interviews*

Due to distance, time and cost, VoIP has become accepted in conducting interviews (Bertrand, 2010; Deakin and Wakefield, 2014; Redlich-Amirav and Higginbottom, 2014) and was adopted for this study. There are several benefits to conducting online interviews, such as low cost and time benefits, more flexibility in interview scheduling and the practicality of interviews (Fenton and Procter, 2019). Kozinets (2015) discussed the suitability of VoIP as body language and facial expressions can still be seen, something that a phone call cannot. This therefore makes VoIP a viable, ethical, and useful tool for this project, allowing the researcher to comprehensively address the objectives outlined at the start of this chapter.

Glaser (2004) has previously noted a preference for field notes (ethnography) over (recorded) interviews, believing that transcriptions are not required. This advice is provided as verbatim misses the point when only the gist is required (Glaser, 1978). However, several GT studies have transcribed interviews (Bartlett and Payne, 1997; Pitney, 2002; Kennedy, 2009; Duggleby et al., 2010; Nasrin et al., 2012), and both Charmaz (2014) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) assured novice researchers that transcriptions are suitable. This approach was therefore adopted for this study, despite the length of time taken (Hannabuss, 1996; Gratton and Jones 2010), allowing the researcher to stay close to the data.

As stated previously, intensive interviews were used. They allow the researcher to gain insights into the experiences and reflections of the participants, but with significant effort in discovering the information (Charmaz, 1991). For example, the approach suggested by Scheibelhofer (2008), is one that was undertaken in this thesis. Here the first question asked by the researcher was: *Can you tell me how you came to support your club, right from the start as far as you can remember?* Once the participant had finished answering, the researcher had a set of probes to reply with dependant on their answer, alongside any other things that the researcher noted too, for instance:

- **Probe:** Did you play soccer/football as a child?
- How did you start supporting your club?
- When did you know you were a supporter of *[team]*?

- Did you support any clubs before? Why did you stop?
  - **Probe:** How did you support this/these club/s?
  - Do you still follow them?
- Did you have to decide between other clubs?
- Did anyone try to deter you?
- Describe your first game, what was it like for you?
- Key moments in your support?

A broad interview guide can be found below:

- Journey to supporting a club, including how and why they are a fan
- Their choice of club and the other options available
- How they maintain support
- Feeling and meaning of support
- Consumption during the season and post season
- Whether they have changed to support the new club
- Merchandise
- Importance of place
- Opinions between supporters of rival clubs

A broad interview guide is often synonymous with studies which explore new areas or, like this thesis, a GT study. The eventual core category of socialisation agents is not included in this list, with the closest topic being the journey to supporting a club, which



included how they became a fan. Most of these issues were discovered within the early literature review and therefore chosen as factors to be explored in the data collection. Despite this, in keeping with GT, topics were refined and became more structured with each interview as the core category began to emerge. Following initial coding of interviews, tentative themes began to emerge, one of which was concerned with the way in which people become fans. As a result, the question “*how did you become a fan of [club name]?*” became the focus of the netnography and socialisation agents became the core category. A full example of an interview transcript can be found in appendix D.

### **3.3.2. Netnography**

A netnography, or an ethnography of the internet, adapts ethnographic techniques and applies them to online spaces (Kozinets, 1998; 2002; 2015; Costello et al., 2017). It has been referred to as an online ethnography, cyber-ethnography or virtual ethnography (Grincheva, 2014). Kozinets (1998; 2002) was one of the first researchers to use and develop a netnography when researching fan cultures, demonstrating the method’s suitability for this research. Kozinets (1998; 2002) discovered that fans were interacting online with one another and therefore attempted to understand them naturally. Costello et al. (2017) are of the belief that netnographies are inadequately understood and are missed opportunities for the co-creation of data with online communities, a bridge attempted by this study.

A netnography can, according to Costello et al. (2017), be a standalone methodology, like an ethnography, or applied within methodologies (Füller et al., 2007), such as GT. Ethnographies were originally seen as the preferred method of GT research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), potentially suggesting netnography's suitability with GT. There are several expected similarities between ethnographies and netnographies, such as a study completed over time, observing behaviours, and providing rich qualitative data (Kozinets, 2002). However, a netnography, depending on the research problem, is more suitable than an ethnography as it is less time consuming, more naturally occurring, and lower in cost (Kozinets, 1998; 2002; Costello et al., 2017; 2019), one of the key benefits of a netnography. Additionally, this method is convenient to participants also, as they can respond to the researcher in their own time, with the researcher being relatively unobtrusive when collecting some types of netnographic data. This research also focused on four clubs from another continent to the researcher, therefore using a netnography allowed the researcher to access these groups (Fenton and Procter, 2019), akin to using VoIP. Similarly, in keeping with aspects of GT, netnographies are also inductive, allowing for data and theories to emerge (Kozinets, 2019). Table 3 summarises the differences between an ethnography and a netnography.

**Table 3: Differences and similarities between ethnographies and netnographies (adapted from Kozinets (2002: 63, 70) and Kozinets (2006: 281-282))**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Ethnography</b>	<b>Netnography</b>
<b>Research focus</b>	Human society with all its groups	Online communities
<b>Communication focus</b>	All forms of human communication including body language, tone,	Online, textual communication with multimedia elements
<b>Method</b>	Obtrusive- the researcher participates in the group	Generally unobtrusive- based on anonymous observation
<b>Data collection</b>	Real-life observation and primary data collection	Data access supported by computer-based information retrieval methods and secondary data collection
<b>Efficiency</b>	Long in duration, high in costs, slow in speed	Relatively short in duration, low in costs, fast in speed
<b>Retroactivity</b>	No	Yes

Netnographies do have limitations, often linked to the benefits of an ethnography. Firstly, in terms of generalisability, as netnographies observe the virtual self rather than physical, this means that self-simulation may occur as one can conceal one's appearance (Kozinets, 1998). The researcher has difficulties ascertaining participant demographics and identities, meaning an understanding of the population is not fully known (Kozinets, 2002). Anticipating these potential drawbacks, a technique to attempt to avoid this is triangulation which allows for the research to construct what is occurring in the data (Kozinets, 2002; 2019). This includes using other methods,

including interviews, an approach used in this thesis. Researchers conducting a netnography suggest an open and honest approach (Berger and Freund, 2012; Boellstorff et al., 2012; O'Reilly et al., 2012; Kaya et al., 2017; Fenton and Procter, 2019; Kozinets, 2019), which causes the least amount of risk to participants, demonstrating both an ethical and publishable advantage.

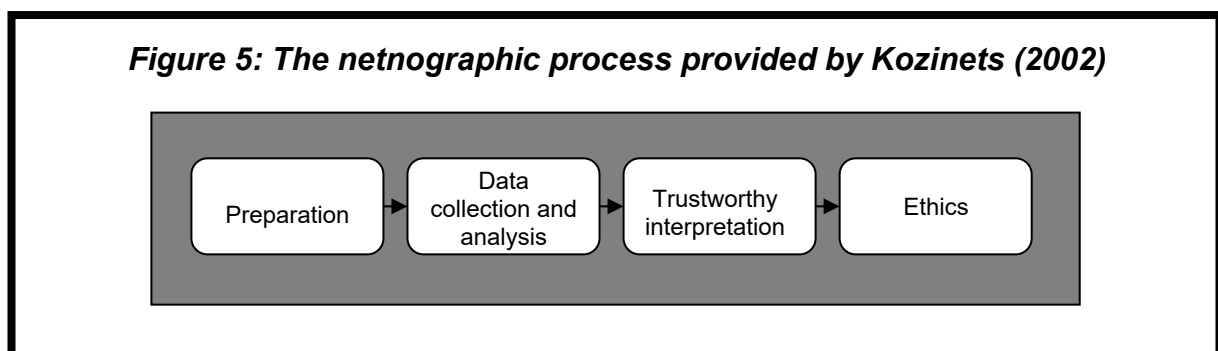
Online sport forums can provide rich data sources for researchers (Gibbons and Dixon, 2010). However, to create a structured netnographic approach, Kozinets (2002; 2019) suggests collecting three forms of data; archival, elicited and field notes:

- Archival data does not involve the researcher in the creation of data and involves summarising previously submitted comments.
- Elicited data involves discussions between the researcher and the participant, which is interrogatory in nature.
- Field note data reflects upon the interactions discovered.

For this study, elicited and archival data were used. Archival data use existing comments and messages, and passive in nature (e.g., Kavanagh et al., 2016; Litchfield et al., 2018; de Souza-Leao and Moura, 2020; Fenton et al., 2020), whereas elicited data involve participatory, direct involvement with the community under study (e.g., Kozinets, 2001; de Valck et al., 2009; Bettany and Kerrane, 2016; Lawrence, 2016). Elicited data considers initiation, investigation, immersion, interaction, integration, and incarnation (Kozinets, 2019). For the purposes of this study,

interaction and immersion are key, sharing similarities with the ideas of CGT, further justifying this use of methodology, as it provides the researcher with opportunities to engage with participants. Immersion may be all that is needed when conducting a netnography (archival data), however for some projects, interaction with the participants may be needed to fully understand the meanings gathered, for example, through online interviews (Kozinets, 2019). This method was utilised in a bid to fully understand the processes fans went through, in a detailed way, probing fans and the data they provided.

To create a practical and ethical netnography, Kozinets (2002; 2019) provided a framework for completing netnographic research, consisting of four stages, demonstrated in Figure 5.



**Preparation** covers the identification of forums to use and attempts to learn as much about them as possible. It is suggested that sites with high traffic, detailed, rich data and the ability for interactions are preferred, alongside self-selected participants, such as football fans. The second stage is **data collection and analysis**, which is easier than an ethnography as the data is already transcribed (Kozinets, 2002; Costello et

al., 2017; 2019). The data can then be directly copied into the analysis or scribed observations. As with GT, if there is sufficient richness in the forums, conclusions can be made from a small number of messages (Kozinets, 2002; 2019). The third stage is **trustworthy interpretation**. This becomes an issue in netnographies as participants can hide identities and therefore be more honest, as they may feel protected online, however it could allow them to be more dishonest. Kozinets (2002:7) believes that triangulation is “useful to help marketing researchers distinguish hardcore, marginal extremists from a more typical group of consumers”, such as passionate sports fans. The final consideration is **ethics**, for which Kozinets (2002; 2019) provides four general guidelines. Firstly, the researcher must state their presence and purpose within the online community and of the research. Secondly, ensure confidentiality and anonymity and offer opportunities for gain informed consent. Finally, incorporate feedback from participants and the research community once the theory has been developed. The application of these stages in this thesis will now be discussed, however, ethical considerations will be discussed in section 3.3.3.

#### 3.3.2.1. Sampling

The researcher identified Reddit ([www.reddit.co.uk](http://www.reddit.co.uk)) as a suitable data collection forum, due to a pre-existing thread, read by the researcher named “*how people became an LAFC fan?*”. Not only was this used for archival data but became the inspiration for conducting a netnography. Additionally, Reddit was found to be a fruitful and interesting place for discussions to take place with the participants, without

disclosing any personal, identifying features (usernames, for example). Following initial coding of interviews, tentative themes began to emerge, one of which was concerned with how people become fans. Then, each club's Reddit site was reviewed for archival data before the researcher created their own post for each club in the form of elicited data. The Reddit sites where elicited data was collected can be found in Table 4.

Reddit however represents a certain or specific demographic and therefore does not represent all football fans. For instance, only 4% of female internet users use Reddit (Duggan and Smith, 2013) and only 31% of Reddit users are female (WebsiteBuilder, 2021). Regarding age, 1 in 3 users are between the age of 18-29 years old (HubSpot, 2022). Another notable finding comes from location of Reddit users, with 47% originating from the US (HubSpot, 2022). Additionally, female fans have been found to often hide their gender on sport forums to avoid judgement from males (Fenton et al., 2021). Therefore, it is clear, even though there are significant benefits to Reddit in terms of quantity of data, it is not always representative of fans and fan bases. This means that the developed framework cannot be applied to all female, expansion and long-distance fans, especially with the limited demographic available through forums such as Reddit.

<b>Table 4: Details surrounding the Reddit sites used in the netnography</b>		
<b>Title of page</b>	<b>Reddit Site</b>	<b>Number of members as of June 2022</b>
NYCFC	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/NYCFC/">https://www.reddit.com/r/NYCFC/</a>	8231
RBNY	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/rbny/">https://www.reddit.com/r/rbny/</a>	4470
LAFC	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/LAFC/">https://www.reddit.com/r/LAFC/</a>	9435
LAG	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/LAGalaxy/">https://www.reddit.com/r/LAGalaxy/</a>	8098
MCFC	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/MCFC/">https://www.reddit.com/r/MCFC/</a>	98,532
MUFC	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/ManchesterUnited/">https://www.reddit.com/r/ManchesterUnited/</a>	117,832
LFC	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/LiverpoolFC/">https://www.reddit.com/r/LiverpoolFC/</a>	386,181
EFC	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/Everton/">https://www.reddit.com/r/Everton/</a>	32,883
EPL	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/PremierLeague/">https://www.reddit.com/r/PremierLeague/</a>	993,348
Indian Football	<a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/IndianFootball/">https://www.reddit.com/r/IndianFootball/</a>	13,153

Following an open and honest approach (Kozinets, 2002; Boellstorff et al., 2012; 2019), data collection was completed with the aim of not deceiving fans. This was completed by the researcher stating in their Reddit profile and in each post how they are not a fan of any the eight clubs and are researching a fan's journey to supporting a club. Additionally, the participant information and consent form were available to the participants with each post, included as an online link on OneDrive, linked to the author's University account, in which participants could complete the consent form. The researcher's Reddit profile provided the broad aims of the research, shown in



Figure 6. Furthermore, the elicited posts were introduced in the same way with the name of the club changed each time, demonstrated in Figure 7.

**Figure 6: A screenshot of the researcher's profile and biography on Reddit**



**Figure 7: A screenshot of a post on r/MUFC**

Hi everyone!

I am a PhD Researcher at Manchester Metropolitan University in England, assessing fans from Liverpool FC, Everton FC, Los Angeles FC, LA Galaxy, Manchester City FC, Manchester United FC, New York City FC or New York Red Bulls.

I am trying to understand **HOW people become fans of the teams they support**.

To clarify, HOW is seen as a method or process. For example if I were to ask you how you baked a cake, you'd tell me the method you took to bake that cake. **By commenting on the post you provide consent for me to use your full quote and consent to that, therefore please state otherwise.**

**I want to know the process or method that you took to the point where you then knew that you supported Manchester United FC.**

*I have posted this in another subreddit and you may have seen it, however it was against their community rules, therefore if you are seeing it again, I would prefer if you could answer again as I can't use those responses.*

Feel free to also discuss alongside how you became a fan, why you became a fan and anything else you feel is important to discuss. Feel free if you feel comfortable, to mention your location too.

- Attached is the participant information for that details more about the study: [https://stummuaac-my.sharepoint.com/:b/g/personal/18052140\\_stu\\_mmu\\_ac\\_uk/Ewd7FnHsqhCuQ5JokaH39QBiw74eZ3jW0Ha4amNNyB4pA](https://stummuaac-my.sharepoint.com/:b/g/personal/18052140_stu_mmu_ac_uk/Ewd7FnHsqhCuQ5JokaH39QBiw74eZ3jW0Ha4amNNyB4pA)
- **By commenting on the post you provide consent for me to use your full quote and consent to that**, but I have also attached the consent form which is attached as a link: [https://stummuaac-my.sharepoint.com/:b/g/personal/18052140\\_stu\\_mmu\\_ac\\_uk/EWEwszoSJWVClnznzcHEUMwBjgc-t-44EzYxlssPCmmyA5A](https://stummuaac-my.sharepoint.com/:b/g/personal/18052140_stu_mmu_ac_uk/EWEwszoSJWVClnznzcHEUMwBjgc-t-44EzYxlssPCmmyA5A) that can also be sent on to me via email on [Matthew.hutchinson3@stu.mmu.ac.uk](mailto:Matthew.hutchinson3@stu.mmu.ac.uk) (this is the ideal but I know it won't be the preferred option)!
- I will reply to some comments and replies, but not all of them, that doesn't mean your replies are not valid, I will just be seeking further clarification on some specific posts.

If you are interested in conducting an interview with this research also, please let me know either through Reddit or via email: [Matthew.hutchinson3@stu.mmu.ac.uk](mailto:Matthew.hutchinson3@stu.mmu.ac.uk)

Thank you everyone!

The fundamental element in a netnography, according to Kozinets (2002; 2019), is not to disrupt what naturally occurs on the site, therefore becoming familiar with the processes of each forum is key, meaning awareness of Reddit community rules was important. Reddit has specific community rules when it comes to posting and each site (e.g., r/NYCFC, r/LAFC) also has their own rules. The general Reddit (No date: online) rules can be found in Figure 8.

## **Figure 8: Reddit rules and content policy**

### Rule 1

Remember the human. Reddit is a place for creating community and belonging, not for attacking marginalized or vulnerable groups of people. Everyone has a right to use Reddit free of harassment, bullying, and threats of violence. Communities and users that incite violence or that promote hate based on identity or vulnerability will be banned.

### Rule 2

Abide by community rules. Post authentic content into communities where you have a personal interest, and do not cheat or engage in content manipulation (including spamming, vote manipulation, ban evasion, or subscriber fraud) or otherwise interfere with or disrupt Reddit communities.

### Rule 3

Respect the privacy of others. Instigating harassment, for example by revealing someone's personal or confidential information, is not allowed. Never post or threaten to post intimate or sexually-explicit media of someone without their consent.

### Rule 4

Do not post or encourage the posting of sexual or suggestive content involving minors.

### Rule 5

You don't have to use your real name to use Reddit, but don't impersonate an individual or an entity in a misleading or deceptive manner.

### Rule 6

Ensure people have predictable experiences on Reddit by properly labeling content and communities, particularly content that is graphic, sexually-explicit, or offensive.

### Rule 7

Keep it legal, and avoid posting illegal content or soliciting or facilitating illegal or prohibited transactions.

### Rule 8

Don't break the site or do anything that interferes with normal use of Reddit.

An issue occurred for the researcher when they posted on r/reddevils, as it was seen to break the rules of the site, according to one of the moderators. The rule that was broken was self-promotion, which said:

*“Self-Promotion by itself is not an issue. However we have always had a stance that someone must also be willing to contribute to other peoples topics and discussions as much as they promote their own. Anyone seen to be promoting their own websites/Social Media channels/Blogs/Surveys without offering anything in return, will see their sites banned, and potentially a user ban too”*

The moderator decided to ban the researcher’s post as the site has a large member base, therefore they do not allow self-promotion without contribution outside of the post. Therefore, a smaller MUFC site was discovered, identified in Table 4, and elicited data was gained there instead. The researcher also posted onto NYCFC forums; the only club specific forum site used, with forums away from Reddit originally intended as being a large source of data collection. The reason only one forum was used was due to an issue that occurred on an EFC forum site, Grand Old Club, where the researcher was blocked from posting due to similar issues described above. At this point, data had already been collected on the NYCFC forum, so it was decided to keep the post on the NYCFC forum as it gained insightful responses, however, the researcher did not proceed with other forums. Additionally, theoretical saturation had been reached meaning this additional data was not required.

### *3.3.2.2. Conducting the netnography*

This thesis made use of archival and elicited netnographic data. Archival data was gained by searching through Reddit sites of interest surrounding topics such as why

fans support the club, opinions on the rival club, marketing of their own club and other concepts that emerged through data collection in interviews. The researcher summarised this data, rather than copying it word for word. This data was then named “(insert club name) archival data”. Below are examples collected from NYCFC fans in Figure 9.

**Figure 9: Example of archival data which was summarised from posts by**

**NYCFC fans**

- Only watched USMNT and couldn't support NYRB due to the branding, supported City because could be there from the beginning, support a New York City club and build an organic connection
- Diehard Yankee fan, so them playing in the stadium was an easy sell
- Really like New York so made the team even better, but when City bought a place in the league made sense
- A New Yorker and that's all there is to it
- When NYCFC was announced chance to go in at the ground level and be there from the beginning which is rare and support domestic soccer regularly
- Grew up with Mathis, Howard, Guevara, Pope, Gavin etc as role models with the Metrostars but the rebrand, bombardment of Red Bull sponsorship and goods and gimmicks pushed me away, along with stupidly claiming New York Heritage. RB is now seen as a boring atmosphere with soccer moms and wanna be ultras.

Elicited data was collected primarily through Reddit (11 posts), with one post onto the NYCFC forum, resulting in 519 main responses. The researcher asked fans ‘*how did you become a fan of your club?*’ After this, the researcher then asked follow up questions and interacted with fans, then waited until participants stopped replying to the post and any follow up questions posted by the researcher before analysing the data. Kozinets (2002), like grounded theorists (Glaser, 1978; Charmaz, 2014; Corbin and Strauss, 2015; Glaser and Strauss, 2017) suggests that data collection and

analysis should be conducted simultaneously. This occurred throughout initial coding, with both netnographic data and interviews conducted and analysed concurrently. Part of the complexity of a netnography is recontextualising the data through coding, however, analysis through QSR NVivo, assisted in this process (Kozinets, 2002; Stavros et al., 2014; Stockinger, 2015; Wang, 2019).

### **3.3.3. Ethical considerations**

Initial ethical approval for this research was granted by Manchester Metropolitan University Ethical Committee on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 2019. Ethical considerations for interviews were relatively straight forward. The researcher gained informed consent from all interviewees, by completing the consent form upon reading the participant information form, both found within the appendix of this thesis. Participants were sent both forms via email, due to the long-distance and virtual nature of this research. Participants were firstly provided with a number that corresponded to their consent form based on the order they were interviewed (1-33), they were then given a specific club fan number, alongside netnography data (for example LAFC fan 36). All of these identifiers were stored on a password protected Excel spreadsheet, adhering to anonymity and confidentiality guidelines.

In a netnography, ethics is trickier than in any other type of social science research and therefore warrants a more detailed discussion. Every decision in a netnography has ethical considerations, whether data was included or excluded (Kozinets, 2015).

Participants' responses can be traced back to a specific account, which may directly identify an individual by either name or picture, however unlikely (Kozinets, 2015). In a bid to avoid the tracing of participants, every consented quote was anonymised and paraphrased. The researcher then searched for it in Google to make sure that each quote could not be traced back to the poster. A consent form was provided and preferred, but no participant completed this. Instead, the researcher made it explicit that consent was provided, when taking part in the elicited part of the netnographic approach by participants replying to the researcher's parent post. The researcher stated, 'by replying to this post, you are giving your consent for your data to be used in accordance with the participant information form attached (via link)'.

The second ethical issue with a netnography is whether to directly copy quotes from archival online sites (Kozinets, 2002; 2019). To avoid the labour of attempting to gain consent from every member who had posted archivally, the researcher instead named this data as "(insert club name) archival data". This is broadly representative of other studies which avoided publishing participants' usernames (e.g., Jones, 2017; Pedersen and Lupton, 2018). Sudweeks and Rafaeli (1996) believe that written, informed consent is not required in a netnography if anonymity is ensured, something this research followed, with all archival data summarised, rather than copied verbatim, as well as no usernames used.

The third issue with a netnography is avoiding deception and being as honest as possible about what the research entails (Boellstorff et al., 2012; Kozinets, 2019), yet

this can bring with it several issues, by revealing too much about the study (Kozinets, 2019). Despite this, the researcher chose to include the broad aims of this research in their online biography and included the participant information and consent form in elicited posts, following advice from Kozinets (2019), demonstrated in Figures 6 and 7. However, as this research uses GT, the core category was not fully known, meaning participants were not fully aware of the research aims.

For ethical considerations, data protection must also be highlighted. Data, due to the international nature of this study, crossed multiple countries and continents, through either the netnography or through interviews and therefore could be bound by the transfer of data within various countries. However, the researcher was always based in the UK when conducting data collection, therefore data was not transferred. Furthermore, when considering netnographic data, it is situated on the internet, meaning it is broadly freely accessible to everyone (Kozinets, 2019). Additionally, the research was granted ethical clearance from Manchester Metropolitan University, it is therefore bound by UK and University policy and the participants were always in control of their own data and could withdraw consent at any time (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

What follows is detail on how the data were analysed using CGT coding, with worked examples from within this thesis to assist in understanding the analysis process of this research.



### *3.4. Variants of Grounded Theory*

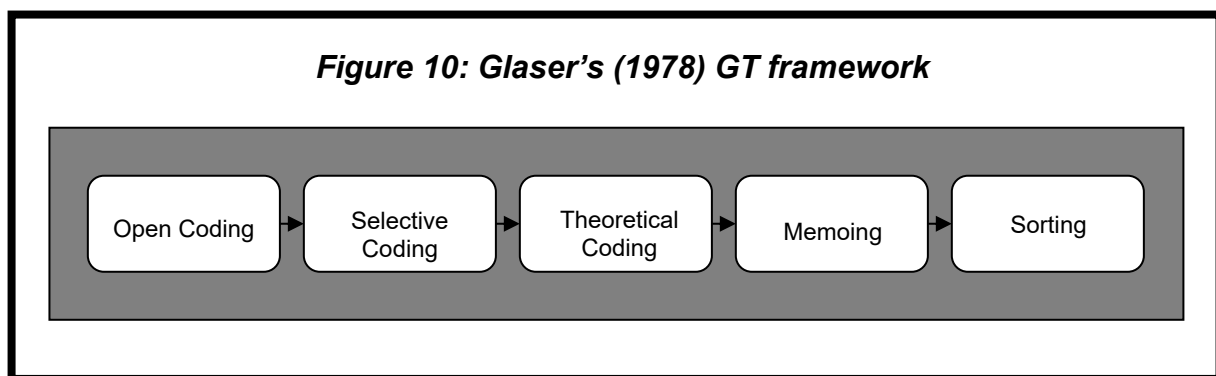
Now that an understanding has been gained surrounding how data was collected, it is useful to now understand the various ways in which data can be analysed in GT. Glaser and Strauss first set out GT, however once their planned projects ended, focused on different paths (Kelle, 2005). In 1978, Glaser further developed GT, providing practical advice to researchers undertaking GT, explained theoretical coding, providing a list of theoretical coding families for the first time, and introduced memoing (Glaser, 1978). In contrast, Strauss published 'Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists' (1987) and then 'Basics of Qualitative Research' with Juliet Corbin (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Both texts had an emphasis on the interpretation of data and theory building, bringing in the role of the researcher. More recently, Kathy Charmaz (2000; 2014) developed CGT which broadly cohered with the work of Glaser and further emphasised the role of the researcher. Charmaz developed CGT in a bid to bridge the gap between Glaser's and Strauss and Corbin's frameworks, and this has recently become one of the most prominent versions of GT (Flick, 2018). The three approaches of Glaser, Strauss and Corbin and finally, the approach chosen for this research, Charmaz (2014), are summarised in Table 5. Following this, each variation of GT is briefly summarised.

**Table 5: The differences between the different GT frameworks, originally taken from Gillani (2014) and adapted by Cowley (2018: 22)**

<b>Parameters</b>	<b>Strauss and Corbin</b>	<b>Glaser</b>	<b>Charmaz</b>
<b>Philosophical Underpinning</b>	Interpretivist	Positivist	Constructivist
<b>Data analysis objective</b>	Substantive theory development or detailed description of phenomena	Core category development, entailing participants main concerns and ways they process those concerns	Substantive theory development or detailed description of phenomena
<b>Coding Process</b>	Open – axial – selective	Open – substantive – theoretical	Initial – focused – theoretical
<b>Inductive- deductive</b>	Inductive	Initially inductive then deductive at theoretical sampling	Inductive-abductive
<b>A priori Knowledge</b>	Brief overview and then in-depth comparison to literature	No prior knowledge	Brief overview then prior knowledge brought into analysis to compare emerged insights
<b>Methodological Procedures</b>	Degree of freedom on employment of procedural tools/steps	All procedures of the methodology are rigidly followed	Researcher can ignore or reject procedural step
<b>Evaluation Criteria</b>	Validity and Reliability, Credibility and truthfulness, Rigor	Fit, Workability, Relevance, Modifiability	Credibility, Originality, Resonance, Usefulness

### 3.4.1. Glaser's Grounded Theory approach:

Glaser's (1978) coding approach, viewed as the classic approach, is in two stages: substantive and theoretical. It is a process of open, selective, and theoretical coding. GT is, quite simply, according to Glaser (1978; 1992; 1998) the development of emergent conceptual categories and their properties integrated into hypotheses resulting in a multivariate theory. Figure 10 shows a simplified diagram of Glaser's framework, but it should be noted that it is not a linear process; researchers can turn back where appropriate. This is the same for all diagrams that demonstrate each framework, with memoing occurring throughout the process.



In open coding the data should be examined line by line, at sentence level. It discovers an emergent set of categories which fit, work and are relevant for being built into a theory (Glaser, 1978). Glaser (1978: 57) states that the researcher asks questions of the data during open coding such as "What is the data a study of? What part does this incident take in emerging theory? What is actually happening in the data?". At this stage, memoing should occur, interpreting any ideas that arise. Selective coding involves coding around emergent categories from the open coding process. It is the stage of data analysis where core concept/s are identified (Mills et al., 2010). Finally, theoretical coding occurs around one or two 'core' categories and considers the

relationships between different codes (Glaser, 1978). Glaser developed 18 coding families to assist in the theoretical coding process including the six C's (causes, context, contingencies, consequences, covariances and conditions), degree, dimension, interactive, theoretical, process, dimension, and type (Glaser, 1978; Urquhart, 2013; Charmaz, 2014; Urquhart, 2019) (Tables 6 and 7). Glaser (1978) states that families may overlap, and new theoretical codes can be created from existing ones and this process is not mandatory.

**Table 6: Original coding families from Glaser (1978: 73-82)**

Family	Examples
The Six C's	Causes (sources, reasons, explanations, accountings or anticipated consequences), Context or Ambiance, Contingencies, Consequences (outcomes, efforts, functions, predictions, anticipated, unanticipated), Covariances, Conditions or Qualifiers.
Process	Stage, Staging, Phases, Phasing, Progressions, Passages, Gradation, Transitions, Steps, Ranks, Careers, Ordering, Trajectories, Chains, Sequencing, Temporalizing, Shaping, Cycling
Degree	Limit, Range, Intensity, Extent, Amount, Polarity, Extreme, Boundary, Rank, Grades, Continuum, Probability, Possibility, Level, Cutting Points, Critical Juncture, Statistical Average (mean, median, mode), Deviation, Exemplar, Modicum, Full, Partial, Almost, Half.
Dimension	Dimensions, Elements, Divisions, Piece of, Properties of, Facet, Slice, Sector, Portion, Segment, Part, Aspect, Section.
Type	Type, Form, Kinds, Styles, Classes, Genre.
Strategy	Strategies, Tactics, Mechanisms, Managed, Way, Manipulation, Manoeuvring, Dealing with, Handling, Techniques, Ploys, Means, Goal, Arrangements, Dominating, Positioning.
Interactive	Mutual Effects, Reciprocity, Mutual Trajectory, Mutual Dependency, Interdependence, Interaction of effects, Covariance, Face to Face Interactions, Self-indications, Delayed-interaction, Symbolic Interaction (Glaser, 1998).
Identity-Self	Self-image, Self-concept, Self-worth, Self-evaluation, Identity, Social worth, Self-realisation, Transformation of self, Conversions of identity.

<b>Family</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Cutting Point	Boundary, Critical juncture, Cutting point, Turning point, Benchmark, Division, Cleavage, Scales, In-out, Intra-extra, Tolerance levels, Dichotomy, Trichotomy, Polychotomy, Deviance, Point of no return.
Means-goal	End, Purpose, Goal, Anticipated consequences, Products.
Cultural	Social norms, Social values, Social belief, Social Sentiments.
Consensus	Clusters, Agreements, Contracts, Definitions of Situation, Uniformities, Opinions, Conflict, Discensus, Differential perception, Cooperation, Homogeneity-heterogeneity, Conformity, Nonconformity, Mutual expectation.
Mainline	Social control, Recruitment, Socialization, Stratification, Status passage, Social organization, Social order, Social interaction, Social mobility
Theoretical	Parsimony, Scope, Integration, Density, Conceptual level, Relationship to data, Relationship to other theory, Clarity, Fit, Relevance, Modifiability, Utility, Condensability, Inductive-Deductive balance and interfeeding, degree of, Multivariate structure, Use of theoretical codes, Interpretive, Explanatory, Predictive Power.
Ordering or Elaboration	Structural Ordering (unit size of: organization, division), Temporal Ordering (A->B-->C), Conceptual Ordering (Achievement Orientation, Institutional Goal, Organizational value, Personal Motivation)
Unit	Collective, Group, Nation, Organization, Aggregate, Situation, Context, Arena, Social world, Behaviour pattern, Territorial Units, Society, Family.
Reading	Concepts, Problems, Hypotheses
Models	Linear model, Property Space

<b>Family</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Basics	Basic Social Structural Process, Basic Social Structural Condition (shifts, semesters, quarters, fiscal), Basic Social Psychological Process (teaching, child rearing, learning curves, becoming, education, grieving, maturing), Basic Psychological Process (identity development, character formation, loving, unconscious agendas)
Paired Opposite	Ingroup-Outgroup (in-out), Manifest-Latent, Explicit-Tant, Figure-Ground, Normative-Comparative, Reduction-Substruction, Induction-Deduction, Generative-Verificational, Unit-Concept
Representation	Descriptive, Proscriptive, Prescriptive, Evaluative, Sentimental. Proper lining, Interpreting, Vauging, Base-lining, Conceptualising
Scale	Likert Scales, Guttman Scales, Cumulative Scales, Random Walk Scale, Funnelling Down, Scaling Down
Structural Functional	Authority Structure, Reference Groups, Role Sets, Status Sets
Boundary	Confidence Limit, Tolerance Zone, Front Line
Unit Identity	Professions
Average	Mean, Median, Mode, Confidence Limit, Tolerance Zones

Despite the number of coding families, Charmaz (2014: 66) argues that there are many absent, especially surrounding “agency and action, power, networks, and narrative and biography”. For theoretical coding, it is often better not to use them at all if they are falsely created, forced, or misapplied to the research (Glaser, 1978). Charmaz (2014) supports this sentiment, although considers how theoretical codes can add

clarity and coherence to the developing theory. However, in this instance, it is worth stating that theoretical coding was not conducted in this study, with the level of focused coding viewed as being sufficient for theory creation and the process not being mandatory.

Originally, Glaser and Strauss (1967) highlighted constant comparison as the key method of data analysis. It is described as comparing findings with existing findings that emerge. The aim of constant comparison is to allow for categories to emerge from the data (Kelle, 2005). Constant comparison is comparing data, labelled as a particular category, with other instances of data in the same category (Glaser, 1978). Firmer advice from Glaser and Strauss (1967: 105) is to code “each incident into as many categories of analysis as possible”. A multitude of categories will be developed in this process and therefore part of it is reducing them based upon frequency of occurrence or connection to other categories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). There are four stages to this process, detailed in Table 8.



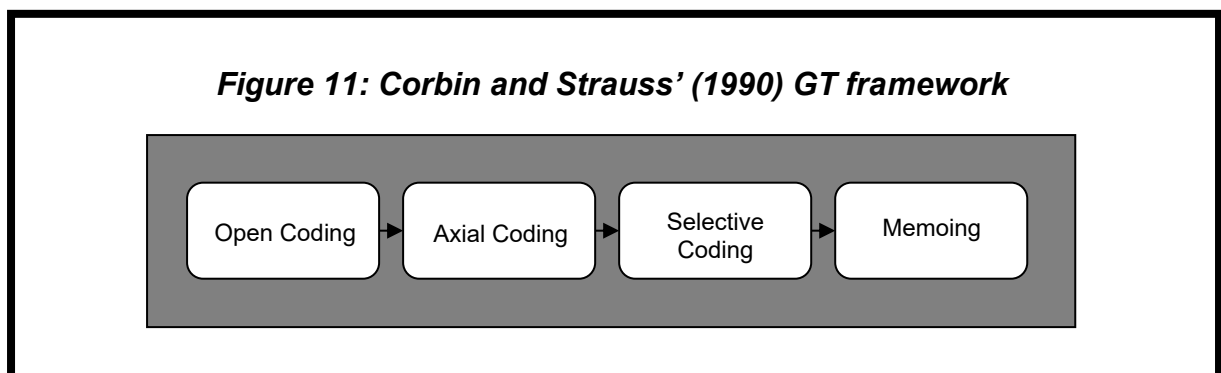
<b>Table 8: The constant comparison method as detailed by Glaser and Strauss (1967)</b>	
<b>Stage</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Stage 1: Comparing incidents applicable to each category</b>	Coding each incident into as many categories as possible, which starts to generate theoretical properties of the category as the researcher takes apart the story within the data.
<b>Stage 2: Integrating categories and properties</b>	The analysis changes from comparing incident to incident, to incident with properties of category that resulted from initial comparisons of incident. Diverse properties start to become integrated and with theoretical sampling integration should emerge itself.
<b>Stage 3: Delimiting the theory</b>	Occurs at theory and category level. At theory level, major modifications become fewer and fewer and eventually clarifying the logic. At a category level, there is a reduction in the amount, allowing for more time on constant comparison.
<b>Stage 4: Writing the theory</b>	At this point, the researcher possesses coded data, memos and theory, but can return to coded data to validate points whenever necessary.

Throughout coding the researcher should stop to write a memo where they see fit (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), encouraging comparison to occur. Memos, and their use in this thesis, are further discussed in section 3.5.3.

### **3.4.2. Corbin and Strauss' Grounded Theory approach:**

Strauss and Corbin formulated their version of GT in 1990, rejecting the positivist approach set out by Glaser (1978). Strauss and Corbin (1997) do not believe in the existence of a pre-existing reality, suggesting that to consider that, takes a positivistic

stance. Corbin and Strauss (1990) established their own GT framework, following a process of open, axial, selective coding, and memoing, again completed throughout (see Figure 11).



Corbin and Strauss (2015) believe the researcher should ask the data what, who, how, when, how long, where, and how much, with the result being a list of categories attached to the text. Open coding shares similarities with Glaser, such as single words or sentences to describe small parts of text. Axial coding creates relationships between categories and elaborates upon them, then the categories most relevant are selected (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). Finally, selective coding identifies one central category, with facets and sub-dimensions below this, and calls for a high level of theoretical sensitivity (Mills et al., 2010).

The idea of the forcing vs emerging approach filters into data analysis. For example, Glaser (1992) believed that using axial coding and coding paradigms, developed by Corbin and Strauss (2015), encourages researchers to force categories on to the data. Glaser (1992) views this as contaminating, constraining, and inhibiting any effort by the researcher to generate theory (Kelle, 2005). Some believed coding families as a

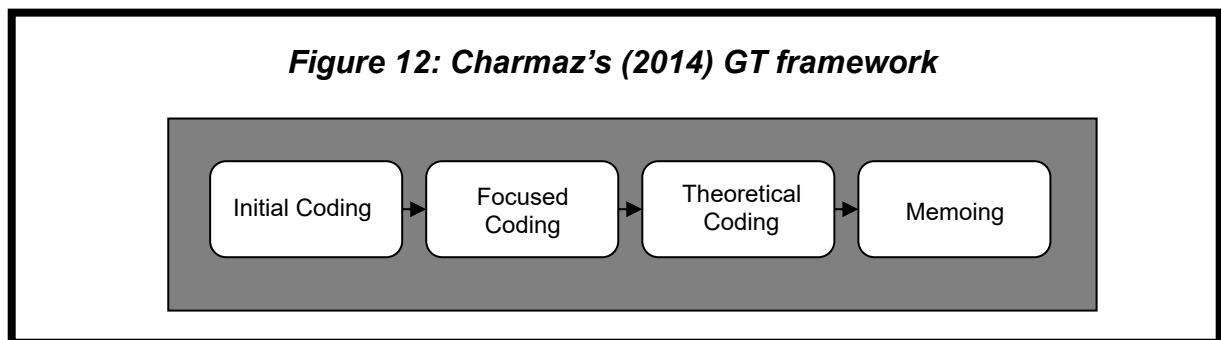
way of forcing frameworks upon the data, however, it should only be used as the core category emerges and any coding families can be used, not just Glaser's.

As an extension to Strauss and Corbin's (2015) GT, Clarke set out situational analysis. Situational analysis conducts all the conventional forms of GT, but assesses the complex situations in the world, alongside variation and differences (Clarke and Friese, 2007). The aim was to develop GT towards a postmodern methodology (Clarke, 2007). When conducting a situational analysis, the "conditions of the situation are in the situation" (Clarke, 2007: 13). The Situational Matrix focuses on the situation of action and conditions such as political economic elements, non-human elements, symbolic elements, local to global elements, spatial and temporal elements, for example (Clarke, 2005). Situational analysis contains situational maps, social works / arenas maps and positional maps, with Clarke (2007) stating that these should be used as analytical tools and supplement traditional GT analysis. However, Glaser disagrees with this process, believing it forces the data.

### **3.4.3. Charmaz's Grounded Theory approach:**

The third variant of GT, and one chosen for this research, is constructivist GT. Kathy Charmaz developed the constructivist variant of GT, to bridge the gap between Glaser's and Strauss and Corbin's frameworks, to unite the field and to overcome any epistemological shortcomings. It has thus become one of the most prominent versions of GT (Flick, 2018). Justification for choosing this framework is highlighted in this

section, with a breakdown of the coding framework containing illustrative examples of how each stage of coding was conducted section 3.5. A simplified version of Charmaz’s coding framework can be found in Figure 12.



CGT is structured around initial, focused and theoretical coding, with memoing conducted throughout. Initial coding is completed word by word, line by line, paragraph by paragraph or incident by incident (Urquhart, 2013; Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014), akin to open coding (Glaser, 1978; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Focused coding is based around significant and frequent initial codes (Charmaz, 2014; Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014). Codes are then assessed for relevance as they become more tentative conceptual categories (Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical coding for Charmaz (2014), is broadly similar to Glaser, supporting the use of theoretical where suitable and appropriate, but again are not mandatory.

Mills et al. (2006: 32) called for a shift to a constructivist approach, stating that “revealing the researcher as the author of a construction of experience and meaning is an important next step in GT research”. Prior to this, the researcher was seen as a “distant expert” (Charmaz, 2000: 513). Yet, CGT focuses on constructed meanings

from interpretations of the data (Weed, 2017), with meanings allowed to emerge. A further way in which CGT becomes applicable here is that it allows the researcher to focus on social, historical, temporal, and situational factors of what participants say. This is alongside the processes and experiences of those under study (Charmaz, 2017), in this case, how people become football fans. This contrasts with previous versions of GT which simply covered what their experiences were, rather than external forces which caused them to occur. In the views of the researcher the processes of becoming a sports fan required CGT. This is due to sport fandom, which as has been highlighted in Chapter 2, incorporates a range of factors and issues that require exploration through a constructivist approach. The complexities of which could not be accounted for in, for instance, a questionnaire, which would not allow for categories to emerge.

CGT states that concepts and categories emerge from the researcher's interactions with the problem (Charmaz, 2000; 2017). Charmaz (2014) believes the role of the researcher to be vitally important in constructing the theory, deeming that theories should not be applied upon participants but discovered and formulated with them. CGT argues that just as the method that the researcher uses influences the study, what the researcher brings to the study also influences the findings (Charmaz, 2014). A further justification for adopting CGT is that Charmaz (2014: 12) believes that we should take the "researcher's position, privileges, perspectives and interactions into account as an inherent part of research reality". This has further implications when considering the researcher's position as a football fan, meaning my position, privileges, perspectives,

and interactions are constructed with the participants, in this case the fans. However, this relies upon the researcher's ability to construct the participants' thoughts and bring in their own experiences. Due to the benefits of co-construction, CGT is advantageous for understanding areas which are underdeveloped and vague (Charmaz, 2014). Broadly, fandom is confusing and difficult to garner unanimous understanding, as evidenced in Chapter 2, and also the three fan categories are as yet poorly understood, highlighted in Chapter 4, thus highlighting the suitability of CGT for addressing the research questions.

Within GT, there are issues surrounding forcing and emergence and one of the core pillars of GT is to avoid preconceptions being forced onto the data. Firstly, this research had two literature reviews, the first contained literature surrounding the broad fandom topics, whilst the second focused on the emerged core category. This only began once the researcher knew about the core category and only then, to avoid any forcing of the data. When considering the researcher and his pre-conceptions, it is important to say that the researcher is a football and sports fan and would humbly acknowledge is a knowledgeable one. Therefore, the researcher had to be, and was, cautious not to force any pre-conceptions onto the data. These interpretations and pre-conceptions were discussed with the supervisory team on a regular basis, through supervisory meetings. Additionally, discussions during teaching classes and other conference presenting discussions, allowed for the researcher's interpretations to be checked. However, due to the researcher's philosophical beliefs, the main pre-conception that was acknowledged was that each fan's journey into fandom was

different and would depend on the researcher's own experiences. A further way in which any preconceptions were managed were through the constant checking and analysis of data. Specifically, data was analysed firstly using QSR NVivo, known to force the data, before eventually moving to a paper-based analysis method, which kept the researcher closer to the data. By continuing to analyse the data in this way, and repeatedly discussing and checking the data with the supervisory team of the researcher, among others, pre-conceptions were checked all in order to prevent the developing theory from being forced.

To summarise, the justification for using CGT is evident, specifically as it allows for the researcher's position, privileges, perspectives, and interactions as a football fan, to become part of the emerging theory, constructing thoughts alongside the participant. Indeed, ignoring the author's influential role upon the research is seen as ill-advised (Charmaz, 2014; Ramalho et al., 2015). CGT allows the researcher to understand the processes, considering social, historical, and temporal factors (Charmaz, 2017), rather than just simply considering what the participants views were.

### *3.5. Data analysis*

As has been mentioned above, Charmaz's approach to GT was deemed suitable for this research for a range of reasons. Firstly, ignoring the author's influential role upon the research is seen as impossible (Charmaz, 2014; Ramalho et al., 2015). This section addresses how the data collected, in this case through interviews and a

netnography, was analysed using CGT. Charmaz (2014) views coding as labelling and distilling. This allows the researcher to grasp the data and make comparisons with other segments of data (constant comparison). Coding allows the researcher to begin an analytic accounting of codes, distancing themselves from analytic interpretations and instead shaping the frame that builds the analysis (Charmaz, 2014). What follows is guidance for how each stage of analysis, according to Charmaz (2014), should be conducted, followed by its application in this research. It should be noted that theoretical coding was not employed in this research as it was deemed not useful for the analysis of this thesis as it is an optional part of the GT process (Glaser, 1978) and they did not emerge from the data.

### **3.5.1. Initial coding**

Initial coding is completed word by word, line by line, paragraph by paragraph or incident by incident (Urquhart, 2013; Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014), akin to open coding (Glaser, 1978; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). At this point, ideas on the framework start to develop, yet the researcher should be wary of forcing theory onto data (Charmaz, 2014). It is short, spontaneous, quick, simple and use precise codes, assessing what the process is and how it is defined and felt (Charmaz, 2014; Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014). In CGT, initial coding encourages early thought around theory creation. Charmaz (2014) suggests sticking close to the data and by simultaneous collection and analysis, initial coding allows for the researcher to find a lack of data in emerging concepts, meaning theoretical sampling can occur. It is

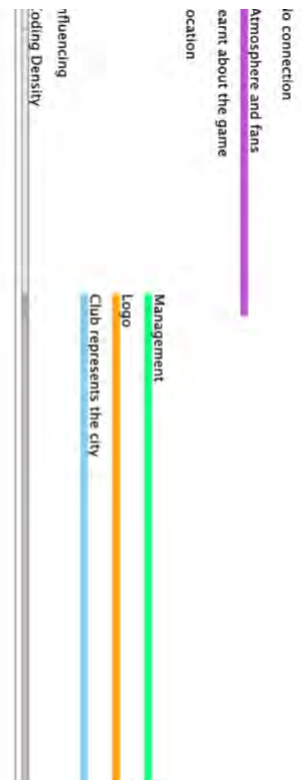


suggested that speed and spontaneity are applied to initial coding, sparking thinking of theory (Charmaz, 2014).

Initial coding in this thesis created 225 codes from 12 netnographic posts and 33 interviews. The online sources were inputted as full documents at this point onto QSR NVivo 12™. Using computer software for memos and analysis is generally seen as quicker and easier to complete and undo actions, keeping the work relatively clean, compared to a manual method (Saldaña, 2015). However, researchers must be careful not to fall into fixing labels to a piece of data and then assigning more data to it afterwards, and therefore forcing the data (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). Benefits of QSR NVivo 12™ include coding strips (Hutchison et al., 2010) which were useful in the initial coding stage, as the researcher continued to go back over transcripts (see Figure 13). Ghauri and Firth (2009) expanded upon Hutchison et al. (2010), discussing NVivo's potential for storing and dealing with large amounts of data and of many different forms of data such as PDFs and Word documents. This was particularly useful with the range of documents and data added to the software. Yet, finding patterns when using the software is difficult (Ghauri and Firth, 2009). QSR NVivo 12™ eventually did not become the dominant tool for coding, with a manual approach preferred due to difficulties detailed later in the following section. Through initial coding, the theme of how someone became a fan was emerging, therefore the researcher at this point focused on this theme for netnographic data. Table 9 displays examples of initial coding.

**Figure 13: Screenshot from a transcript in NVivo, highlighting the coding strips to demonstrate what has been coded**

R: So, I have been watching football since about 2010 with the World Cup was when I got into it and I would just watch the European game and international matches. But I've never really had an MLS Club that I supported, I would go to Galaxy Games, but that was mostly out of it was like the only choice here and when I went to Galaxy Games the atmosphere felt very inauthentic. Everything about MLS just in general felt inauthentic to me, it felt manufactured. It felt more like the type of atmosphere that you would see at a baseball game here where it's just families with their kids going out for a night out. Nobody's really into what's happening on the field and when I went to Europe in 2015 I watched a game at the Bernabéu and I went to a game at the Emirates. I was like man and I see it all the time on TV like this is on another level like these people like is what a lot of people their lives revolve around this so I wanted something like that here. And then when LAFC was announced. I think was 2015 or 16. I was originally mostly into it just 'cause the logo looks cool. So I bought a cap, but I was, I was reading. A lot about their vision and they talked a lot about how they wanted to represent LA like the identity of the city because it's a very diverse city. They wanted to reach out to the different communities. I felt like they didn't want to leave anyone out. They got a lot of the fan input when it came to designing the stadium and wanted to match the atmosphere that they wanted to create and I read a book about Real Madrid and why they are so successful and it's because a lot of these big clubs in Europe and around the world, they are not just football clubs their brands and then represent the identity and culture of their supporters there in their city and I feel like



**Table 9: Examples of open coding from this research**

Source	Quote	NVivo initial codes
<b>David: Everton</b>	It's all business and the owners don't give a flying **** the managers and players probably don't give that much of a flying ****. Either they'll play for whoever you know the transfer market will show you that way while they're being paid.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anti-corporate</li> <li>- Players and managers don't care</li> </ul>
<b>Tom: MCFC</b>	I actually went two summers ago they did the International Champions Cup, Manchester City played Real Madrid in Los Angeles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Friendlies abroad</li> <li>- Access to a club they support</li> </ul>
<b>Ben: Everton</b>	I don't mind watching on my own because ultimately it's just the train really where you're on your own 'cause you always bump into people when you're up there	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Going it alone</li> <li>- Travelling to games</li> <li>- Meeting new people</li> </ul>
<b>Female footballs fans: Reddit thread</b>	In 2015 I moved to Boston where there are a ton of Liverpool fans (LFC and the Red Sox are both owned by FSG). I like to think one way or another I would have found my way home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sister clubs</li> <li>- Same owners</li> <li>- Other sports</li> </ul>
<b>How did you become an LA Galaxy fan? Reddit thread</b>	I was looking for another club to support consistently during hockey's offseason. I like baseball, but it wasn't sufficient enough.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Time of year or day</li> </ul>

### **3.5.2. Focused coding**

Decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense are at the centre of focused coding (Charmaz, 2014). Focused coding is based around significant and frequent initial codes (Charmaz, 2014; Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014). Codes are then assessed for relevance as they become more tentative conceptual categories (Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014). However, CGT allows for theoretical directions to be kept, rather than becoming too narrow in focus. This is a step away from classic grounded theorists who are sceptical of maintaining too many codes or descriptions (Sebastian, 2019). Focused coding is more directed, selective, and conceptual than initial coding and helps manage pre-conceptions by using constant comparison methods, by keeping the codes close to the data (Charmaz, 2014). Focused coding is an emergent process, which uses codes to explain larger sections of text (Charmaz, 2014). The aim here is to identify the core category (Glaser, 1978; 1998; 2005; Charmaz, 2014), which once emerged, can be used to help guide future data collection and analysis.

Choosing a core category too early in the process can limit the practicality of theory and the analytical representation of the final theory and therefore the researcher must remain open to modifying their codes and “be surprised by the data” (Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014: 8). Charmaz (2014) states that researchers could return to earlier respondents or use theoretical sampling to focus on previously unexplained topics

which may change the broader focus of the central category. This demonstrates how coding frameworks, are not linear processes. Yet, a key difference between Charmaz and Glaser, is that these processes are not prescribed and can be applied flexibly.

This process resulted in 519 responses from the netnographic data, with the researcher using identifiable features (gender, location) to segment the fans. Despite this, some information was not available and therefore given the title unidentifiable and could only be used when discussing participants' specific choice of club (expansion club). When approaching focused coding, the researcher identified that many of the initial codes that emerged were socialisation agents. This resulted in engaging in netnographic elicited data which asked fans 'how they became a fan' of their favourite club. Furthermore, it was at this stage where the researcher focused on which group participants would enter (long-distance, female or expansion club fan). This was assessed based upon factors in their data or any known demographics and whether that meant their socialisation was due to them being in one group of fan or another. This was completed for two purposes. One, to avoid repetition of data throughout the study, and second, to make evident through attentive coding, what each participant was disclosing to the researcher. This process became difficult, as data needed to be isolated for each objective/fan group. Therefore, a QSR NVivo 12™ document with all the socialisation agents and data inside was saved, before then resaving documents named after each objective and then deleting all data that was unrelated to that objective, for example, all **MCFC**, **MUFC**, **LFC**, **EFC**, **LAG** and **NYRB** data sets were deleted for expansion club fans, with only **LAFC** and **NYCFC** data remaining in this

document. This then helped understand the most salient socialisation agents for each objective and whether there is a need to study the segments differently, in terms of socialisation agents.

Everyone who provided a response were given a number, for example, NYCFC fan 1. As stated previously, elicited data was coded as 12 individual documents, however when conducting focused coding, the researcher turned each parent comment into a file on QSR NVivo 12™. This encompassed comments from the researcher, the poster, or any other members of that community. A parent comment is the first comment posted after the researcher's post. Table 10 highlights several focused codes.

<b>Table 10: Examples of focused coding from this research</b>		
<b>Source</b>	<b>Quote</b>	<b>NVivo focused codes</b>
<b>NYCFC fan 24</b>	I always liked Frank Lampard when I would watch Chelsea games in the morning when I was a kid.	Players
<b>LAFC fan 3</b>	The only time I can remember any affinity for the Galaxy is opening up an earlier FIFA and simply choosing them because they were the top US club in the game.	Video Games
<b>LAG fan 50</b>	I went to the Galaxy vs Barcelona game and from that day on I became a fan	Pre-season friendlies
<b>EFC fan 1</b>	I plan to also talk about being a fan of Everton FC, I became one more recently than a LA Galaxy fan, and it was actually Donovan who led me to that choice.	Player from the fans home country
<b>MCFC fan 92</b>	When I began my university experience in 2015, we discussed sporting events a lot throughout the foundation year degree. I always found myself looking at Man City and the events that they put on. It wasn't until my final year of university during the Sports and Events unit where a lot of the coursework was focused around Man City FC that I started to realise how intrigued by this club and their match-day events I was.	University

After completing this process, the body of data was reviewed and it was decided that it was best to complete manual coding, with data printed and analysed using pen and paper. The core reason for this was difficulty in understanding what was being coded, with the researcher aiming to select either the first impact on fandom or what respondents clarified as their main impact. This firstly meant that the researcher

needed to sort all data needed for long-distance fans, expansion club fans and female fans into groups. The researcher read through each piece of data, highlighting the first or each fan's highlighted most significant impact, following initial coding guidelines. Then, each one was distilled and grouped to create the focused codes of these socialisation agents, with the role played identified. For example, family is a socialisation agent, with the role played by the socialisation agent the detail behind them, such as gifting or obligation. More detail on this is discussed in Chapter 5.

From this point, socialisation agents and the roles they played were then grouped into three areas. In the context of this research, it emerged that there were two ways that fans were impacted by clubs, either **Person-Person** or **Club-Person**, with the latter split into **direct** or **indirect**. At this point theoretical coding was considered, however it was decided that it was not suitable for this study as the focused codes were grouped as above. These three concepts combine to form the *Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework* which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Finally, it was at this point literature was considered. Charmaz (2014) states that once the core category has emerged, the researcher must engage deeply with the literature and weave it into the developing theory but that an initial review should occur. This helps clarify ideas, make comparisons, and allows the reader to see where the work fits into or extends the field. This is broadly in synergy with the thoughts of Glaser. For this thesis, the literature was used as a source of data to be compared with the data collected through interviews and netnography (Glaser, 1998). The literature is crucial



in deepening understanding of the emerged core category, and in the case of this study, literature (Chapter 4) greatly assisted in understanding the various groups of fans that were under study (Parahoo, 2009). This led to literature being coded and therefore being treated in the same way as the data collected (Glaser, 1992). The GT should determine the frame of the final review, with researchers advised to look beyond the immediate substantive area, make links to other areas, contribute to new topics and / or assess a new group of participants (Charmaz, 2014). In whatever way the researcher uses the literature, it is essential that data are the priority (Ramalho et al., 2015).

### **3.5.3. Memoing**

Memos document the theorising process, develop the model, and occur throughout the analysis (Glaser, 1978; Corbin and Strauss, 2015). They are viewed as a storehouse of ideas (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). Memos can be long and thoughtful but not just a list of codes and concepts (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). “Detailed memo-writing during the entire analysis process requires writing down ideas, assumed associations, and theoretical reflections related to each of the emerging categories” (Hallberg, 2006: 144). Charmaz (2014) views memos as a crucial key step between data collection and writing the theory as they can indicate where theoretical saturation occurs. Memos can be used for directly writing the theory and help keep the researcher involved in the whole process. This allows for new ideas and insights to emerge. Additionally, Charmaz (2014) believes that memo-writing should be done

quickly, which helps to spark ideas about the emergent theory. There is also the idea of verbal memoing which was aided by recording interviews (Mouratidou et al., 2020). Memos assist in developing a storyline and open data exploration, by making comparisons with other pieces of data and asking questions of the data (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). This process allows for raw data to be brought into the theory, keeping the researchers' voice present alongside that of the participants (Charmaz, 2001), helps develop the potential framework and concepts (Charmaz, 2014) and moves the analysis forward (Corbin and Strauss, 2015).

Memos were used for varying purposes in this study. For instance, one surrounded the developments of the segmentation of fans, whilst another involved a discussion around the effect of gender on parental influences on how a person becomes a fan, noting that at some point, this needed to be broken down into male and female. An example of a memo from this study can be found in Figure 14, which talks about locality and the negative connotations of not supporting your local club, based off what participants said.

**Figure 14: An example of memos completed throughout data analysis**

*"I assume it's like this in England as well, but there is there's kind of like a negative connotation to supporting clubs in the US from you know from a city where you have no connection to" (Sammy, LAFC)*

Sammy here is discussing the negative connotations of not supporting local and therefore showing how important local is to him. However, to compare American soccer to English soccer, is an interesting case, trying to compare themselves to the larger leagues and their fans and assuming that fans are similar. However, Alan demonstrates what he believes is the opinion of fans is when you don't have any connection to the place.

*"It does, but also makes it harder as cause I don't have the accent, people think your jumping on the bandwagon and glory hunting and stuff, but I think cause of like work and family and costs and stuff, support goes up and down anyway, so I give what I can and when, so it would be nice to go to more games, but it's not always easy. Like the close fans are hard core who go to all games home and away, whereas I can't, well like I mean I could, but the cost and location is so hard, so I'm probably more of an armchair fan, go to odd games when possible, depending on its location. Like probably other fans think I'm not too interested in football and call me a part timer, Glory Supporter but I just do it my way" (Alan, Liverpool)*

#### **3.5.4. Theoretical Saturation**

In GT, the question always relates back to when to stop collecting data, however practically, Charmaz (2014) believes that the point to stop the collection process is when categories are saturated, and no fresh theoretical insight is created. GT

saturation differs from repetition of the same events and stories, with Charmaz (2014) arguing that researchers confuse this with ordinary saturation. This is supported by Glaser (2001) who states that saturation is not seeing the same pattern again and again, but the conceptualisation of comparisons of data, in which no new concepts are created. Corbin and Strauss (2015) believe saturation occurs when no new or relevant data occur, the category is well developed, and relationships are well established. Morse (1995) highlighted key considerations around theoretical saturation when conducting research; selecting a cohesive sample, using theoretical sampling, sampling until negative cases are identified and that the theory does not contain any gaps (Morse, 1995).

When trying to ascertain whether saturation has occurred, the researcher should question the data, for instance where they lead you, what sense do you make of these comparisons, what new conceptual relationships might be seen and in what other directions does the data take you (Charmaz, 2014). An example of how theoretical saturation occurred in this thesis was identified for expansion club fans for instance was the notion of gifting appearing frequently in both interviews and netnographic data and therefore became saturated, this is evidenced in Table 11.

<b>Table 11: An example of theoretical saturation</b>	
<b>Fan</b>	<b>Data</b>
<b>NYCFC fan 38</b>	“My wife got tickets to the home opener, and we were both so into it, that we got a 9-match deal immediately after the game for season 1 and then seasons tickets every year after that”
<b>NYCFC fan 40</b>	“My wife bought us tickets for my birthday because Pirlo was playing for NYCFC and I was a long-time fan of his”
<b>NYCFC fan 42</b>	“A friend has season tickets and gave me a free ticket when one of their groups couldn't make it. It turned out that this game was the derby in which Villa potted the hat trick. Bought a scarf that night and never looked back”
<b>NYCFC fan 20</b>	“Thankfully my uncle got us tickets to the first NYCFC game in Yankee stadium”
<b>NYCFC fan 56</b>	“A friend of mine who lives on Long Island told me about it. He got me tickets to a game in 2015 and it was a blast.”

Furthermore, there is no guidance on how many, or how few, responses are required for a successful GT study (Thomson, 2010; Charmaz, 2014; Corbin and Strauss, 2015; Glaser and Strauss, 2017) but researchers must be aware about how claims of saturation may affect the credibility of a study (Charmaz, 2014). However, Thomson (2010) in an analysis of 100 GT articles, identified researchers should plan for 30 interview participants. This is an approach completed by this thesis and more, with the combination of interviews and netnographic data.

What this section will move onto discuss is the secondary literature review, conducted in keeping with CGT principles.

## **Chapter 4: Secondary literature review**

When forming a GT study, Charmaz (2014) advocates for a basic, general literature review to be conducted prior to the data collection commencing. This must then be followed by an extensive review which covers the wide-ranging literature in the field surrounding the core category. This study followed Charmaz's advice, with Chapter 4 containing the secondary literature review. It focuses on the core category that emerged from this study; socialisation and socialisation agents (section 4.1.), and the fan categories of this research (expansion club, female, and long-distance fans) (section 4.2.).

### *4.1. Socialisation*

Socialisation is the "comprehensive and consistent induction of an individual into the objective world of a society or a sector of it" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 271). The term covers the learning, social development, and adaptation process into a social group, formed by interaction with others (Eitzen and Sage, 1997; Coakley, 2017) and is often named role learning (Kenyon and McPherson, 1973). It is a process that involves learning the attitudes, values and actions that are accepted and appropriate in becoming members of a particular group or society, such as sports clubs (Kenyon and McPherson, 1974; Wann and James, 2019). It is often viewed as an adult initiated process (Baumrind, 1980), although more recent studies have found it can be child initiated (Hyatt et al., 2018).

Socialisation is useful in understanding choices people make regarding their consumption habits. Consumer socialisation, or consumer education (McNeal, 1993), is "the processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace" (Ward, 1974: 2), sharing similarities with definitions of socialisation. One area to consider in consumer socialisation is life stages, akin to the those identified in the PCM (Funk and James, 2001) in section 2.3.4. Socialisation occurs throughout the life cycle of a person (Spaaij and Anderson, 2012), but various authors have found it to be completed in the early stages of cognitive development as consumptive behaviours and identities are formed (James, 2001; Kerrane et al., 2015). This is supported by John (1999) who cites the perceptual stage (3-7 years), the analytical stage (7-11 years), and the reflective stage (11-16 years), when considering consumption within a marketplace. This shares similarities with sport fan socialisation, as McPherson (1976) views sport socialisation to be comparable to the broader concept. Sport fan socialisation literature, according to Delia and Katz (2019), is limited, thus this thesis aims to contribute to filling this gap, focusing on football fans. McNeal (1993) found children start to make requests and selections, assist in purchases, and finally make independent purchases, leading to socialisation. This is echoed in the case of sport fans, as "children articulate a portfolio of teams of which they are fans" (Tinson et al., 2017: 374), often making such decisions independently.

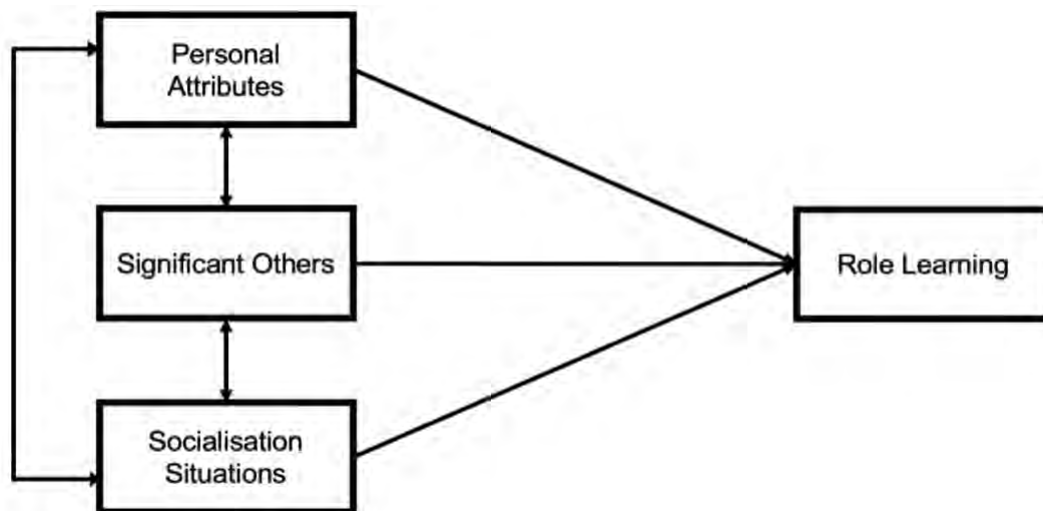
As such, socialisation is rooted in social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), which states that we learn observationally, before performing behavioural norms and becoming

accepted into a group. Social Learning Theory suggests that children learn by watching others and reproduce the behaviours displayed by others, whether that be live models, verbal instruction or symbolically from media practices, either real or fictional (Bandura, 1977). There are complexities with socialisation, as Berger and Luckmann (1967) discovered primary and secondary socialisation. Primary socialisation takes place during childhood and is usually the most important, drawing parallels with consumer socialisation. Secondary socialisation, however, looks at new social sub-worlds which cause the renegotiation of primary socialisation, suggesting socialisation could occur later in life.

Socialisation into sport was first theorised by Kenyon and McPherson (1973), who identified three elements: significant others (socialisation agents), socialising situations and personal attributes (Figure 15). Significant others are those who influence the attitude and behaviour of the individual, within social situations (socialising situations), whilst personal attributes relate to personal characteristics of the individual being socialised (Kenyon and McPherson, 1973; Stroot, 2002). This implies that becoming a sports fan could be both personal and social, as suggested in work in this field (Dixon, 2013; Duffett, 2013; Wann and James, 2019). Furthermore, gender, nationality, cultural background, social class, religion and ethnicity, amongst other factors which help shape the nature of fandom (Wann et al., 2001b).



**Figure 15: Kenyon and McPherson's (1973: 305) three elements of socialisation**



The awareness stage of the PCM (discussed in Chapter 2) displays many similarities with socialisation situations and significant others, from the above model. Socialisation occurs in the awareness stage of the PCM and is the process of becoming a sports fan and helps form an individual's identity (Wann and James, 2019). The PCM suggests that socialisation agents in the awareness stage assist in identity formation, akin to Kenyon and McPherson's significant others (1973). What follows now, is a discussion of the extant literature surrounding socialisation agents. In this case, socialisation was studied from a specific point in time, focusing upon when they became a fan.

#### **4.1.1. Socialisation agents**

For this thesis, the socialisation that is under study is those that contributed to the induction of an individual becoming a fan of a team. However, it is key to acknowledge that socialisation is an on-going process, but this thesis is looking at a snapshot part of that. Factors that cause this induction are socialisation agents. Socialisation agents influence an individual's attraction towards a sports organisation (Funk and James, 2001). Early use of socialisation agents in sport focused upon participation, rather than into fandom, yet they have also been found to be applicable to sports fans (Mastromartino et al., 2019a). These agents teach future fans about the attitudes, values, and actions of a sports club (Funk and James, 2001; Wann and James, 2019). Family, peers, school, and community are viewed as primary socialisation agents contributing to the creation of a sports fan's identity (Kenyon and McPherson, 1974). The church, according to McPherson (1976), previously impacted sport socialisation, but this seems to have diminished, with little evidence of recent occurrences.

Since then, other significant socialisation agents have been considered, including spouses, parents, siblings, friends, school (teachers or coaches), community, geographic proximity, media (news and programming) and promotions (advertising and special events) (Funk and James, 2001; Thomson and Williams, 2014; Wann and James, 2019). Many of these agents including community, geography, media, and promotions are all inanimate objects, suggesting that a socialisation agent does not need to be a person. This represents a claim put forward by new materialist scholars, who focus on whom or what socialises whom or what. For instance, in the case of a wheelchair user, does the wheelchair socialise the person or does the person in fact

socialise the wheelchair? (Höppner, 2017). This idea considers how inanimate socialisation agents are decentralising the human actor, not just other people, as was considered previously (Eitzen and Sage, 1997; Coakley, 2017).

From previous research, socialisation agents in the field of sport appear stable across the world (Mastromartino et al., 2020a), however, there is a need to consider cultural differences (Theodorakis et al., 2017). To this end, research has been conducted in countries including the USA (Wann et al., 2001b; Mastromartino et al., 2020a), Norway (Melnick and Wann, 2004), Greece (Theodorakis and Wann, 2008), Australia (Melnick and Wann, 2011), the UK (Parry et al., 2014) and Qatar (Theodorakis et al., 2017). Additionally, most of the previous work has employed the questionnaire method, where fans ranked the most impactful primary agents of community, family, friends, and school. This then followed a process of participants freely naming the most significant socialisation agent.

In Spaaij and Anderson's (2012: 526) response to Melnick and Wann's work, they questioned the "disconnect between the forced choice responses given by respondents in terms of rating the importance of socialization agents, and those agents that were freely nominated by them as the most influential person in their 'decision' to become a sport fan". This raises issues regarding the predominance of a quantitative survey approach in prior sport fan socialisation research and the difficulty in capturing the subtleties and nuance within the different socialisation agents. Additional to this, Mastromartino et al. (2020b) highlighted that many socialisation

agents had yet to be quantified and therefore various meanings have been attached to agents. This will be assessed in greater detail below.

A further issue with socialisation agents is operationalisation. Mastromartino et al. (2020a) identified a need to focus on how socialisation agents can be used by sports organisations. Previous studies have tended to focus on the fan-initiated role of socialisation, such as parents, people in school or peers. What is lacking is an understanding of how clubs initiate socialisation (Mastromartino et al., 2020b). Much of this is due to a focus by the cross-cultural quantitative research on sport fandom, rather than club fandom. Therefore, this thesis extends studies which consider the socialisation of fans of sports clubs, adding to further studies to consider fandom of sports clubs (e.g. Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011; Theodorakis et al., 2017; Delia and Katz, 2019; Allison and Pope, 2021). This could allow for a greater range of team focused socialisation agents to emerge and allow for their operationalisation. There is also a lack of detail attached to previously identified socialisation agents (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Theodorakis et al., 2017), with research tending to identify terms and their impact, rather how they impacted fans. The remainder of this section evaluates the core socialisation agents in the PCM. This includes application to sport and wider socialisation literature, finishing with a discussion of the other agents identified.

Firstly, family are viewed as the chief agent of socialisation (Lasch, 1977). Consequently, individuals are often encouraged into sports through family members (Kenyon and McPherson, 1974; Huang et al., 2019). Prior work has largely

identified fathers to be the most significant in the socialisation process (Kenyon and McPherson, 1974; Kolbe and James, 2000; James, 2001; Melnick and Wann, 2004; Theodorakis and Wann, 2008; Melnick and Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014). There are examples, however, of children socialising parents (Thomson and Williams, 2014; Allison and Pope, 2021), in what has been termed reverse socialisation (Hyatt et al., 2018). This shows the potential for further research on the impact children have on their parent's sport fandom. Siblings have also been identified as a powerful socialisation agent in sport (James, 2001; Mastromartino et al., 2019a) and more widely. Kerrane et al. (2015) identified their use as checking mechanisms before confessing decisions to friends. Notably, male siblings are identified as being an important socialisation agent for female fans (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Theodorakis et al., 2017). This is exemplified by much sport socialisation agent research taking place in countries noted for their masculine characteristics, including Australia (Melnick and Wann, 2011), Qatar (Theodorakis et al., 2017), the UK (Parry et al., 2014) and the USA (Wann et al., 2001b). Therefore, the extent to which female siblings socialise remains unclear. Completing the body of work on family members, research has identified male partners as socialisation agents for female fans (Wann et al. 2001b; Melnick and Wann, 2008; 2011; Parry et al., 2014), termed by Mewett and Toffoletti (2011) as sexually transmitted fandom (STF).

Like family, friends are expected to play a role in socialisation (Wann et al., 2001b; Theodorakis and Wann, 2008; Parry et al., 2014), however here there are cultural differences. For instance, females in Greece and Qatar rated friends higher than family

(Theodorakis and Wann, 2008; Theodorakis et al., 2017). Further understanding gender differences, McPherson (1976) found peer groups were a significant socialisation agent for males, compared to females. Yet when assessing female sport participation, friends are seen as most significant (Huang et al., 2019). For those who became fans of a women's football team, those who were recruited, were done so largely by female friends (Allison and Knoester, 2021). Delia and Katz (2019) identified friends' socialising role in those who became fans while travelling. This was completed through a variety of forms, but one unexpected way was through personal rivalry, meaning they could support their clubs against each other.

The impact of community is minimal across most cultures (Theodorakis et al., 2017), apart from in Norway, where it was one of the most prevalent (Melnick and Wann, 2004). In the UK and the USA, the impact of the local community on socialisation was significantly lower, in comparison (Parry et al., 2014). This is potentially explained through the role of club sports in cultures such as Norway (Melnick and Wann, 2004; Parry et al., 2014; Theodorakis et al., 2017). In contrast, professional clubs have significantly more impact on the sporting background in the UK (Parry et al., 2014). As far back as 1976, McPherson (1976) highlighted various elements, including media and athletic role models, yet many of these could be deemed as socialisation agents within their own right. However, it was not until recently that detail on the role the community played was surfaced, which may account for its varied occurrence throughout the literature. In understanding community, Mastromartino et al. (2020a) cited charities, schools, and hospitals as what is contained within the phrase, as teams

engaged in outreach activities. Additionally, community, alongside civil pride, was found to play a significant role for US NHL fans in areas where hockey is not traditional (Mastromartino et al., 2019a).

The impact of the media on young people was significant in how they learn about brands, sports, and phenomena, especially as they often receive large volumes of advertising and marketing messages (Shin et al., 2020). When assessing the literature in this field, media seems to become conflated with promotions and advertisements seen through the media. For instance, Shin et al. (2020) state that adolescents' ability to use media could make them more knowledgeable about advertising. Significantly, it implies that the socialisation of teenagers is not restricted to traditional sources (Lee and Conroy, 2005). However, there is an argument that adolescents are socialised through the internet, receiving "word of mouth (recommendation), mutual learning or influence, construction and discovery, multi-tasking, and learning from multiple sources" (Lee and Conroy, 2005: 15). Within sport, cross-culturally media has been identified across various studies (e.g., Theodorakis and Wann, 2008; Melnick and Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014; Theodorakis et al., 2017), but focus on which media forms and how they socialise is limited. However more recently, various elements of the media have been identified such as interactive media (Theodorakis et al., 2017), films, video games (Mastromartino et al., 2019a) and television (Kolbe and James, 2000; Trail and James, 2015). As highlighted previously, fathers are key in socialisation, with studies identifying how fathers have used media practices such as

television and news shows to socialise (Kolbe and James, 2000), demonstrating potential interactions between multiple socialisation agents.

Despite geographic proximity being used by Funk and James within the PCM, cross cultural research found its effect negligible (Wann et al., 2001b; Melnick and Wann, 2004; Theodorakis and Wann, 2008; Melnick and Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014; Theodorakis et al., 2017). Instead, the term local or hometown club has been used, however, it could be argued that they differ to geographic proximity, as hometown and local club could be subjective, and the former could even have links to those who have maybe moved away from their home. This highlights issues with socialisation agents and how they are defined. Despite this, the majority of studies were completed using fans who were in close proximity to the club (e.g., Kolbe and James, 2000). In some countries, due to the quality of sport within it, fans support clubs in different countries (Theodorakis et al., 2017), hence why proximity may be limited. Considering geographic related terms further, fans reported an affection for place and the club's association with the city as playing a role in socialisation (Mastromartino et al., 2019a), showing issues surrounding the complexity of geographic related terms.

Schools have been noted as being a preferred socialisation agent (Durkheim, 1922). School has been identified as significant in countries with a strong school sport tradition, including the USA, UK, and Australia (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014; Wann et al., 2019), while it plays a lesser role in countries such as Norway or Qatar (Melnick and Wann, 2004; Theodorakis et al., 2017). This is because they lack



school tradition of sport or because community sports clubs are more prevalent (Giulianotti et al., 2019). A further agent that socialises is participation (Mastromartino et al., 2020a; Allison and Pope, 2021), whether at school or in a club setting. One NHL manager noted “getting people to play the sport of hockey is a really good way to be truly connected with the club” (Mastromartino et al., 2020a: 364), by teaching children the sport and thus growing the club’s brand. In this respect, schools and clubs represent a potentially fruitful and easier socialisation agent for clubs to exploit, but how clubs do this remains, as yet, largely under-researched (Mastromartino et al., 2020a). For participation, school staff were key (Stuij, 2015), but institutional agents, such as schools and community, become expectedly less impactful as children get older (Huang et al., 2019).

Previous cross-cultural research within the sports marketing context seems to be limited in identifying the effects of promotions on people’s socialisation into fandom. However, more recently work from Mastromartino et al. (2020a) found that from a managerial perspective, clubs wanted to attract fans in unique ways, such as jersey exchanges and personalised relationship building marketing. Kerrane et al. (2015) believe that learning more about the socialisation process of adolescents and their siblings can help practitioners target communication within the family. This is particularly useful, as, as far back as 2001, North and Kotzé (2001) found that children have more disposable income and have greater understanding of marketing campaigns, meaning more opportunities to spend and awareness of brands. This supports findings identifying sports organisations who use price discounts and

giveaways to encourage fans to gain awareness about the club (Mastromartino et al., 2020b).

There have been many other socialisation agents discovered that add to those originally provided in the PCM. For instance, outside of the sphere of personal relationships, star players are also identified as a socialisation agent (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Theodorakis et al., 2017). In this case, the socialisation agents of star players and parents interact for children, and once parents have initiated the socialisation into a sport or club, other agents become more prominent, including marketing and famous players (Spaaij and Anderson, 2012). The low impact of locality and family in Qatar justifies why the agent 'club' was highly influential (Theodorakis et al., 2017). An additional notion identified is, in the case of fans of women's football, how a men's club creating a women's club helps create awareness for fans (Allison and Pope, 2021).

What has been identified in sport fan socialisation is the term 'myself' (Theodorakis et al., 2017), also known as self-socialisation (Hurrelmann, 2002). The identification of this agent by Theodorakis and Wann (2008) and Theodorakis et al. (2017), in the case of the latter, may be based around the focus on club, rather than sport fandom. It is highlighted as how one may choose what group or culture to become a member of oneself, instead of through someone or something else (Hurrelmann, 2002). However, as suggested in the work of Theodorakis et al. (2017), knowledge of how this occurs is limited, showing a need for further qualitative research.

In summary, one feature of the agents discussed above, is that they largely cover just the identification of terms and the impact of those upon various individuals. The quantitative methodology employed by previous socialisation agent studies, where participants rated four agents (friends, family, community, school) on a Likert scale and then freely nominate the single most impactful term to them, means that for all the agents discussed here, the role they played is lacking. The present research seeks to add greater depth to each agent identified by this thesis, rather than simply highlighting how impactful they are and how frequently they are cited. This is further exemplified by the lack of clarity around many of the socialisation agents, specifically community, media, and geographic agents. Furthermore, the role these agents play in the socialisation of sports fans is yet to be identified. This makes the operationalisation of them difficult, as what has been identified previously is simply terms without meaning attached to them. Additionally, much of the previous work has identified those who are socialised at either at a young age, or in some cases studying fans who are under the age of 30, with this research endeavouring to reach a wider range of participants. The next section discusses specific details around the three types of fans involved in this research, looking at various theoretical approaches and factors related to their fandom identity formation, and where possible, their socialisation. Finally, it is important to highlight again how the socialisation agents that are being focused upon here, are those that impact individuals to the point of becoming a football fan.

#### *4.2. The focus of this research*

This thesis intended to uncover how people become football fans. What emerged from this initial research aim and as a result of the data collected became the aim of this thesis, being to identify, discover and operationalise the socialisation agents that impact individuals into becoming football fans. Specifically, three categories of fans were selected. These categories were chosen based off the clubs identified and the participants' location. This resulted in three research objectives:

1. To explore which socialisation agents impact:
  - a) Expansion club fans
  - b) Female fans
  - c) Long-distance fans
2. To identify the role that the identified socialisation agents play in the socialisation of:
  - a) Expansion club fans
  - b) Female fans
  - c) Long-distance fans
3. To create a framework which operationalises the socialisation agents identified and the roles they play.

As will be identified in the following sections, there is limited research focusing on the socialisation of the three categories of fans chosen for this research, providing further

justification for their choice. Furthermore, despite a significant number of studies which highlight socialisation agents, most of these studies did not overtly focus on the role they play in how someone becomes a fan. Instead, previous research, in some cases references socialisation agents as motivators for fandom, conflating the concepts of motivation and socialisation, further evidencing the lack of theoretical clarity in the extant work. A reminder here that motivations are the needs and desires of an individual (Wann, 1995), whereas socialisation agents teach future fans of the attitudes, values, and actions of a sports club (Funk and James, 2001; Wann and James, 2019). However, in this chapter, motivation and team identification literature is still considered due to its pertinence in understanding the three categories of fans. It is also important to recognise that groups of fans are not homogenous and within group differences likely exist (Lock and James, 2016), demonstrating how the literature related to each fan group will not be fully representative. This thesis addresses the gap in the literature by exploring, in detail, the emerging role of socialisation agents in the context of expansion club, female, and long-distance fans. The remainder of this chapter will therefore focus on expansion club, female, and long-distance fans, including literature on socialisation agents, alongside theoretical frameworks including team identification and motivations related to the three categories.

#### **4.2.1. Expansion clubs**

Expansion clubs are new clubs entering a league. Their newness positions them in a different way to established clubs, by lacking tradition, history of success or developed fanbases through which fandom can be passed on (Lock et al., 2009; Grant et al., 2011; Doyle et al., 2017). Work on new clubs is far more limited than that on established sports clubs. The notion of new clubs and how fans become fans before even any branding exists, is something that warrants academic attention, in a bid for the relevant socialisation agents to be applied (Lock et al., 2011; Davies et al., 2021). Previous work on expansion clubs has focused largely on team identification (Lock et al., 2009; 2011; 2012; 2014), purchase and brand switching (covered in section 4.2.1.1) (Harada and Matsuoka, 1999; James et al., 2002; Shapiro et al., 2013), brand awareness and associations (Du et al., 2020; Davies et al., 2021) or fan segmentation (McDonald et al., 2016), with the latter acknowledging fans of expansion clubs as being heterogeneous. Lock et al. (2009; 2011; 2012; 2014) highlight socialisation agents, yet this is not the sole focus of their study.

Factors that increase identification help fans in feeling a psychological connection to a club (Wann et al., 2001a). This is in comparison to socialisation agents, which teach future fans about the attitudes, values, and actions of a sports club (Funk and James, 2001; Wann and James, 2019). A point to note here is that Wann et al.'s research focuses on US sports and fans, where club switching is probably more common. Work on identification with expansion clubs identifies wider attachment to the sport, the city in which the club is located and the match-day experience as drivers of club attachment (Lock et al., 2011; Heere and Katz, 2014). By supporting the club from the

start, fans could co-create the club's identity, something those who were not, or fans of established clubs, could not do, thus increasing their identification with the club (Doyle et al., 2017). Highly identified fans who are there from the beginning are vitally important when it comes to generating excitement around the club (Ross, 2006; Dwyer et al., 2015; McDonald et al., 2016). Additionally, it has been identified that after the expansion club's inaugural game, brand awareness significantly increases (Du et al., 2020), showing the dual benefit of fans, pre and post first game. This is further exemplified by the **instant fanatics** fan type, presented by McDonald et al. (2016), as they advocate for the club amongst their own networks, with fans reaching this level before a game has even been played.

Developing levels of fan identification is crucial for expansion clubs to create a long-term sustainable fanbase. New clubs have a variety of branding devices at their disposal to facilitate this, including players, club name, brand identity and novelty (James et al., 2002; McDonald et al., 2016). Further brand associations that have been identified across various studies include online and in-person discussions, merchandise, evangelism (Mastromartino et al., 2019b) and star players (Lock et al., 2009; Shapiro et al., 2013; Kunkel et al., 2014). Additionally, fans can become aware of new clubs prior to the first game through physical or online touch points (Du et al., 2020). This includes viewing parties of other sporting events, billboards, word of mouth, or from friends and family or social media, for example. Studies into expansion clubs suggest that city related marketing and engagements (Davies et al., 2021) and co-branding with local, pre-existing attachments can increase awareness (Kunkel et

al., 2013; Du et al., 2020), including associating with existing interests, players, and leagues. Despite this, expansion clubs have sometimes been inconsistent in their branding (Grant et al., 2011). By changing identity frequently, it threatens fans' sense of attachment to the club and their own fan identity (Doyle et al., 2017).

The identification of geographical connection further points towards the issues surrounding geographic related terms within expansion clubs. However, work has identified proximity to the club as playing a role in identifying with the team (Kolbe and James, 2000). Work on how someone becomes a fan of a new club has, unsurprisingly, found little evidence of family and friends as socialisation agents due to club's inherent newness and consequent lack of an existing fan base (Lock et al., 2009; Mastromartino et al., 2020b), despite being brand touchpoints (Du et al., 2020). Due to all fans being new to the fandom, this finding within the literature is expected as opportunities for fandom to be passed on are limited. Yet, in the early stages, one may be socialised by someone who very recently became a fan themselves, therefore in person discussions and evangelisms become useful (Mastromartino et al., 2019b).

Except for the work above, work on socialisation agents related to expansion club fans is limited. This lack of literature has since led to calls for not only more to be conducted in the field, but for qualitative socialisation research specifically, with the aim of developing theory (Lock et al., 2011). While not focusing specifically on socialisation, several of what can be deemed socialisation agents were surfaced by Greenwood et al. (2006) as reasons for becoming a fan of a sport in a new market. Notably, these



included parents or family members, players, coaches, geographical connection and matchday activities. However, this focused on the sport, rather than the club.

#### *4.2.1.1. Switching Intentions*

Switching intentions and the act of switching between brands is important to this research, especially within the context of expansion clubs. Expansion club fans may have supported an established club prior to the club's formation and therefore change to support the expansion club. This section focuses upon factors that may cause switching, where possible applying socialisation literature.

Consumer switching has been assessed across a variety of settings, including fitness clubs (Alexandris et al., 2001), hairstyling (Bansal et al., 2005), banking (Moutinho and Smith, 2000; Gerrard and Barton Cunningham, 2004), insurance (Antón et al., 2007), energy supply (Wieringa and Verhoef, 2007), and online gaming (Keaveney and Parthasarathy, 2001; Hou et al., 2011). The term has been referred to as brand switching; the action of a user who switches consumption to another brand (Dekimpe et al., 1997; Bolton et al., 2004; Ghasrodashti, 2018). It centres around behavioural intentions, which encompasses product switching or complaining behaviour, positive word-of-mouth and brand loyalty (Bush et al., 2004). Therefore, it is important to look at how these features relate to one another.

Brand loyalty has been found to contribute to brand switching (Bayus, 1992). Therefore, when considering application to sport, brand loyalty shares features of club identification. Lowly identified fans are more likely to distance themselves when the team is lacking success, known as CORF-ing (cutting off reflective failure) (Wann and Branscombe, 1990). CORF-ing often occurs with less committed fair-weather fans, who have less brand loyalty. Fans engage in CORF-ing to avoid the emotional burden of losing and therefore detach themselves from the club, and regarding this section, potentially switching. When considering socialisation and switching intentions, studies have found celebrity athlete endorsers to have a positive influence on switching intentions (Dix et al., 2010), although these findings are contested (Bush et al., 2004). This provides justification for further understanding socialisation agents and switching. However little research has examined the socialisation agents that cause switching intentions, something this research, due to an examination of expansion clubs, could reveal.

The Push-Pull Mooring (PPM) model considers the various factors related to switching and was first applied to migration (Moon, 1995), before Bansal et al. (2005) identified a cross-over between migration and switching behaviour. Previously suggested determinants of customer switching were placed into the PPM model by Bansal et al. (2005), demonstrated in Table 12.

**Table 12: PPM Model proposed by Bansal et al. (2005), applied to consumer brand switching**

Push effects	Pull effects	Mooring effects
Quality	Alternative attractiveness	Attitude toward switching
Satisfaction		Subjective norms
Value		Switching costs
Trust		Prior switching behaviour
Commitment		Variety seeking
Price perceptions		

Consumers are increasingly inclined to change brand when they have a positive attitude toward brand switching (Ghasrodashti, 2018). Push effects, in the context of migration, were identified as negative influences on someone’s quality of life (Moon, 1995). However, in brand switching they can be classed as effects that drive consumers away from the original brand (Liao et al., 2021). In contrast, pull factors are positive aspects of other brands that attract consumers (Liao et al., 2021), often viewed as attractive alternates; the positive characteristics of competing service providers, pulling them towards the alternative (Jones et al., 2000; Bansal et al., 2005). Mooring factors can be personal, social, and situational (Bansal et al., 2005), and are often those that brands may use to lock customers into them (Ghasrodashti, 2018).

Focusing now upon alternative attractiveness and pull effects in more detail, switching could be caused by changes in availability of a product or brand (McAlister and Pessemier, 1982), the release of a new product, the ceasing of another (Harada and

Matsuoka, 1999) or when exposed to a rival's aggressive marketing (Lee and Jung, 2018). This demonstrates clear links to expansion clubs and how they may pull fans in, causing fans to switch. Further factors that contribute to alternative attractiveness include availability of a better service, proximity, availability of services, lower fees, or better performance (Sharma and Patterson, 2000). When considering sport, as a new club enters the market, such as NYCFC or LAFC, they become potential alternatives (Harada and Matsuoka, 1999). It has been found that those with low involvement with the brand would switch when exposed to a rival's aggressive marketing (Lee and Jung, 2018), showing how the term could be applied to sports fans, linking to club identification. A further pull effect found more recently is the idea of subjective norms (Liao et al., 2021), previously identified as a mooring effect (Bansal et al., 2005). These subjective norms were found within mobile phone brand switching, in which one consumer stated that because those around them had a particular phone brand they were thinking of switching to that brand (Liao et al., 2021).

For expansion club fans, it is also important to consider push factors. Consumers are likely to switch brands if they read negative news about a brand (Lee and Jung, 2018). In sport, fans may cite features of the established club that pushed them away from that club to the expansion club. Within brand switching, satisfaction, value, trust, commitment, and price perceptions (Bansal et al., 2005) are considered. When applying switching intentions to expansion clubs, previous studies have found that new clubs should exploit fans with low levels of club identification, whilst established clubs should look to increase levels of team identification, to prevent the switching from one

club to another, especially prior to an expansion club arriving (Harada and Matsuoka, 1999).

#### **4.2.2. Female fans**

Female football fans are now widely seen as a legitimate audience member in sport (Dixon, 2015; Toffoletti, 2017), yet were previously underrepresented in academic work (Crawford, 2004; Pope, 2013). Furthermore, they have been deemed the 'other sex' within sport fandom (Cleland et al., 2020). This has caused female football fans to not be taken seriously (Dixon, 2015), especially when traditional fans have previously been named 'the lads' (King, 1998). This has led women to be systematically marginalised or excluded within some fan cultures, suggesting that they should present masculine traits (Esmonde et al., 2015; Sveinson and Hoeber, 2016; Pope, 2017). Female fans often feel that "to be a 'real fan', one must embrace the masculine characteristics and 'banter' that has history and authenticity" (Dixon, 2015: 648), as men claim legitimacy and authenticity (Cleland et al., 2020). This provides justification therefore for this thesis to consider female fans without comparison to males, regarding socialisation.

Stereotypes of female fans are important to consider. They include only being interested because of boys, low knowledge, commitment, and dedication, (Esmonde et al., 2018) and player attraction (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Toffoletti and Mewett, 2012; Esmonde et al., 2015; 2018). However, with the latter, there are differences in

this view (Crawford and Gosling, 2004). Many see attraction to players to only be defensible when aligned with knowledge about the sport (Esmonde et al., 2015). This stereotype is often combatted with humour as fans joke about their objectification of male athletes. This included adopting masculine communication traits and dark, humorous banter (Jones, 2008; Pope, 2017; Allison, 2018). However, the idolisation of famous sports people is viewed as untraditional in fandom (Giulianotti, 2002), with other women calling out female fans who only like sports due to player attraction and their hyper feminisation, stating that they are inauthentic and letting others down (Jones, 2008; Esmonde et al., 2018; Cleland et al., 2020), leading women to feel on trial (Cleland et al., 2020). When considering players more widely in socialisation, club agents, including players, were most important for female fans (Theodorakis et al., 2017). This was a novel finding as other studies were limited in finding such examples, with small occurrences of famous players identified in the UK and Australia (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014). However, as has been discussed, Theodorakis et al. (2017), like this thesis, focused upon socialisation into a club, rather than the sport, suggesting that players may be more relevant.

The large focus of this section so far has been on legitimisation and stereotyping of female fans, rather than on socialisation. However, one of the first pieces of research, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, to address female fan socialisation specifically was Mewett and Toffoletti (2011). The authors developed a typology focusing on the inter-personal elements of female fandom of Australian Football League teams. Firstly, **in-the-blood**, as the name suggests, is rooted within family

and geographic origins. It finds that attending from an early age and developing an “overwhelmingly powerful connection with a particular club” occurs (Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011: 674). This supports Pope’s (2011) assertion that females are born into fandom. **Learners** progressively develop fandom through match attendance and watching on television, commonly with other people (Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011). Studies have also found that women are motivated to engage in sport to connect with their spouses and families (Whiteside and Hardin, 2011) and attend games with others (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000; Ben-Porat, 2009). Attendance is important to **learners** as their understanding of and gratification from the game increases (Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011).

**Converts** and **sexually transmitted fans (STF)** share similarities, with an event in their life turning them into a fan. **Converts** abruptly change from having little to no opinion of the sport to becoming a fan relatively quickly (Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011). Those within the **STF** group are introduced to Australian Football League by their partners, with no awareness of the club prior to their meeting (Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011), supporting previous work (Farrell, 2006; Ben-Porat, 2009). This supports suggestions that fandom is conducted to deepen bonds and create compatibility with others (Duffett, 2013). As has been highlighted, the typology focuses on individuals close to the fan that socialise. However, as has been identified and will be highlighted further, there are factors outside of the close relationships around the fan that play a role in socialisation, showing a need to consider the wider agents that play a role. This suggests that there may be several contextual issues with Mewett and Toffoletti’s

(2011) work, surrounding the sport of Australian Football League and within the country of Australia, showing a need to expand the field, as this thesis does. This is further exemplified by the limited occurrence of players, for instance, with Australian female fans of AFL teams (Melnick and Wann, 2011).

Further support for Mewett and Toffoletti's work (2011) is identified by findings that fathers are the most significant socialisation agent for female fans (Wann et al., 2001b; Melnick and Wann, 2004; Farrell, 2006; Theodorakis and Wann, 2008; Melnick and Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014; Theodorakis et al., 2017), apart from in Norway (Melnick and Wann, 2004). Furthermore, brothers play a significant role on female fans (Farrell, 2006; Theodorakis and Wann, 2008; Melnick and Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014; Theodorakis et al., 2017). Fathers and brothers were found to achieve this through taking women to a game (Pfister et al., 2013), all contributing to the male domination of socialisation, but also putting forward examples of how they are recruited. Other family members to play a significant role among female fans include cousins (Wann et al., 2001b; Melnick and Wann, 2011; Theodorakis et al., 2017; Wann and James, 2019), uncles (Theodorakis et al., 2017), and grandfathers (Melnick and Wann, 2011), all with varying impacts. There are contrasting views on the impact of females on female fans, with some considering it to be non-existent (Ben-Porat, 2009) and others highlighting mothers and sisters playing a limited role in socialisation (Wann et al., 2001b; Melnick and Wann, 2004; Melnick and Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014), showing a need to understand further how this occurs. Furthermore, what is



largely missing from the discussion above is how all the named agents play a role in socialisation, a contribution this research aims to meet.

Friends are identified as playing a varied role in the socialisation process of female fans. For instance, females in the UK and Australia rated them the highest (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014). However, when freely nominated, friends were the most frequently cited in Greece (Theodorakis and Wann, 2008). One interesting point to consider is that several female fans cannot link anyone to their socialisation (Theodorakis et al., 2017), however this work was unique in covering club socialisation, rather than sport and cultural factors in Qatar. Additionally, the agent 'myself' was found to apply to female sports fans (Theodorakis and Wann, 2008; Theodorakis et al., 2017).

Further agents to consider include media which was not identified in all cross-cultural research for female fans, yet it was cited in Qatar, albeit with low prevalence (Theodorakis et al., 2017). Additionally, school has been found to be more significant for females than males (Wann et al., 2001b; Melnick and Wann, 2004; Melnick and Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014). Again, geography was not present across cross-cultural research, yet hometown club was identified in Qatar, however its occurrence was limited due to the significant number of fans supporting clubs outside the country (Theodorakis et al., 2017), further adding to issues with geographically oriented socialisation agents. More recently, research into fans of women's football clubs in America and the UK, which largely contained female fans, identified mega-events,

participation, online spaces, and men's club adding a club, as creating awareness (Allison and Pope, 2021), suggesting a wider range of agents may be emerging.

As has been discussed above, there are a range of agents that have been identified as playing a role female fandom. Several studies have attempted to provide detail into how socialisation occurs and the role each agent plays, including that of Mewett and Toffoletti (2011) and, more recently, Allison and Pope (2021), with the former limited in identifying and assessing agents external to the fan's personal relationships. Furthermore, researchers have considered that greater knowledge about female fans could help change how sporting organisations engage with female fans (Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011). Therefore, this study aims to expand our understanding of female fan socialisation.

#### **4.2.3. Long-distance fans**

Like female fans, a comprehensive understanding of long-distance fans is currently lacking (Pu and James, 2017; Reifurth et al., 2019), making them a valid group to be studied. It is viewed that assessments of long-distance fans "provides an example for us to rethink the role of "place" in the creation of fandom" (Pu and James, 2017: 435). This reconsiders the need to be in close proximity to the club, with suggestions that the consumption of sport brands cannot be simply reduced to live events (Bodet et al., 2020). Long-distance fans are also known as satellite fans (Chanavat and Bodet, 2009; Kerr and Emery, 2011; Sondaal, 2013; Behrens and Uhrich, 2019). An additional

variation is a displaced fan, who has moved away from the location of the club (Collins et al., 2016; Baker, 2018a; 2018b; 2019), or the club has moved away from the fan (Kraszewski, 2008). This research however, used the term long-distance fans to describe those who began supporting a club in an area in which they have never resided, or the club is not their closest club, therefore a non-local, non-displaced fan (Hyatt and Andrijiv, 2008; Pu and James, 2017; Delia and Katz, 2019; Reifurth et al., 2019). The present literature on long-distance fans focuses on team identification (Kerr and Emery, 2011; Al Ganideh and Good, 2015; Burton et al., 2019; Lianopoulos et al., 2020), motivations (Smith and Stewart, 2007; Yu, 2010; Pu and James, 2017; Sullivan et al., 2021), and psychological connection to a club (Pu and James, 2017). Several studies also consider the socialisation of long-distance sports fans (Kerr and Emery, 2011; Theodorakis et al., 2017; Delia and Katz, 2019; Sullivan et al., 2021).

Expectedly, geographic factors are less prominent in long-distance fandom (Kerr and Emery, 2011). Where this is the case, international pre-season friendlies can influence long-distance fans (Richelieu and Desbordes, 2009) or help maintain fandom (Delia and Katz, 2019), providing fans access to the club (Bodet et al., 2020). Long-distance fans cite how the media played a significant role in their fandom (Hognestad, 2006; Pu and James, 2017), a feature which was viewed as a socialisation agent within Kerr and Emery's (2011) study. As globalisation and the availability of new forms of technology has increased, long-distance fans have often been called 'inauthentic' for not consuming sport in the correct way (Gibbons and Dixon, 2010; Ludvigsen, 2019), yet a vast number of fans (whether long-distance or otherwise) do not attend games.

When it comes to socialisation specifically, the extant work cites limited research around long-distance fan socialisation (Theodorakis et al., 2017), a clear and evident gap to be addressed in this thesis. Furthermore, studies have suggested the need for qualitative research into long-distance fans (Pu and James, 2017; Theodorakis et al., 2017). Despite an expectation that family may not play a role within long-distance fans' socialisation, fathers were significant (Theodorakis et al., 2017), with family often key in socialising in the pre-adolescence stage (Delia and Katz, 2019). Yet, there are a range of ages that become missing from previous work with students or those under 30 often used (Theodorakis et al., 2017; Delia and Katz, 2019). With the present study sampling a wide age range of fans, demonstrated in appendix C, it helps to understand fans more broadly. Pu and James (2017) discussed how family may pass their fandom down to their children, becoming long-distance fans, however this becomes difficult within the early stages of a market's growth, akin to expansion club fans. Yet fans may have family roots in areas where football is popular which lead them to becoming a fan of a club (Delia and Katz, 2019). Friendship groups are also an important socialisation agent for long-distance fans (Pu and James, 2017; Theodorakis et al., 2017), especially with adolescents (Delia and Katz, 2019). For the latter, socialisation can be formed through personal rivalry with friends (Delia and Katz, 2019). One clarification of Delia and Katz's (2019) work, which translates into a difference with this thesis, is that it considered those that became a fan while travelling and how this fandom was maintained, whereas this study considers those who were socialised from afar.

What is clear is that many long-distance fans had a desire to witness higher levels of perceived physical skill and entertainment than what was available to them (Pu and James, 2017). This leads to a belief that fans are impacted by players and clubs, with club focused socialisation agents, collectively, the most influential (Theodorakis et al., 2017). This could be through club success and history, coaches, clubs, players, the wider game, clubs' image or history, and style of play (Theodorakis et al., 2017; Sullivan et al., 2021). Considering club details more specifically, club kit was found to influence long-distance fans, including the club's tracksuit, often due to fashion and aesthetic reasons (Hognestad, 2006; Chanavat and Bodet, 2009). Similarly, style of play, player presence, club, and history of success, being in the top division and stadiums, all have been found to impact international fans (Kerr and Emery, 2011). However, Kerr and Emery (2011) did not explicitly focus on socialisation, but on factors that caused identification with a team to occur, being the extent to which fans feel psychologically connected with a team (Wann and Branscombe, 1993).

For long-distance fans, player nationality is significant (Hong et al., 2005; Bodet and Chanavat, 2010; Yu, 2010; Kerr and Emery, 2011; Pu, 2016), but such findings have yet to be derived in socialisation work. Fans view players from their native countries playing in foreign countries with high levels of national pride (Yu, 2010). Yet, the identification of nationality of players is not found globally, with LFC fans in Canada, Sweden, the US, and Norway not viewing nationality to be significant, whilst it was identified in Australia, thus demonstrating cultural factors at play (Kerr and Emery, 2011). Therefore, this research, through qualitative methods, aims to explore further

cultures and justifications for how player nationality plays a role. The overarching consideration here is to attempt to determine and categorise the process fans go through in choosing to support clubs abroad, rather than locally, responding to a call by previous researchers (Theodorakis et al., 2017). Despite a wide range of socialisation agents being already identified, our understanding in how they socialise is still lacking, thus highlighting the need for this research.

#### *4.3. Secondary Literature Review Conclusion*

This literature review has identified several gaps in the research, justifying the need for this study, with still much to learn about how people become socialised into becoming sports fans (Wann et al., 2001b). Methodologically, there have been several calls to understand the role socialisation agents play and to identify any new ones by using qualitative studies (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Mastromartino et al., 2020b). This is due to the previous quantitative methodologies conducted by other socialisation agent studies, where participants were asked to rate four agents (friends, family, community, school) on a Likert scale and freely nominate a single term that was the most impactful to them.

There have been calls to better understand how these categories of fans become expansion club (Lock et al., 2011; Doyle et al., 2017; Davies et al., 2021), female (Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011) and long-distance fans (Pu and James, 2017; Theodorakis et al., 2017). This identifies a key contribution of this research by

identifying the specific agents that apply to these fans. Despite several of these studies contributing to socialisation, the role they played is relatively unknown, hence why qualitative research is required (Lock et al., 2011; Pu and James, 2017; Theodorakis et al., 2017; Davies et al., 2021) to uncover these. Therefore, not only does this research aim to identify which agents socialise female, expansion, and long-distance fans, but it attempts to understand the role these agents play, allowing practitioners and academics alike to have a greater understanding of socialisation agents.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there are limited works that consider sport fan socialisation qualitatively (Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011; Delia and Katz, 2019; Allison and Pope, 2021); therefore, this thesis will significantly contribute to this field. This is not just by using one qualitative method, but two and adopting CGT (Charmaz, 2014). An additional factor that is missing from previous socialisation agent work is focus on a range of ages, with students and those under 30 previously tending to be used (Theodorakis et al., 2017; Delia and Katz, 2019). The present research, through a range of sampling methods, involves fans from a variety of age categories. Additionally, researchers have considered that greater knowledge of these categories of fans can have significant practical implications for marketing managers (Lock et al., 2011; Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011). For female fans, it is concluded that greater knowledge about female fans could help change how sporting organisations engage with female fans (Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011), hence why operationalisation, an outcome and contribution of this thesis, is key. In the context of long-distance fans, previous work has called for investigations to determine and categorise why fans

choose clubs abroad, rather than locally (Theodorakis et al., 2017), a motivation for the researcher choosing to study long-distance fans.



## **Chapter 5: Findings and discussion**

This chapter presents and discusses the findings and discussion of the thesis. Each of the three segments of fans in this study, expansion club, long-distance and female fans are assessed in turn and are related to the model that emerged from this thesis, the *Person-Centric Socialisation Framework*. As a reminder, the research objectives, first highlighted in Chapter 1, of this study are provided:

1. To **explore** which socialisation agents impact:
  - a) Expansion club fans
  - b) Female fans
  - c) Long-distance fans
2. To **identify** the role that the identified socialisation agents play in the socialisation of:
  - a) Expansion club fans
  - b) Female fans
  - c) Long-distance fans
3. To create a framework which **operationalises** the socialisation agents identified and the roles they play.

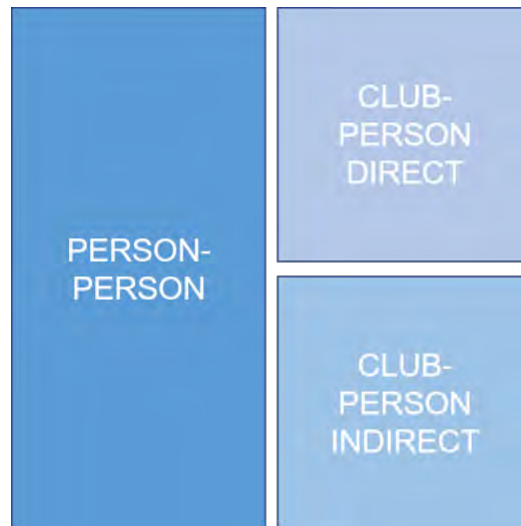
The final objective is answered through the *Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework* which emerged from the findings. The findings are situated in relation to the extant literature on expansion club fans, followed by female and long-distance.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the PCM states that awareness is formed through socialisation agents, yet understanding of how these agents are defined, operationalised, and initiated, is limited. Previously, spouses, parents, siblings, friends, school (teachers or coaches), community, geographic proximity, media (news and programming) and promotions (advertising and special events) were identified as socialisation agents, which teach future fans of the attitudes, values, and actions of a sports club (Funk and James, 2001; Wann and James, 2019). What has been brought out of this thesis is that although many of the early socialisation agents highlighted still exist, there are others that are more pertinent to the specific categories.

What also arose are two key groups of socialisation agents; **Person-Person** and **Club-Person**, with the latter split into **Direct** and **Indirect**, these form the *Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework* (presented in Figure 16), demonstrating the agents impacting upon a person being socialised. The three groups of socialisation agents are how the sections on each category of fans are structured. How each group is defined can be found below.

- **Person-Person:** A socialisation agent that is initiated by an individual onto the fan.
- **Club-Person: Direct:** A socialisation agent that is initiated by the club and within their control.
- **Club-Person: Indirect:** A socialisation agent that encompasses the club but is out of their control.

**Figure 16: The Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework**



Previous work has called for further research into club-initiated socialisation agents (Mastromartino et al., 2020a), with this study providing the *Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework* of how clubs can socialise fans, alongside detail surrounding all agents and how clubs leverage them. This is, therefore, a contribution of this study.

There were instances of fans who were in two of the categories in this study (e.g., they may have been a long-distance, female fan). The decision was made to place them into one category based upon what their data was telling the researcher, therefore factors specific to their socialisation. This was done for two purposes; to avoid repetition of data throughout the study, and secondly, to make evident through attentive coding, what each participant disclosed to the researcher.

**Person-Person** socialisation agents within the *Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework*, as stated previously, focus upon those individuals who played a role in the socialisation of a fan in this study. In this sense, they focus on family, friends, self-socialisation, other fans, education, players, and media personalities. **Club-Person** socialisation agents all involve the club in some way, however, what emerged was that the club's role was split; firstly, in how they play a **direct** role and are in control of the socialisation and secondly in an **indirect** way, in which they had no control over the socialisation. Agents grouped as **direct** were community, marketing, club identity, new club, owners, player signings, infrastructure, and atmosphere. The final group of socialisation agents is **Club-Person: Indirect**, which included success, geography, media, mega-events, and video games. Table 13 highlights the full *Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework* and where each agent applies to the three fan categories.

What follows is a detailed discussion on the findings from this thesis, and their application to the *Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework* and existing literature. Attached to these various socialisation agents are a various roles played; these will be assessed for each category of fan. Once this has been completed, a summary of the three sub-chapters (5.1, 5.2 and 5.3) details where any salient similarities or differences occur can be found in section 5.4.

**Table 13: The Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework in reference to each category of fan**

Category	Socialisation agent	Category of fans		
		Expansion club fans	Female fans	Long-distance fans
<b>Person-Person</b>	Family	✓	✓	✓
	Friends	✓	✓	✓
	Other fans	✓		✓
	Self-socialisation			✓
	Education		✓	✓
	Player/Manager		✓	✓
	Media personalities			✓
	Individual infatuation		✓	✓
<b>Club-Person: Direct</b>	Community	✓		
	Marketing	✓	✓	✓
	Club Identity	✓		
	New Club	✓		

Category	Socialisation agent	Category of fans		
		Expansion club fans	Female fans	Long-distance fans
<b>Club-Person: Direct</b>	Owners	✓	✓	✓
	Player signings	✓		
	Infrastructure	✓		
	Atmosphere	✓		
<b>Club-Person: Indirect</b>	Geography	✓	✓	✓
	Media	✓		✓
	Mega-events	✓	✓	✓
	Video games		✓	✓
	Success		✓	✓

### 5.1. Expansion club fans

Work on new clubs compared to established sports clubs is limited. Despite this, there is a need for these clubs to understand the behaviour of these fans and how their awareness is formed (James et al., 2002). This marks a key theoretical contribution of this study; identifying the agents that socialise expansion club fans and the role they play. Before an evaluation of the findings of this research, Table 14 presents the *Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework* in its application to expansion club fans and the role they played. As a reminder, the model this was first presented in Table 13.

**Table 14: The Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework applied to fans of expansion clubs**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Socialisation agent</b>	<b>Roles played</b>
<b>Person-Person</b>	Family	Gifting
	Friends	Gifting; word of mouth
	Other fans	Atmosphere
	Self-socialisation	Move to the city; city identity; job
<b>Club-Person: Direct</b>	Community	Players; club identity; club represents the city
	Marketing	Branding; friendlies
	Club Identity	Logo and colours; name; atmosphere
	New Club	Club announcement; part of something new; co-creation
	Ownership	Individual owners; sister club
	Player signings	Designated players; from larger clubs
	Infrastructure	Location; accessibility
<b>Club-Person: Indirect</b>	Geography	Local club; proximity
	Media	TV; social media
	Mega-events	Club formed



### 5.1.1. Person-Person

*A socialisation agent that is initiated by an individual onto the eventual fan.*

Socialisation agents identified in this category are family, friends, other fans and self-socialisation, with this section addressing the specific role each agent played.

#### 5.1.1.1. Family

As has been stated previously, due to expansion clubs' lack of playing history, there is often a lack of family awareness of the club, something this research also uncovered. This finding supports previous expansion club research (Lock et al., 2009). Yet, previous expansion club research found family to be impactful (Kolbe and James, 2000), without noting whether they were assessing socialisation agents. The family members highlighted by expansion club fans were female partners, brothers, and uncles. When considering the role they played, it was found to be through gifting.

Female partners were one of the most prominent factors within the family socialisation agent category, identified by several fans, a finding identified previously (Mastromartino et al., 2020a). This was achieved through gifting tickets to fans. On the face of it, this role shares similarities with 'STF', put forward by Mewett and Toffoletti (2011), however in their case the partner was a fan of the club. However, female partners in this study simply created opportunities for their partner to become a fan through gifting, providing a different form to 'STF'. Gifting is a voluntary act from one person to another (Yu et al., 2018). Drivers for gifting behaviour are divided into

symbolic (communicate a symbolic message) (Belk, 1977), hedonic (pleasure and emotion invoked by giving gifts) (Wolfenbarger and Yale, 1993), normative (driven by established social norms) (Giesler, 2006) or social (to build and maintain a social relationship with the recipient) (Giesler, 2006). Therefore, what will be discussed below is how the various examples identified apply to **Person-Person** socialisation by family members.

Considering female partners, NYCFC fan 38 stated, *“my wife bought us tickets to the first home game, which we both loved, so much so that we got a package for 9 games immediately after for the first season and purchased season tickets ever since”*. This example is one of social gifting as the gift-giving fan aims to build and maintain social relationships between them (Giesler, 2006). Additionally, it further supports the differences between this example and ‘**STF**’ (Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011). Similarly, NYCFC fan 59 noted how his wife spontaneously bought them tickets for a game between NYRB and NYCFC, with NYCFC losing 7-0, a further example of social gift giving. However, a different example of female partners gifting tickets, included NYCFC fan 40 who stated, *“I have followed and supported Andrea Pirlo for many years, and him coming to NY coincided with my birthday so my wife purchased tickets for us to see him play”*, with this example being normative (Giesler, 2006) as it was birthday related. Females are more likely to gift than males (Ward and Tran, 2008), with female partners here creating opportunities for socialisation to occur by gifting tickets, creating either shared experiences (social gifting) or arise from more normative situations. Therefore, this research supports the work of Ward and Tran (2008).

Other family members to socialise through gifting included uncles and brothers. NYCFC fan 20's uncle bought them tickets for NYCFC's first game at Yankee Stadium with the aim to spend time with each other the purpose of the ticket purchase, again social gifting (Giesler, 2006). Sharing similarities with gifting, one fan's brother-in-law signed them up for a founders list (list of first fans) (LAFC archival data), further contributing to the social gifting theme. There are implications for gifting. For instance, clubs could create opportunities for fans, mainly season ticket holders, to gift tickets to family members, potentially by making them cheaper to purchase or potentially even free at times. Many of the fans providing the gifts to the eventually socialised fans are likely to be early fans who are key in spreading the word about the expansion club (Ross, 2006; Dwyer et al., 2015; McDonald et al., 2016).

#### *5.1.1.2. Friends*

The original list of socialisation agents provided by Funk and James (2001) proposed friends as a socialisation agent. This was identified in this study also, alongside identifying the roles they played, through word of mouth and gifting. Previous expansion club research detailed that expansion club fans spend a significant amount of time attending games with friends (Lock et al., 2009). Firstly, fans were found to become aware of the expansion club simply because a friend told them about the club (NYCFC archival data). This was further exemplified by LAFC fan 21 who was directly invited to join the supporter group by a friend, providing them awareness of the club. LAFC fan 24 and NYCFC fan 67 shared similar examples:

*“My pal that I watch Lakers and Rams games with proposed we watch LAFC. After the World Cup and the ground being just a few stops on the exposition line from where we live it felt like a great moment to go.” (LAFC fan 24)*

*“I talked to a couple of friends of mine, one of which was my best friend and had been my best man and I said should we get a season ticket for NYCFC. We ended up doing it and although we weren’t in the first thousand fans, we were pretty early on” (NYCFC fan 67)*

This authenticates how friends’ suggestions to attend games and discussing the club together can have a bearing upon socialisation.

A second example of friends-initiated socialisation in this study provided by several fans was through the gifting of tickets, supporting previous studies (Mastromartino et al., 2020a) and the previous socialisation agent. This provides similar implications to those highlighted above. NYCFC fan 56 discussed how a friend bought them tickets for a game, with NYCFC fan 42 expressing how *“a friend has season tickets and gave me a free ticket when someone from their group of friends couldn’t make it. That game was the derby against NYRB in which Villa potted the hat trick. Bought a NYCFC scarf that night and never looked back”*, finding similarities with family above. Similarly, LAFC fan 29 discussed how a friend invited them to watch LAFC vs LAG, with the intention of watching LAG and Zlatan Ibrahimović, however, became an LAFC fan instead. Both examples represent features of social gifting, highlighted by Giesler

(2006). An implication therefore of these findings is in creating opportunities for fans to gift tickets to fans, especially those who are already season ticket holders, who may look to spread the word about the expansion club, akin to those identified with family.

#### 5.1.1.3. *Other fans*

Moving now onto other fans, those who are unknown to the fan in this case, and how they socialised fans, this was achieved by the atmosphere that these fans provided. Examples of this were less frequent, however, LAFC fan 31 exemplified this, by stating that *“the atmosphere and the fans was a huge draw for me”* and therefore socialised them. Furthermore, according to LAFC fan 19, LAFC have a more engaging culture than LAG, with LAFC fan 29 telling the researcher it *“gave me chills to see how that little corner was louder than all the stadium”*, highlighting LAFC fans when they attended LAFC vs. LAG. This enriches and add enjoyment to matchdays (Kolbe and James, 2000; Lock et al., 2011), with this research identifying other fans as an agent for socialisation to an expansion club. Furthermore, non-verbal displays from fans can also create awareness for brand associations of the clubs in the form of flags (Davies et al., 2021), which can contribute to the atmosphere. This may include Tifos or flag displays, cited by fans of both clubs (NYCFC and LAFC archival data). This demonstrates how impactful existing supporters can be in socialisation as they outwardly defend and represent their club, teaching fans the attitudes and values of being a fan, evangelising about the club (Mastromartino et al., 2019b). These fans are more than likely early fans, who have been found to become vitally important for

expansion clubs in creating excitement surrounding the club (Ross, 2006; Dwyer et al., 2015; McDonald et al., 2016).

#### *5.1.1.4. Self-socialisation*

Self-socialisation has previously been identified in previous research (Kolbe and James, 2000; Theodorakis et al., 2017). This study identified several examples such as city identity, moving location or a new job, however with a limited number of participants identifying each one frequently. However, one factor that was found amongst several fans was moving to a new city. This is exemplified by NYCFC fan 44 who moved to NYC and stated:

*“I began supporting NYCFC because I moved to NY right as the club was formed and I lived in Harlem, which is 3 stops from Yankee Stadium. The club, NYCFC, felt like New York from the first moment I attended a game. I might be new to NY, but it felt... just right”*

Other examples included moving to New York for an internship, again making them aware of the club (NYCFC archival data). Moving to a new city is found as a factor that can increase awareness of the team, supporting previous work (Funk and James, 2001). NYCFC fan 63 also chose to support NYCFC, however how they ended up with this decision provides various factors, but with awareness developed when they moved to NY.

*“When I was moving for college, I chose one around Newark and had decided that I needed a club to support. I find sports more fun when you can cheer for your boys against the enemy. However, I wasn't sure if I should pick NYCFC or NYRB. So on the day before I moved, I decided to perform a very scientific experiment. While sitting in the Newark hotel, about a mile from the Red Bull Arena, I loaded up FIFA 19 and simulated a best of three series between NYCFC and NYRB and all three games were tight, however NYCFC won in the end so that is who I chose to support”*

Despite NYCFC being successful in the video game, the move to New York was what brought the fan awareness of the club, with success in the video game, arguably a motivation, showing issues in the differences between the terms and the benefit of qualitative research. An additional, but limited role in self-socialisation was the fan gaining a new job. NYCFC fan 64 stated that they reported on the build-up to the NYCFC's first game for MLB.com (a baseball site), as NYCFC play at Yankee Stadium, a baseball stadium, which provided them with the awareness of NYCFC.

A further element of self-socialisation is city identity. This emerged as fans highlighted how they felt that being an Angelino or New Yorker created awareness of the club (NYCFC fan 2; 62; NYCFC archival data), with one fan saying that this was all there was too it. NYCFC fan 62 alluded to being from New York but now living in Orlando and how their city identity resulted in awareness of NYCFC.

*“I was born and raised in NY, but I had moved to Florida around the time NYCFC and Orlando SC joined MLS. I attended NYCFC’s first match in Orlando with a friend who was visiting from Italy and had never been to an MLS game. My friend asked me who I would be supporting since I now live in Florida but from NY. I told him I was unsure and jokingly said I would become a fan of whoever won. The game ended in a tie and after he asked me who would I follow. The answer was easy- I could never imagine wearing that Barney [the dinosaur] purple that Orlando SC wears. And I believe that once a New Yorker always a New Yorker even if you move somewhere else”*

Furthermore, NYCFC fan 2 illustrated what occurred as NYCFC was announced and how being a New Yorker contributed to that, stating that *“I had a unique opportunity as a New Yorker to support a club from the outset.”* This quote highlights how identifying with the city plays a role in socialisation, which also links into the uniqueness of being an expansion club. This shows that expansion club fans identify strongly with places (Kolbe and James, 2000; Lock et al., 2011; Heere and Katz, 2014), developed by themselves, hence **Person-Person**. A further example of city identity was identified by one LAFC fan who became aware of the club because the stadium is 5 minutes away from where they grew up (LAFC archival data). This demonstrates historical proximity and a previous connection and identity to the place. For practitioners, developing campaigns that foster fans’ identity to a place is a clear outcome of this finding, especially when it is noted that fans have a strong affinity with the city (Kolbe



and James, 2000; Lock et al., 2011; Heere and Katz, 2014). This is further enhanced when competing with another club within the same city.

### **5.1.2. Club-Person: Direct**

*A socialisation agent that is initiated by the club and within their control.*

The agents that **directly** played a role in the socialisation of expansion club fans included community, marketing, club identity, new club, owners, player signings and infrastructure.

#### *5.1.2.1. Community*

How the expansion club represented their community was identified by participants as a notable socialisation agent. This occurred through players, club identity and how the club represents the city. Community has yet to be, to the researcher's knowledge, identified as playing a role in expansion club fan socialisation, yet there are features that could be grouped into how clubs represent their community from the existing literature. For instance, Delia and Katz (2019) found sport and place identity to impact each other, with this evident here. Additionally, previous findings from this study and the wider literature find that expansion club fans significantly identify with their city (Kolbe and James, 2000; Lock et al., 2011; Heere and Katz, 2014). This demonstrates why this agent was the most prominent within the expansion club context.

Players signed by the expansion club who share a nationality with the local community were found to be key in fans' socialisation. California, the state that the city of LA is situated in, is in close proximity to the Mexican border with almost half of LA's population citing their ethnicity as Latino or Hispanic (Bureau, 2020). In NY, nearly one third of the population identify as either Hispanic or Latino (Bureau, 2020). The USA Census (2020) refers to Latino or Hispanic as a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race, a definition adopted by this study.

Detailing these players in greater detail, numerous fans in NY cited that due to their Spanish background, the signing of David Villa provided them with awareness of NYCFC (NYCFC archival data). Additional to this, LAFC fans appreciated the club signing Carlos Vela and other Latino players, such as Diego Rossi and Eduard Atuesta (LAFC archival data). In turn, these created opportunities for socialisation to occur. Supplementary, one fan noted that because their wife is Mexican and Carlos Vela was Mexican, they felt that there was a congruence between them and the club (LAFC archival data). LAFC fan 11 highlighted more detail surrounding this:

*The announcement of Carlos Vela to LAFC meant I was automatically in, this club has been awesome and I've gotten my dad and others to support them as well. I'm Mexican and so is Vela, so he's always been one of my favourite Mexican players and someone I always supported overseas as a player, so it was amazing to see him join LAFC.*

Jewell (2017) suggests clubs who are surrounded by Mexican communities should sign Mexican players, with this research clearly supporting that. This study does not suggest that clubs should sign all Mexican / Latino players, but this demographic of player clearly resonates and assists with fans' socialisation. Furthermore, for clubs with competition within the city it allows them to demonstrate an identity and affinity with the local community. This study therefore extends the role of players as socialisation agents (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Spaaij and Anderson, 2012; Theodorakis et al., 2017), simultaneously adding the role each socialisation agent plays, a feature which is lacking from previous studies. However, this not just within the player socialisation agent, but within community. What should also be noted is that Carlos Vela, Diego Rossi, and Eduard Atuesta are all midfielders and attackers, adding a positional element. This will be further addressed in future sections.

Club identity also played a role in the socialisation of fans within the community socialisation agent. This was either through the club's name, colours, and badge. Fans of expansion clubs, according to Davies et al. (2021), want their club to tap into authentic city characteristics and represent their city and portray this through club branding and culture. These previous examples, despite not assessing socialisation, closely embody how community, and specifically club identity, is epitomised. For instance, the logo was principally impactful for NYCFC fans, with NYCFC fan 16 stating that *"I loved NYCFC as soon as they unveiled their logo, a beautiful blend of NYC iconography"*. NYCFC's (2014: online) logo is inspired by the New York City subway token, with five subway tokens around the badge related to the five Boroughs

of NY, in what NYCFC says is to “reinforce the Club’s connection to entire city”, using Gotham font and use of the colours blue, white and orange taken from the New York City flag. This shows how NYCFC went to, and still go to, great efforts to represent the city in which they play, even to the extent of explicitly stating their intention.

A further example of how the expansion clubs represent the city and its community, is derived from NYCFC fan 65, and echoed by many other fans, who stated, *“I liked the fact they were a club for New York, who wanted to represent the whole city”*. This is enhanced by NYCFC’s name, which demonstrated the club was connected to the city using “City” in their name. NYCFC fan 1 simply stated that *“honestly it was simply the name ‘New York City’ FC”*, with this further supported by NYCFC fan 19. Furthermore, NYCFC fan 34 appreciated the marketing of having a club **directly** within the city of New York and demonstrates that clubs can play a role in socialising fans through marketing and branding activities. How the club marketed itself and its identity was also evident in how the club formed connections to the community. One way this was conducted was through billboards which stated “New York ‘City’s’ Football Club”. Billboards have been identified as useful physical touchpoints in how people become aware of new clubs (Du et al., 2020). NYCFC fan 65 discussed how these billboards positioned the club as belonging to, and reinforcing its location within, the Five Boroughs of NY, through the production of several billboard adverts (examples of which can be found in Figures 17-18).

*“When you are in NY, there are billboards... it’s often just a blue sign, saying ‘New York City’s club’, its subtle, out on subways or taxis, I see them mostly on there, then on Twitter too, if people see them, they tweet about them”*

**Figure 17: NYCFC advertisement, posted by @kcahalin (2019)**



**Figure 18: NYCFC advertisements, posted by @OhCitySaidI (2019)**



These billboards support notions that NYCFC are attempting to represent their community, through the billboards wording, suggesting that NYCFC are NY's football club, crucial when in competition with other teams within the city. Additionally, city related marketing and engagements can help build awareness of the expansion club (Davies et al., 2021). This provided similarities to MFC's (NYCFC's sister club) Our City' campaign in 2005, which attempted to foster the loyalties of local fans (Edensor

and Millington, 2008). This was based around the idea that MUFC, like NYRB, are situated in a different city to MCFC, or NYCFC. The use of this idea in New York could help foster an 'us versus them' element against NYRB and their fans, which can unite expansion club fans in the early periods (McDonald et al., 2016). This is achieved by wording that NYCFC is NY's football club and that the club are 'for the city' of NY. Furthermore, work by Lee (2018: 375) found that the president of the NYCFC supporter group (The Third Rail) at the time had stated that "the existing team in the region [prior to NYCFC], New York Red Bulls, had lacked emphasis on a New York City fan base", showing that NYCFC had. This demonstrates why this role was significant to fans who had a team already within their city and that when an attractive alternative arises, fans can switch team (Harada and Matsuoka, 1999).

Further contributing to the discussions above, one fan stated how LAFC created a connection to the community (LAFC archival data), something which LAG did not. This begins to bring in ideas around switching intentions and what could cause a fan to switch from one club to another. Additionally, it displays how fans have started to understand corporate changes in football. LAFC fan 34 highlighted decisions made by LAFC early in their development that helped socialise them into the club:

*"I was researching their vision and how they wanted to represent LA, including the identity of the city as it's a very diverse city. They wanted to reach out to the different communities. I felt like they didn't want to leave anyone out. They got a lot of the fan input when it came to designing the stadium and wanted to*

*match the atmosphere that they wanted to create. I read a book about Real Madrid and why they are so successful and it's because a lot of these big clubs in Europe and around the world, they are not just football clubs, they represent the identity and culture of their supporters in their city and I feel like people have like an urge to want to support that because they feel like these clubs represent them, represent where they're from"*

This suggests expansion clubs take inspiration from established clubs in a bid to make them seem more traditional. This extends similar findings by Mastromartino et al. (2020a) who found clubs were engaging with local businesses and doing good in the community, as a feature which was identified by fans. Therefore, what emerges from these discussions is a clear sense that fans of expansion clubs become aware of clubs by their actions, to not only forge but also clearly articulate, strong connections with the identity of the city, its culture, residents and therefore community, from the outset. Furthermore, this is something all clubs could take advantage of this, expansion club or not, whether that be in the development of new kits, creation of a new logo or generally in marketing and branding activities that represent the city in which they are based, especially in instances where the city has two clubs located within it, in a bid to make themselves seem connected to the community.



### 5.1.2.2. Marketing

Fans in this research cited the use of pre-season friendlies and general marketing and branding which created awareness of their respective expansion club. For instance, several fans praised the marketing and branding as simply being 'right' and effective (LAFC and NYCFC archival data) and how it played a significant role in their socialisation. However, there is an acknowledgement that this description is vague, but helps to validate the decisions they made. For LAFC fan 24, it was simply the presence of advertising and marketing that provided them with awareness of LAFC, telling the researcher that *"during LAFC's first season I saw vast amounts of advertising and a lot of fans wearing LAFC hats"*. This shows how impactful marketing and advertising can be in generating awareness for an expansion club, simply through a quantity of adverts, often in comparison to the limited marketing from the other team within the city. LAFC fan 9 described to the researcher that they had heard about LAFC through an email from MLS and LAFC in 2014, showing examples of email marketing. This factor then led them to sign up for the club due to the awareness they provided through emails, playing a role in their socialisation. The timing of the marketing and advertising was deemed to be important. NYCFC's advertising around the World Cup in 2014, the year before the club joined the league, played a role in socialising fans into clubs (NYCFC archival data). This reveals the power and importance of early marketing activities in encouraging support for expansion clubs, even prior to them playing their first match. These examples suggest any form of marketing and advertising would work as the expansion club attempts to increase its

awareness, but from the previous agent, city related marketing could also be impactful. An additional example comes from free tickets. NYCFC fan 11 received free tickets for a Philadelphia Union game against NYCFC, with Philadelphia Union offering the tickets. Although NYCFC did not offer the free tickets, it shows the benefits of offering free tickets or discounts to fans (Mastromartino et al., 2020b).

The deliberate planning of friendly matches also represents a marketing opportunity for expansion clubs to create awareness of the club, as they often mean a smaller club plays against a larger club. For larger clubs they represent opportunities to engage with fans they would never normally be able to. As an example, one LAFC fan reported becoming aware of the club when they played a friendly against Borussia Dortmund (LAFC archival data). Therefore, where expansion clubs play established clubs from other markets, they represent an opportunity to attract fans. Further examples emerged with two established clubs playing at a neutral venue. In this case one of the clubs was NYCFC's sister club, MCFC. NYCFC fan 67 attended a friendly match between MCFC and LFC at Yankee Stadium, as a supporter of MCFC, stating *"that's when we found out that they were going to have a sister club in NYC. So, it was immediately then I became interested"* with the sister club being NYCFC. These examples show two ways in which expansion club fans could become aware of the club, either through a game they were involved in or through a game a sister club was involved in. Regardless, they represent suitable opportunities to engage expansion clubs, with examples of friendlies found later in this thesis also.

### 5.1.2.3. Club Identity

Expansion clubs begin their journey with a clean slate meaning club identity is vitally important when forming perceptions. Furthermore, it was deemed significant amongst fans also, with numerous fans highlighting club identity as playing a role in their socialisation to becoming an expansion club fan. Fans of expansion clubs have been found to be 'old school sports fans', who seek nostalgia and traditional aspects of sport (Kunkel et al., 2017; Davies et al., 2021), with a many fans highlighting how this played a role in their socialisation.

NYCFC fan 34 highlighted that the reveal of the badge played a role in their socialisation, without providing any detail on the badge content. Many fans across both clubs highlighted a fondness for the colours of the club, noting that they liked the colour scheme of the club (LAFC fan 20; LAFC archival data; NYCFC fan 30 and 54). The logos for both clubs can be found in the appendices. The logo embodies the values of the club, with fans highlighting connotations of modernity, timelessness, simplicity, and freshness as drawing them into the club. For instance, LAFC fan 34 stated that *"once LAFC was announced I was initially generally into them because the logo looked cool"*. This was further demonstrated by LAFC fan 1, whose previous job as a graphic designer helped to shape their perception of the club's identity.

*"I remember thinking THIS is who I want to follow when I heard about their announcement. The crest was released, and I loved the aesthetic. What I love*

*about is that it looks timeless, I used to do graphic design and although not many clients wanted to go that route, the simpler the design the better. Other MLS clubs look like they are from a logo farm”*

All these descriptions of the logo are what expansion clubs will want to control and manipulate to allow the creation of a brand identity and personality, especially when these features may be all fans have to judge the club upon in the early stages. Additionally, by being new, expansion clubs can also create a change in MLS identity, something highlighted by NYCFC fan 54 who emphasised that they felt that MLS clubs’ identity has been revolutionised, thus leading to their socialisation:

*“I was just getting into soccer when MLS launched but I never completely engaged with local teams like the Metrostars [now, NYRB]. Whether it was kits, name, badge just never felt totally right. Also, neither Massachusetts or New Jersey are really convenient enough for my journey from Connecticut to see them as a legit local club. Enter NYCFC. MLS improved, the kit, colours, badge all feel more in line with what I want from a football club”*

This presents a belief that MLS expansion clubs have improved the quality of their identity. Expansion club clubs clearly play a significant role in this, appealing to fans’ wider knowledge of football through the modern transformation that MLS has been through.

Both expansion clubs in this research are slightly different in their choice of name by including “Football Club” in their name. This contrasts with established MLS clubs which have Americanised names such as Montreal Impact, Real Salt Lake, San Jose Earthquakes and Colorado Rapids and further enhances the discussions above surrounding the changing style of MLS club identity. LAFC fan 35 suggested how the inclusion of traditional aspects of a club name, helped to produce awareness of the expansion club.

*“Seeing “LA Football Club” after being used to Chelsea Football Club, Arsenal Football Club, Manchester United. Those names I was drawn to you know they were original quote unquote football, not like LAG or Kansas City Wizards those are all Americanized club names. I guess then I was drawn to the concept of LAFC”*

This change in attitude shows how fans in America have come to prefer the traditional European football names. Other MLS expansion clubs such as Atlanta United, FC Cincinnati and Orlando City SC (soccer club) have all begun to include features of traditional names also (e.g., Manchester United FC, FC Barcelona, FC Bayern Munich, Liverpool FC). There are two aspects here to consider. Expansion club fans tend to be ‘old school sports fans’, who seek nostalgia in sport (Kunkel et al., 2017; Davies et al., 2021). This helps to justify why there may be a change in attitude detailed by LAFC fan 35. Linked to this, it also suggests that clubs in MLS are potentially working on a glocal approach, tailoring a global product to the local market (Robertson,

1992). The idea of “New York City FC” and “Los Angeles FC”, in the context of glocalisation, contains a local identity, New York and LA aspects of their name, but simultaneously appealing to the global football fan community, albeit imagined, by the use of FC. LAFC fan 36, amongst others, further highlighted appreciation of the unique “Football Club” aspect of the name:

*“I saw that there was gonna be a new club in LA called LA Football Club, and this was after a couple years of watching football. I thought that's weird that they would call themselves LA Football Club because most clubs come in and they you know are called LAG or different things and so I kind of started following their expansion really early on”*

This adoption described by LAFC fan 36, should be considered by future expansion clubs, as it resonates with the perception and knowledge of what fans already know about football around the world. Furthermore, it demonstrates how the retained local identity (NYC or LA) alongside the global aspect of ‘football club’ or ‘city’, appeals greatly to fans. This contrasts with the “traditional” MLS names, which were an attempt to use a marketable approach to football in America, with names such as Kansas City Wizards, San Jose Clash and New York / New Jersey MetroStars, attempting to appeal to the American sports market at the time, with these clubs changing to names that reflected the sport globally and locally (Strutner et al., 2014). Yet, the fact fans feel this shows an extension to Giulianotti and Robertson’s (2004) idea of particularistic symbolism, as fans play a role in representing locality, through dress,

songs, flags, with the club representing this in marketing campaigns, like those discussed in the community agent.

Atmosphere and the role it played, is a further aspect of club identity, with a change to a European, traditional atmosphere that assisted in fans' socialisation. Atmosphere is often controlled by fans and therefore would normally be categorised as **Person-Person**. In this instance however, LAFC fan 12 exemplified how a promise from the front office of LAFC, therefore a **direct** socialisation agent, was something that created awareness to fans about the expansion club:

*“I had been to all sorts of sporting events even a LAG game growing up but never really enjoyed soccer. Then moved to Spain and went to two separate Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid matches and was blown away by the atmosphere. Literally the same month I got back, I heard an announcement for LAFC and the promise of a European style of football matches. I bought two season tickets and have been a fan ever since”*

This represents a shift in what fans are looking for in MLS clubs, namely a move away from the Americanised experience, with Americanised names and atmosphere, towards what they perceive to be a more traditional European football experience, supporting the idea of nostalgia and traditionality identified previously (Kunkel et al., 2017; Davies et al., 2021). This is a reoccurring theme, with factors such as club identity, continuing to be viewed as an element that is improving. As such, the fan

experience plays an important role in socialising fans into clubs, by promising features that the club would endeavour to create or facilitate.

#### 5.1.2.4. *New club*

What became increasingly evident was how the newness of the expansion clubs provided fans with opportunities to co-create the club's future, therefore being a new club is a socialisation agent. This meant that, instead of learning about the attitudes, values, and actions that socialisation agents are seen as providing, fans could co-create the attitudes, values, and actions themselves alongside others. The role this socialisation agent played emerged from phrases such as 'the chance to be there from the beginning', 'write their own history', 'fresh slate', 'support a club from the bottom up' and 'the chance to be there from day one'. Terms such as these, allow fans to feel like they have a club they can call their own, no longer needing to turn to neighbouring existing clubs (Davies et al., 2021).

A significant number of fans relayed to the researcher how the announcement of the club created awareness (LAFC fan 13, 20, 26, 28 and 30; NYCFC fan 35, 41, 48, 49, 52, 53, and 56), suggesting this to be a significant socialisation agent. This is exemplified by NYCFC fan 33, stating that it was "*once the club had been announced I became interested*", suggesting that for expansion club fans, the announcement of the club can have an instant impact. Similarly, LAFC fan 26 professed that "*as soon as I heard LA was announced, I immediately fell in love and wanted more and to be a*



*part of it*", showing how socialisation can be immediate due to this desire to be there from the beginning. This shares similarities with findings from McDonald et al. (2016) around the **instant fanatic** expansion club fan type.

In this case, the growth of MLS and therefore the expansion of it, allows fans to feel a connection to the sport and feel like they are increasing football's growth in the country, as highlighted by NYCFC fan 14.

*"Once NYCFC was announced I immediately decided to not only follow a club close to me, but also to be part of a new sporting organisation. Most New York sport fans become fans due to ancestry or proximity, and those clubs have history, having been around for years. I'd rather support a new club in one of the biggest cities in the world. This would help expand soccer in America and NY city. How many can say they supported a club from the start in New York? Not many"*

The idea of supporting the sport has also been found within team identification of expansion club fans, with supporting football viewed as an overwhelming motivation (Lock et al., 2009), with similar findings for motivation to support female sports clubs (Guest and Luijten, 2018).

Finally, what becomes evident is that the newness of a club can allow fans to co-create the identity and culture of the team. A **direct** way in which fans were allowed to co-

create with the club, was by NYCFC offering fans the opportunity to vote on the development of the club's badge (NYCFC fan 33), which provided an opportunity for socialisation in this study and has been recognised as a way of enhancing team identification (Doyle et al., 2017). LAFC fan 15 further expanded on this idea and how it feels:

*“The feeling of helping shape it is something big. I'm not affiliated with any supporters' groups but being in the first 10,000 or so members before a match had been played is new. Watching a club grow, even if you don't have a say in decisions, from just a name to winning titles gives you a huge sense of ownership and pride. You feel like it's your club because you've been there from the beginning”*

By indicating that they feel that they have ownership in creating their own attitudes and values for the club, they demonstrate the very definition of socialisation agents (Funk and James, 2001). Much of this suggests there is some nuance needed by expansion clubs when building a fan base, such that fans feel they are part of the development of the club, whether that be allowing fans to vote on specific features of the club or just using phrases in their campaigns.

#### 5.1.2.5. Ownership

Owners of the respective clubs emerged as a key socialisation agent for fans in this study. For context, NYCFC are owned by the CFG, who own a network of clubs including **MCFC**, and the **New York Yankees**, resulting in these clubs being viewed as sister clubs. In contrast, LAFC are owned by a plethora of investors, including **Larry Berg**, **Brandon Beck**, and **Henry Nguyen**, however, there are more famous and notable owners including **Will Ferrell** (actor), **Earvin Johnson** (former NBA player), **Mia Hamm Garciparra** (ex-US women's national club player), and **Nomar Garciparra** (former MLB player). One of the highest ranked brand associations by fans of new clubs has been found to be the personnel of clubs (Kunkel et al., 2016), showing some relevance to this study as socialisation agents. There is an overarching notion here surrounding pre-existing attachments that fans may already have, including "soccer, sport in general, the city, the community, the coach, the players, the owner, Major League Soccer (MLS), an affiliated lower division team, and an affiliated major league team" (Du et al., 2020: 29). This in turn can help with forming awareness of the expansion club (Kunkel et al., 2013; Daniels et al., 2019; Du et al., 2020), with attachments identified in this study being individual owners and sister clubs.

The individual owners highlighted above were seen as key by participants in playing a role in providing fans' awareness of the expansion club and therefore in becoming a fan. For instance, commentators during a Chelsea FC game, spotted Will Ferrell in attendance and noted his connections to LAFC (LAFC archival data). Furthermore,

based off who was part of the ownership team, fans stated that they believed they were of a high standard and were ambitious (Lafc fan 16; Lafc archival data). This demonstrates that famous people can socialise fans, supporting previous research on celebrity athlete influencers and the purchasing of products (Dix et al., 2010; Chaudhary and Dey, 2015; 2016). Lafc are not the only club to engage in such phenomena; 2021 MLS expansion club, Austin FC are co-owned by Matthew McConaughey, with other clubs owned or part-owned by famous people, including Naomi Osaka at North Carolina Courage, Jamie Vardy at Rochester Rhinos, and Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney at Wrexham AFC. Therefore, an implication here may be to try and encourage famous, ideally local celebrities to engage within the ownership of the club, to increase awareness of the club.

Fans also told the researcher that they were aware of some crossover between Lafc and Lafc Dodgers, their favourite Baseball club, with Magic Johnson (Lafc fan 32 and 36). However, as will be discussed, this differs from the role played by sister clubs as there is no formal link between the clubs. Yet, this further supports the idea of local co-branding, as clubs associate themselves with existing interests of fans, which include other sports and leagues (Du et al., 2020), a trend also discovered within sister clubs.

One of the unique features of NYCFC is that they are owned by the CFG, alongside MFCF, and New York Yankees, therefore MFCF and New York Yankees are sister clubs for NYCFC. Across Europe, "UEFA estimates there are 90 clubs with links and

'just under' 50 shareholders owning two or more clubs" (Menary, 2021: online). This is pertinent here as many fans cited sister club relationships as how they became aware of the expansion club. Therefore, and extending findings from McDonald et al. (2010), new clubs can leverage existing support for a global expansion club by creating links, something yet to be identified in the extant socialisation literature. Furthermore, these links, either formal or informal, could be, and continue to be, operationalised by larger clubs around the world (Menary, 2021).

Previous studies have found that fans who support clubs in European leagues are more likely to support their local club (McDonald et al., 2010), with examples uncovered here in relation to sister clubs. This is exemplified by many fans of NYCFC citing the MFCFC connection as how they discovered NYCFC, adding that it made sense to follow NYCFC because of this existing relationship (NYCFC fan 13, 45 and 54; NYCFC archival data). Additionally, by being a New York Yankees fan, many fans gained awareness about NYCFC (NYCFC fan 3, 21, 32, 46 and 49). This demonstrates how creating relationships, such as NY Yankees and MFCFC, can develop a viable fan base for expansion clubs, something that could easily be replicated by established clubs. Moreover, NYCFC fan 13 believed that there would be high standards to NYCFC due to the shared ownership with MFCFC. NYCFC fan 45 provided extensive detail about their journey from MFCFC to NYCFC and how they were socialised to NYCFC, with MFCFC playing a significant role.

*“My extended family are MUFC fans, so I went the other way and rooted for MCFC. I kept up with them via the internet but didn't have a way to watch them until I graduated university in 2015. In my last year in university, I decided I to watch MLS. I hadn't paid the league much attention up to that point, so I didn't know that NYCFC was coming until a few months prior to the start of the 2015 season. The connection to MCFC, same colours and philosophy, made it easy to identify with them and being a brand-new club when I was getting into soccer made it a good combination. My MCFC connection started as a joke, but over time I came to identify with the club”*

The similarities do not stop there, with many clubs within the CFG sharing similarities such as a round badge and colours, evident in Figure 19.

**Figure 19: Logos of four of the CFG clubs that share similar logos**



Furthermore, NYCFC fan 50 stated that *“when NYCFC were announced as an expansion club, I started following them [NYCFC] due to the MCFC relationship”*, as they had been an MCFC fan previously. These examples contribute to the discussion of how links with established clubs can help to create awareness for expansion club fans. What has previously been identified is that long-distance fans often choose to support a club abroad, especially when they share similarities with the kit of their local club (Hognestad, 2006; Chanavat and Bodet, 2009). In this example we have a reverse of this notion, with fans in New York choosing to support their local club, NYCFC, because it shared similarities with their international club, MCFC. However, fans found that NYCFC could be viewed as an American MCFC, with shared values, colours, and philosophy, shown by NYCFC fan 41 who stated how *“I don’t really love being MCFC lite”*, showing drawbacks and challenges of ownership links.

The above highlights how NYCFC benefitted from the sister club relationship of either New York Yankees or MCFC, with many fans being socialised into becoming a fan through them. However, for NYCFC fan 32, they discussed being a fan of New York Yankees followed by NYCFC and then MCFC. This shows that there can be benefits of the relationship for all sides as NYCFC fan 32 stated that it *“I’m a NY Yankees fan, so decided it’d make sense to be a NYCFC fan as they play in Yankee Stadium. At this point, I started watching MCFC as they are part-owners of NYCFC...so I just moved through the clubs”*. Therefore, this study finds that sister clubs are not the sole beneficiary of such relationships, a finding identified elsewhere (Martorell et al., 2020). This thesis therefore shows support for sister clubs in socialising fans, across a variety

of sports, (baseball and football) demonstrating how they can be useful in the recruitment, and socialisation, of expansion club fans.

#### *5.1.2.6. Player signings*

Player signings are elements controlled by the expansion club and in this case are Designated Players (DP) and players signed from larger clubs. The identification of this finding extends the extant literature on sports fans in general (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Spaaij and Anderson, 2012; Theodorakis et al., 2017). Previous expansion club studies identify star players to cause complexity in relation to fandom (Lock et al., 2012), yet players have been ranked as the highest brand associations by expansion club fans (Kunkel et al., 2016). This highlights a need to uncover players prominence in relation to expansion clubs across various cultures.

MLS has a salary cap in which DP are off budget, with clubs allowed three at one time, often high profile and highly paid. DPs have been found to have a positive impact upon attendances within MLS (Lawson et al., 2008). The rule has been a feature of MLS since 2007, when David Beckham signed for LAG (Coates et al., 2016). The doubling of ticket sales was attributed to David Beckham's arrival to MLS (Lawson et al., 2008). However, Parrish (2013: 65) identifies that “the ability to lure and pay up to three marquee players market value favors clubs who are positioned in a financially advantageous market”, highlighting New York and LA as being two cities who are ideally positioned. Other notable DPs, aside from Beckham, include Thierry Henry,



Steven Gerrard, Wayne Rooney, and Zlatan Ibrahimović. Additionally, these players are often from Europe, which for fans with awareness of football may suggest why they are chosen as DPs as awareness of them is already high. NYCFC fans highlighted **Frank Lampard**, **Andrea Pirlo** and **David Villa** as being their favourite player (NYCFC fan 7, 9, 58; NYCFC archival data) creating awareness of NYCFC. Similarly, LAFC fans highlighted how Carlos Vela was their favourite player prior to signing for LAFC which therefore made them aware of LAFC when he signed as a DP (LAFC archival data). NYCFC fan 58 discussed how the signing of Andrea Pirlo was enough to socialise them, suggesting that by Pirlo signing that was enough.

*“NYCFC: We have signed Andrea Pirlo.*

*Me (an intellectual): I now support NYCFC”*

The comment from NYCFC fan 58 is discussing that the simplicity of NYCFC signing Pirlo almost automatically made them a fan. One fan commented on this fan’s post stating that, *“Andrea Pirlo was a favourite player of mine. Once NYCFC signed him as a DP the choice was made”*, showing the impact DPs can have on awareness. Additionally, NYCFC fan 7 and 9 both highlighted David Villa as their favourite player, making it easy for them to support NYCFC. Again, all the players identified by fans were forwards or midfielders, a trait of many of the other MLS DPs. This could be because DPs’ aim is to attract fans to the club, with goals and excitement contributing to this.

An additional significant role of players in socialisation was how many expansion team fans followed a player from one team to the expansion club. For instance, fans cited supporting Chelsea FC (Frank Lampard's previous club) (NYCFC fan 21, 31 and 43), Barcelona and Valencia (David Villa's previous clubs) (NYCFC fan 9, 33; NYCFC archival data) and Arsenal FC (Carlos Vela's previous club) (LAFC fan 28) and then moving to support the expansion club. An additional factor is that all the players cited above are also all DPs. The fans' support of these player's previous clubs, and their subsequent signing by expansion clubs, therefore socialised and provided fans with awareness of the expansion club. NYCFC fan 9 discussed how their prior knowledge of Villa through his previous club, lead them to NYCFC.

*"Once I found out David Villa had joined NYCFC it was a done deal for me as he was one of my favourite players to watch when he played in, and for, Spain, especially in the 2010 FIFA World Cup"*

Frank Lampard's signing brought attention to NYCFC for many fans who were supporting Chelsea previously. Fans stated that when Frank Lampard joined, they automatically became an NYCFC fan (NYCFC fan 24, 31, 34 and 43), with the signing being viewed as the cherry on top for NYCFC fan 34. NYCFC fan 43 *"leapt at the opportunity to see Lampard, one of my favourite players playing in my home city"*, showing how the player brought awareness of the expansion club. Fans who support clubs in Europe, like Chelsea who Lampard played for, are more likely to support their local club (McDonald et al., 2010), NYCFC and LAFC in this case. Here players were

found to be the central theme that brought them to the expansion club, via the European club.

#### *5.1.2.7. Infrastructure*

This research found that when considering infrastructure, location and accessibility played an important role within this socialisation agent. It is key here to differentiate between geography and infrastructure. Infrastructure surrounds the features around the stadium, including specific location and accessibility and how they socialised the fan. In contrast, geography considers locality and proximity, which will be covered in section 5.1.3.2. as an **indirect** socialisation agent. Considered within infrastructure is accessibility and location. For the latter, the role played is twofold; location of the stadium and the specific location within the city, all of which provided the fan with awareness of the club.

Taking the location of the stadium first, it played a significant role in fans' socialisation as they had an appreciation for where their respective stadiums, Banc of California Stadium and Yankee Stadium, were located. The Banc of California stadium is in the downtown area of LA, near the Coliseum, and Yankee Stadium is in the Bronx, one of the Boroughs of NY. LAFC fan 14 simply stated "*LAFC appealed more to me than the Galaxy based on location of stadium*". Similarly, LAFC fan 27 provided further detail on comparisons between LAFC and LAG, telling the researcher about the amenities around the stadium.

*“I live under an hour away from LA and I wanted to see what activities I could do before and after watching a game. The location of LAFC’s stadium offers the best experience. There are so many things to do; museums, restaurants, and pockets of downtown neighbourhoods to explore such as Little Tokyo, Chinatown, Koreatown and the Arts District. Beyond that and you will end up in Echo Park, Silverlake. Downtown LA is experiencing massive growth and LAFC is part of that. I can’t say the same for LAG and Carson. Their only attraction is an Ikea MegaCentre and strip malls and it’s in a very nondescript suburban neighbourhood. If I’m going to take a journey of over an hour just to get to LA, I want to have the time of my life while I’m there!! LAFC provides that”*

This highlights that the amenities around a stadium, in this case the Banc of California stadium, are appreciated by fans and provide them with awareness based upon the location of the stadium. This is an element adopted by many established clubs too, either through fan parks organised pre-match or in America where new stadiums have been brought closer to the city and other amenities, despite the lack of real estate. This shows an implication for future expansion clubs, and even established clubs. This becomes more significant when there are two clubs within a city for fans to choose from.

The second and most cited role by expansion team fans within this agent is the team’s location within the city, as fans’ intense attachment to the city that the club is based in continues here. For instance, LAFC fan 3 told the researcher how *“there was no club*

*in LA before LAFC, for a lifelong Angeleno*”, suggesting a contrast to the location of LAG, alongside a city identity, which creates feelings around the club’s location. LAFC fan 2 added to this by stating that they wanted to support the LA club and LAFC provided them with that, with NYCFC fans stating that the city of New York did not have a club until NYCFC were founded (NYCFC archival data).

This begins to question where fans perceive their respective cities to begin and end. LAFC and LAG both play in California state and within the Metropolitan area of LA, however LAFC play in the city of LA, whereas LAG play in the city of Carson. Additionally, how the difference between two teams plays a role with fans in becoming a fan, where an attractive alternative is identified. With this, fans wanted the club to physically be in the city of LA (LAFC archival data), compared to LAG. LAFC fan 4 stated that their socialisation was *“easy, I love football and LA”*. NYCFC and NYRB differ to LAFC and LAG. NYRB play in the state of New Jersey and the city of Harrison with NYCFC playing in the state and city of NY. Therefore, many fans, when NYCFC were founded, wanted the club to be situated in the 5 Boroughs of NYC, with this being what socialised fans (NYCFC fan 23 and 30; NYCFC archival data). NYCFC fan 41 stated that *“being in New York City proper”* was most important to them, showing the impact of a club in the city of NY. Similarly, NYCFC fan 21, who also was an NYRB fan previously and switched clubs, said:

*“Rumours began of another NYC club that would play in NYC. Having a club not only play in NYC, but INSIDE Yankee stadium, I immediately threw my full*

*support behind NYCFC. The feeling of a club actually playing in the city made supporting RB no longer feasible”*

Furthermore, NYCFC fan 13 stated how they may have remained a NYRB fan if they played in NYC, demonstrating the importance of the club’s location within the city. This demonstrates fans’ feelings towards places and how clubs, especially expansion clubs, should be aware of the significance of place related factors when building a fan base.

Often a consequence of the club’s location within the city is a more accessible stadium, with this impacting socialisation. Previous work identified options for transit and access as key in fandom (Davies et al., 2021), however it is yet to be identified in socialisation. Accessibility has been found to impact stadium experiences (Fernandes and Neves, 2014; Steadman et al., 2020; Edensor et al., 2021), however it is missing from socialisation literature to the best of the author’s knowledge. When clubs choose where to place their stadium, public transport links should be of prime importance.

The Exposition Line, a light rail line that runs from downtown LA to Santa Monica, had a significant impact on fans’ socialisation as they could get to the Banc of California Stadium by exiting at Expo Park / USC Station (LAFC archival data). This was exemplified by LAFC fans who highlighted that they wanted to take the train to games and LAFC was able to provide this (LAFC archival data). LAFC fan 7 further stated that the Expo Line was easy to use and accessible for them. NYCFC fan 44 discussed

the ease of transportation, stating that *“I used to live in Harlem which is 3 stops from Yankee Stadium”*. LAFC fan 5 highlighted that *“we live close enough to public transit that Kings (Ice Hockey), Clippers (Basketball), Lakers (Basketball), and Dodger (Baseball) games are really accessible, so as soon as LAFC this included them”*, showing how public transport and access can socialise fans. This further emphasises the impact of public transport for expansion club fans in this research. There is also a comparison between one club and another, bringing in switching intentions, with NYCFC fan 36 stating that *“NYCFC only had to play where I didn’t have to take the NJ transit to attend”*, *although at times, NYCFC do play some games at the Red Bull Arena, home of NYRB*. This is a slightly different argument around public transport, but potentially raises an argument around preference of type of transport or for no public transport, with NYCFC being an attractive alternative. An additional element surrounding accessibility is how fans can walk to the stadium, with NYCFC fan 54 simply saying *“Getting to the Bronx isn’t too difficult”*, further echoing previous work (Davies et al., 2021).

### **5.1.3. Club-Person: Indirect**

*A socialisation agent that encompasses the club but is out of their control.*

When considering **indirect** socialisation agents that play a role in the socialisation of expansion club fans, this thesis identified geography, media, and mega-events, all of which were outside the control of the expansion club.

### 5.1.3.1. Geography

As has been highlighted above infrastructure did emerge, however the difference between the terms geography and infrastructure is that geography focuses on distance and locality. Considering the wider literature, geography was discovered as a socialisation agent in the PCM (Funk and James, 2001), yet its significance in expansion club literature was limited. The extant literature outside of expansion clubs identifies a lack of significance for the term (Wann et al., 2001b; Melnick and Wann, 2004; Theodorakis and Wann, 2008; Parry et al., 2014; Theodorakis et al., 2017). Geographical connection was identified previously regarding expansion club fans (Greenwood et al., 2006), but did not specifically focus on socialisation. This study however identified local club and / or the proximity of the club as playing a role in expansion club fan socialisation.

LAFC fan 6 exemplified the definition of locality, stating that it was *“Very simple, they are local!”* This was further supported by NYCFC fan 4 and 5, with the latter declaring that NYCFC is *“Local pro soccer in my borough!”*, showing how locality plays a role in socialisation and differs from infrastructure. Additionally, NYCFC fan 37 had a desire to support a local club, saying *“I needed a local club, and NYCFC filled that void”*. This shows that there was nothing NYCFC needed to do to entice NYCFC fan 37 as the club was simply local to them, demonstrating the **indirectness**. One less expected example derives from NYCFC fan 55 who lives in Canada and identified NYCFC as



their local team. This is due to the low spread of clubs in USA and is covered in more detail when discussing proximity.

Geographic proximity focuses on the objective notion that the club is the closest one to them. This has been identified previously by Kolbe and James (2000). This was summarised by one fan comparing the LA MLS clubs to their MLB clubs. They described LAG as being like the LA Angels, who play in Anaheim, whereas LAFC are like the Dodgers, who play in the city of LA. They eventually stated that LAFC were their closest geographical club (LAFC archival data). Similarly, LAFC fan 18 stated that *“when MLS put a club in close proximity to me, it brought MLS to my focus. I was a 5-minute walk from the Banc”*. This shows how placing a club close to where fans live, helps provide awareness, with this fan citing MLS as playing a role in the process due to the process of expansion club selection.

Comparisons between expansion and established clubs continued here, contributing to switching intentions. LAFC fan 10 highlighted that LAG’s moving stadium from Pasadena to Carson, meant that LAFC eventually became closer for them. LAFC fan 10 stated *“I heard LAFC were playing next to the Coliseum, which was close to my house. Naturally I felt it was my obligation to support them”*. This example shows how they felt an obligation to follow, and gain knowledge of, the closest club, a pressure identified in previous literature into expansion clubs (Kolbe and James, 2000). Further comparisons emerged around NYCFC and NYRB (NYCFC archival data), advanced by NYCFC fan 8 who did not state that NYRB was further away, however they stated

that they “*wanted to support a club to watch in person and NYCFC was the closest*”, suggesting proximity to the club meant that they were able to see NYCFC in person.

#### 5.1.3.2. Media

Media has previously been identified as a socialisation agent in the PCM (Funk and James, 2001), with this thesis reinforcing it, albeit with limited significance. This was identified by fans as occurring through TV and social media. In the case of television, it was found that fans became aware of the club by watching them on TV, in this case, during the club’s first season. NYCFC fan 28 described that prior to working as an interpreter for NYCFC, they already had awareness of the club as they “*had followed them on TV during their first few months*”, of their inaugural season, therefore showing how they had become aware of the club through TV, leading to their socialisation.

In the case of social media, LAFC fan 33 noted how they became aware of LAFC’s existence through social media, before further down the line, declaring themselves as a fan. This process therefore is demonstrative of the PCM, showing how fans move through the stages, as described by Funk and James (2001). In a move away from traditional awareness, one fan decided to follow the LAFC Subreddit, where this research was conducted. They chose to do this as they followed other sports clubs from LA on the site (LAFC archival data), with the fan citing this as their first awareness of LAFC. This was not **directly** accomplished by the club but demonstrates variances in how media occurred. Existing research has found that fans have been found to

gather in online domains (Gibbons and Dixon, 2010; Pegoraro, 2013; Stavros et al., 2014; Smith, 2017; Yoon, 2019; Teng et al., 2020), with this study identifying its emergence in the socialisation process.

#### 5.1.3.3. *Mega-events*

When considering the previous relationship between MLS and FIFA World Cups, the 1994 World Cup in USA had forming MLS as a pre-requisite to hosting the event. More recently however, a World Cup has been found to decrease attendance in MLS due to the calendar aligning with the mega-event (Wooten, 2018). Yet, the present research suggests it has an ability to socialise fans, despite only one fan citing it. For instance, the 2014 World Cup in Brazil coincided with the early stages of both NYCFC and LAFC's formation. The impact of this was illustrated by NYCFC fan 61 who stated that "*I started watching soccer during the 2014 World Cup, the same time NYCFC was being formed, so it fit*", showing how timing when an expansion club forms, in line with a World Cup in this case, can provide fans with awareness. Although the presence of the agent in this study emerged as an **indirect** socialisation agent, there is potential for clubs to develop their marketing activities around World Cups and other major championships, such as the Gold Cup, in which the USA play in, when considering future MLS expansion clubs. Additionally, marketing by the expansion club surrounding World Cups was highlighted within **direct** marketing in socialisation agents.

## 5.2. *Female fans*

Female fans are seen as an underdeveloped area of study (Crawford, 2004; Pope, 2013), with a focus previously upon their experiences rather than how they become a fan (Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011). Therefore, this section aims to identify the key socialisation agents and understand the role played by those agents in relation to female fans. Before an evaluation of the key findings for this research, the *Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework* is displayed, in Table 15, in relation to female fans.

**Table 15: The Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework applied to female fans**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Socialisation agent</b>	<b>Roles played</b>
<b>Person-Person</b>	Family	Obligation; shared experiences; family from the city; history of family support
	Friends	Shared experiences
	Individual infatuation	To impress
	Education	School
	Player	Attraction; partner; skill
<b>Club-Person: Direct</b>	Marketing	Promotions
	Ownership	Individual owners
<b>Club-Person: Indirect</b>	Geography	Local club
	Success	Non-dominant club; underdog
	Video games	Club identity
	Media	TV

### 5.2.1. Person-Person

*A socialisation agent that is initiated by an individual onto the fan.*

The first aspect to consider is the role people play in socialising female fans. Considering the model highlighted above, this section will address the **Person-Person** socialisation agents that emerged as playing a wide range of roles for female fans, which include family, friend, individual infatuation, education, and players.

#### 5.2.1.1. Family

Female football fans were socialised by a range of family-related agents, including cousins, male partners, parents, and siblings. These have previously been identified with previous work into female fans. For example, fathers were broadly seen as the most prominent socialisation agent, as identified in previous studies (Wann et al., 2001b; Melnick and Wann, 2004; Theodorakis and Wann, 2008; Melnick and Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014; Theodorakis et al., 2017). Similarly, partners were expected to have a bearing on the process of female fandom socialisation, as suggested by previous work (Ben-Porat, 2009; Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011; Whiteside and Hardin, 2011; Tamir, 2020). This is further supported with cousins' (Wann et al., 2001b; Melnick and Wann, 2011; Theodorakis et al., 2017; Wann and James, 2019) and brothers' (Theodorakis and Wann, 2008; Melnick and Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014; Theodorakis et al., 2017; Tamir, 2020) impact on socialisation in the extant literature. This leads to a consideration of how gender plays a role in socialisation, as males may have higher levels of capital in sports fan communities compared to females, despite

the growth of female fans. As has been noted previously, much of this work identifies family members, without detailing how they socialised, yet this thesis has identified a range of roles played by family members, consisting of obligation, shared experiences, family from the city and history of family support. This section will discuss these roles in turn and within them will highlight which family members played this role. Furthermore, this agent was the most prominent within the female fan context.

One of the main roles played by family centred around a feeling of an obligation to become a fan of the club amongst several female fans (MCFC fan 64; MUFC fan 49; LFC fan 2, 147). This focuses on the idea of fandom being something without choice, supporting Tamir's (2020) work. This was underlined by MUFC fan 49 who told the researcher that *"I don't believe I really had a choice. All my family members are very big fans of MUFC"*. This was extended by MCFC fan 64 for instance, who highlighted how they felt how they had little choice in which club they supported due to their family's history of support. Once this occurs, it leads to fans adopting their family's fandom behaviour, as was the case in LFC fan 2 as they were taught about the attitudes and values associated with supporting the club. LFC fan 147 highlighted similarities with the comments above, noting how their father would watch games on weekends, which socialised them: *"I ended up watching football with my dad and it became this idea that if I am to become a fan of a team, it has to be LFC, there was no real decision in the matter"*. These examples further highlight fathers' role in socialisation and how participants felt like they had no other choice than to become a fan of their parent's team (Tamir, 2020).

A further role played is one of shared experiences, mainly through male partners. Despite this, Jones (2008) identified that many female fans choose to take issue with those who attend simply because their boyfriends brought them or was attending. However, MCFC fan 69 noted how their now husband's family were MCFC fans and would often watch games when she visited Manchester, stating how *"it was nice to do it with the family"*. This shows how fandom became an opportunity to engage with her partner's life and connect through experiences (Whiteside and Hardin, 2011). This example shares similarities with the **STF** type (Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011), with the male partner sharing their fandom with the female fan. MCFC fan 69 goes on to state that *"My husband jokes that I like football more than he does. He might be right..."*. EFC fan 13 shared similar feelings, saying how *"to begin with, I wanted them to win because my partner was happier when they won, but now I enjoy watching them myself"*, suggesting it was a way of connecting with their partner, before becoming an individual fan themselves. Female fans have been found to rarely watch football alone (Ben-Porat, 2009), yet this fan, due to the extent of their socialisation, now does watch alone, supporting Mewett and Toffoletti's (2011) discoveries.

LAG fan 80 provided detail about their journey to becoming a football participant and demonstrating how a family member socialised them into LAG through the shared experience of attending LAG games together.

*"I have a huge group of cousins, and we all played American Youth Soccer Organisation (AYSO) soccer as kids through to high school. I played at high*



*school and then I started having kids and went on to college and it kind of fell by the wayside. Then my cousin, about 4 years ago, who is a big soccer fan asked me if I wanted to go with him [to a LAG game] and I started going with him and I was hooked, And now it's out of control”*

This shows how an introduction to the sport, and participation in it, can assist in socialisation, sharing similarities to the work of Mastromartino et al. (2020a) and Allison and Pope (2021). What then followed was one of those cousins providing LAG fan 80 with awareness of the club by attending games together. This is supported by MUFC fan 1 and 2 who also watched and attended football games with their MUFC supporting father. Additionally, MUFC fan 2 stating that once they were socialised, they set about socialising others.

Further adding to the dominance of males in female fans' socialisation, and the role males play in shared experiences, MUFC fan 65 highlighted how their father socialised their sister, with MUFC fan 65 *“following in [both] their footsteps”*, then taking them to their first game, with these shared experiences leading to their socialisation. Additionally, MUFC fan 28 cited how their brother would watch every game, which *“eventually rubbed off on me”*. This suggests that socialisation is a journey and a process, supporting work identifying fandom assimilation and gaining capital as a slow process (Bourdieu, 1977; Wann et al., 2001b; Tamir, 2020). Additionally, this resonates with the female fan socialisation group **‘learners’** issued by Mewett and

Toffoletti (2011), who progressively develop fandom through attending games and watching on television, commonly with other people.

The examples throughout the family socialisation agent, hints at the hegemonic masculinity and paternalistic nature of fandom, identified by previous work highlighting a largely male dominance in socialisation (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014). This adds to the idea that males are gatekeepers within a male dominated game (Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011; Dixon, 2013). This further adds to family patrimony and how domestic solidarity is served to hold the family together, consisting of family name, memories, and history (Durkheim, 1897). Additionally, it could be viewed that being socialised by your family gains more capital in the field, as well as forming the habitus and socialising fans. This is demonstrated by the feelings parents have when their child chooses to support a different team (Tamir, 2019b).

The final role played by family members was found to be achieved through family members being from the club's city (LFC fan 11; MUFC fan 49; MCFC fan 150). It has been found that a parental connection to the club's city provides the fan with geographic ties to the place (Tamir, 2020). This was highlighted by LFC fan 112 who believed the role played in their socialisation to be standard one, showing thoughts and judgements around how people are socialised. LFC fan 112 stated, *"I think mine would a fairly standard reason; my dad is from Merseyside and my whole family are Liverpool fans"*, showing perceptions of socialisation agents. MUFC fan 49 mentioned how their mother's family is from Manchester, socialising them to MUFC. What brings

similarities with obligation and geographic origins, is the role played by a history of family fandom. This finding suggests family as being intergenerational (Wann, 1995; Funk and James, 2001). For instance, MCFC fan 150 stated how their father socialised them into MCFC, stating *“I became a MCFC fan at the age of 4. My dad is a lifelong MCFC fan, so I have always grown up watching them”*.

It could therefore be argued that football fandom, through the roles of geographic links and obligation, could form part of family solidarity maintenance. These two core themes were prominent within female fans, showing their significance. Furthermore, sport fandom is often viewed as being tribal, with the ideas of families and kinship often linked to this (Serazio, 2013). This supports ideas put forward by Tamir (2019b) that fans follow in their father’s footsteps, which can form domestic solidarity.

#### *5.2.1.2. Friends*

Friends’ role in socialisation broadly supports the findings identified within other categories of fans assessed in this study and supports previous studies (Theodorakis and Wann, 2008; Melnick and Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014). Firstly, male friends played a significant role in the socialisation of female fans, with limited female friend impact. The examples provided justify the findings provided so far that females are socialised by males, supporting findings by Ben-Porat (2009), despite only a few fans citing friends. However, this could be due to the only recent increase in female sports fans being viewed as legitimate audience members. Additionally, young people would

often choose clubs to fit in with their peers, showing the relevance of SIT and wanting to identify with a group close to their own self-identity (Harasta, 2021). There are several examples that simply fall into the friend agent and help to situate this agent. For instance, MUFC fan 64 had a male best friend, despite their father supporting Leeds United FC, who socialised them by wearing an MUFC shirt around them, saying *“I became a MUFC fan around 7 years old, because my best friend at the time did. I think it’s because he used to have a football shirt and as a kid you want what your friends have so I wanted one as well.”* This illustrates how friends can be passive in socialisation and just by simply wearing a shirt around them, with MUFC fan 64 wanting to follow their lead, without encouragement, despite being cited by one fan.

The next role played by friends in female fan socialisation was through shared experiences. MUFC fan 32 highlighted how a male friend provided them with awareness of football, and of MUFC, stating they *“became one in college because I’d been getting more into soccer and my college buddy wanted someone to watch PL with him and MUFC was his club”*. This demonstrates how a friend’s desire to watch football games with someone can drive socialisation to occur, seeking shared experiences, again cited by only one fan.

When considering how friends’ values can impact the socialisation of a fan, LFC fan 72 stated that a friend provided a variety of clubs to support based off certain, value-related criteria.

*“After the 2018 WC I watch football more regularly but no idea how. Soccer is not commonplace here in the States. My first idea was to watch Italian soccer because of my family but that's not cheap in the US. My friend suggested that I watch EPL since it's easier and that I pick a club to support and gave me some info about several. I picked Liverpool after ruling out clubs owned by oil barons or Emirati princes. My friend steered me away from clubs that he personally found distasteful: Chelsea, MUFC, any historically right-wing clubs or clubs owned by oil barons. He described LFC and Everton as good options because he felt they were apolitical/left leaning with a strong fan base and history. I have since learned that there are lots of Irish people in Liverpool so maybe that was his real reason?”*

This shows how friends can manipulate a choice of clubs, not trying to pass their fandom on, but suggested a list of clubs which their friend thought would be suitable based off their own values and knowledge of football.

#### *5.2.1.3. Individual infatuation*

Individual infatuation refers to someone an eventual fan had a crush on, who unintentionally was the catalyst for their socialisation into fandom. Firstly, this notion adds to the wide-ranging roles played by males in socialising female fans in this study. This reinforces heteronormative norms and expectations that women who support football fall into heteronormative assumptions and ideals of emphasised femininity.

This is due to the individual they were infatuated with doing very little in this process and more the fact the fan used supporting the club to connect with them, as per previous work (Whiteside and Hardin, 2011) yet was only identified by one fan. For instance, LFC fan 111 became exposed to LFC by “*a dumb school crush who had red hair and supported LFC lmao*”. An aspect to consider here is their use of “lmao” (laughing my arse off), as it implies that LFC fan 111 is aware of the stereotype of females only being interested in sport because of boys (Esmonde et al., 2018). Additionally, LFC fan 111 may also be joking about how such a now big part of their life was forged by such an inconsequential event. This demonstrates how agents are viewed by fans and potentially by others too. What would be useful to identify in future work would be how or if this agent is activated within other, specifically female sports, or whether it is a crush on a man that enables a female to enter male sport.

#### *5.2.1.4. Education*

This socialisation agent assesses the specific individuals within the education setting that played a role in the socialisation of female fans. School has been found to be more significant for females than males in previous work (Wann et al., 2001b; Melnick and Wann, 2004; Melnick and Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014). This was highlighted by a single fan however, LFC fan 150, who discussed how individuals in school created awareness of LFC.

*“If I’m being honest, I think the boys in my class back in year 3 made me aware. I was the only girl who played football in my class, at the time there were no girls clubs available, so I joined the same club as the boys in my class. Most of them supported LFC or MUFC. I lived in North Wales and at the time the 3 most popular clubs were MUFC, LFC and EFC”*

LFC fan 150 highlighted how those in school provided them with their first awareness of the club. This occurred due to the popularity of the three clubs in their location, highlighting an element of success here too also.

#### *5.2.1.5. Player*

Previous studies have found females to cite players significantly less than males (Melnick and Wann, 2011), and in some cases players are not cited at all (Wann et al., 2001b; Melnick and Wann, 2004; Theodorakis and Wann, 2008). To consider players as **Person-Person** and not **Club-Person**, the role played contemplates actions or factors from within the player. In this study, player attractiveness, partner and player skill, were all identified for female fans.

Attraction has been known to play a key part in the identity formation of female fans (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Toffoletti and Mewett, 2012; Esmonde et al., 2015; 2018). However, earlier work did not identify this (Crawford and Gosling, 2004). What emerged in this thesis is that fans’ attraction to players played a role in the socialisation

of female fans. LFC fan 69 became aware of **Fernando Torres** through a national club game, stating that *“I was 13 and watching a game against the Spanish national team and Torres is cute and caught my eye, I checked who he played for and saw that it was Liverpool”*, showing how attraction of players can lead to fans becoming socialised into the club. According to Esmonde et al. (2015), fans believe that attraction to players, alongside knowledge of the game is enough to be a true fan, yet scholars have argued to the contrary. Giulianotti (2002) suggests that by idolising celebrities, fans are not participating in traditional fandom, something supported by previous female fan studies (Jones, 2008; Esmonde et al., 2018). However, this is contested and problematic (Crawford, 2004; Davis, 2015; Dixon, 2016), as it assumes that female fans are less of a fan due to becoming a fan through attraction. For instance, Davis (2015) believes that authenticity is borne out in many ways, meaning attraction, amongst others, should be seen as a valid form of socialisation. Additionally, authenticity is seen as a masculine trait, therefore the works of Giulianotti (2002), amongst others, would deem this socialisation and fandom practice, as inauthentic.

A further example was found with the arrival of **David Beckham** to LAG, not only as the first ever DP, who socialised fans due to their attraction to him. This was also the case for fans’ socialisation to MUFC and Beckham (MUFC fan 66). LAG fan 49 told the researcher they became an LAG fan when David Beckham joined the club, stating *“LOL. I am a girl, and he is super-hot so I really wanted to see him play in person”*. This suggests that by being a female, it is expected that LAG fan 49 would support



LAG due to Beckham, conforming to stereotype. Using “LOL” may be used as women felt the need to express this due to the potential surveillance of male fans and as such use this strategy to gain acceptance. Messner and Cooky (2010) believe that by accepting this non-traditionality it prevents others from jumping to such conclusions (Duncan and Brummett, 1993), as previously this agent has been shared and acceptance was not gained. It may also be used to avoid threatening male fans’ position with knowledge of the game and instead appear to conform to stereotypical and accepted ways into fandom.

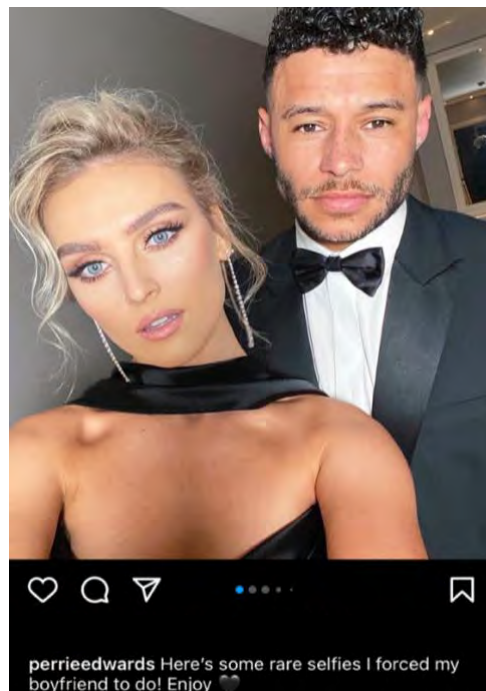
Additionally, “LOL” supports notions of authenticity and tradition of socialisation, running parallel with the crush socialisation agent. Their use of this term means fan may potentially view their socialisation as not being traditional and lacking in authenticity (King, 1998; Dixon, 2015; Lenneis and Pfister, 2015), alongside their potential knowledge of stereotypes (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Toffoletti and Mewett, 2012; Esmonde et al., 2015; 2018). Additionally, many women, despite being upfront that they enjoyed looking at ‘hot and hard bodies’ as part of their fan experience, are worried about being judged (Toffoletti and Mewett, 2012: 104), perhaps going some way to explaining why ‘LOL’ is used. Despite this being **Person-Person**, how clubs manage attractive players may be key in avoiding the over sexualisation of players. Some female fans call out, and reject those who are motivated because of attraction, stating that these women are letting other female fans down (Jones, 2008; Esmonde et al., 2018), so either normalising it or avoiding the topic could help to manage perceptions.

When discussing skill, MCFC fan 1 simply said “*the passes by [Kevin] De Bruyne made me support Man City 😂😂*”. Arguably the emoticons used suggests how MCFC fan 1 feels about how their socialisation occurred, viewing it potentially as non-serious and inauthentic (Giulianotti, 2002), sharing similarities with player attraction. However, it is believed that authenticity is borne out in many ways (Davis, 2015), so viewing various forms of socialisation as such, is not useful and is problematic. LFC fan 74 shared similar sentiments, believing that “**Gerrard was essentially a superhero**” and explaining they became a fan as they watched the 2005 Champions League final. However, LFC fan 74 self-reflected, suggesting that there may be traditional views of socialisation, but that they are still a fan, stating that “*I may not be a red born and raised, but I am still a red*”. This raises a deeper issue that potentially LFC fan 74 has experienced prejudice for citing how they socialised into an LFC fan. Sports clubs must manage how perceptions of these fans are held, potentially by elevating their stories and allowing other fans to see this as being positive, through pro-active storytelling and engagement with those from all corners of their fanbase, but specifically in this case, female fans. This could be developed in tandem with supporter groups, which may allow those fans to feel more connected with the club.

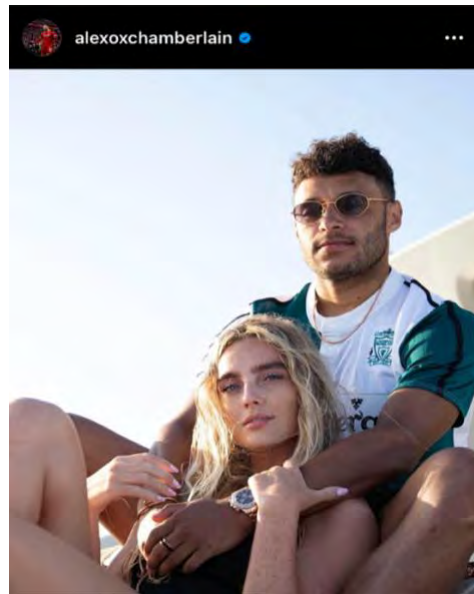
A further role played is by the player’s partner. The example from LFC fan 71 refers to Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain’s partner, **Perrie Edwards**, explaining that “*I started supporting Liverpool because of the girl band, Little Mix. As Perrie [Edwards], is dating Liverpool midfielder, Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain*”. This created awareness of LFC to Little Mix fans, as Perrie Edwards and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, often share images

on their Instagram, demonstrating how fans may become aware of links between the pair (Figures 20 and 21). In this case, the player's partner is arguably just as famous as the player, demonstrating a mixing of popular culture, in this case music and sport.

**Figure 20: Instagram post from @perrieedwards of Perrie Edwards and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain**



**Figure 21: Instagram post from @alexochamberlain of Perrie Edwards and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain**



Despite this, the idolisation of famous sports people is not seen as conforming to traditional fandom (Giulianotti, 2002; Esmonde et al., 2018), despite additional arguments to the contrary (Crawford, 2004; Davis, 2015; Dixon, 2016). However, previous studies have attributed sport celebrities and endorsers as playing a role upon consumers (Bush et al., 2004; Dix et al., 2010), such as switching intentions, complaint intentions, positive word-of-mouth, and brand loyalty, although **Perrie Edwards** is not a sport celebrity. Although this is something clubs cannot re-create or force, they could use this to their advantage to socialise fans, demonstrating how a player's personal life can socialise, hence it being classified as **Person-Person**. Female fans in Iran, due to their government regime, would find different ways to be 'authentic' through

mediated forms and as Iranian players move clubs and through Iran competing in the FIFA World Cup (Toffoletti, 2012), showing how 'authenticity' has changed and been adapted based on access and circumstances. This is demonstrated here as female fans found ways through mediated forms, such as music in this case, through the form of Little Mix.

### **5.2.2. Club-Person: Direct**

*A socialisation agent that is initiated by the club and within their control.*

There were fewer **direct** agents that emerged from the female fans in this study that played a role in the socialisation compared to **Person-Person**. This shows that female fans tend to rely upon relationships with others in their socialisation, rather than the club. The **direct** socialisation agents derived within this category were marketing and owners.

#### *5.2.2.1. Marketing*

A **direct** promotion that socialised female fans was exemplified by NYRB fan 28, and NYRB fan 28 only, who volunteered at AYSO in Brooklyn, NY. AYSO is the American Youth Soccer Organization, a local football programme in America. NYRB fan 28 noted how AYSO's relationship with NYRB played a significant role in their awareness of NYRB. This was due to NYRB providing AYSO with discounted tickets and player

appearances as part of outreach projects, with New York only containing one club at the time.

*“The league had a good relationship with NYRB, as Red Bulls is very community orientated, I don’t think it goes back to the Metrostars, but since NYRB came in, they have started this grassroots thing of reaching out to local youth soccer organisations and that had been in effect for 4 years when I took over, but when I took over as commissioner, that was the year the stadium opened, Red Bull Arena and that coincided with me taking over as commissioner, so I took over the relationship, so we subsidise tickets for games and then we basically offer them to families at a steep discount and get players to come and speak to our kids, that’s the kind of nature of that relationship”*

This shows how engaging with fans and the community, as part of their wider marketing plan, with examples of discounted tickets and player appearances, extend and increase awareness of the club (Mastromartino et al., 2020b). Additionally, it is important here to consider the role NYRB fan 28 played in this situation, by volunteering with the organisation of AYSO. Typically, on-field voluntary sport roles being filled by fathers, whilst mothers often play hidden, formal, and off-field roles (Messner and Bozada-Deas, 2009; Trussell and Shaw, 2012; Trussell, 2016; Stride et al., 2020), such as that highlighted by NYRB fan 28. NYRB fan 28 took on the role when their daughter began playing football and moved from being a referee to assistant commissioner. With on-field roles, such as coaches and managers being

more highly regarded by young people (Trussell, 2016). This becomes relevant due to the position NYRB fan 28 was in, reinforcing the context surrounding their socialisation. However, this example shows the benefits for sports clubs in engaging with grassroots sports.

#### 5.2.2.2. Ownership

When understanding the owners socialisation agent, one element under consideration for female fans was the individual owners. Despite this, it was only highlighted by one female fan, showing the issues clubs have with engaging female fans. LAFC fan 32 highlighted how these individuals who owned the club played a role in socialisation:

*“I liked the group that they were putting together and the leadership looked good and interesting and had some solid California sports background with the NBA in the Warriors and women soccer connections to **Mia Hamm**, and her husband **Nomara Garciaparra** having a LA baseball connection. **Magic Johnson** has LA basketball connections that I grew up with, which all looked really good on paper”*

The comments above from LAFC fan 32 show how famous people and owners, with LA sport connections in this case, can contribute to awareness for female fans, sharing similarities with the socialisation of expansion club fans. For this female fan, part of their awareness was provided by their knowledge of women’s football too, showing

how club connections with individuals who fans can look up to, can socialise fans, sharing links with many of the **Person-Person** agents.

### **5.2.3. Club-Person: Indirect**

*A socialisation agent that encompasses the club but is out of their control.*

Socialisation developed **indirectly** by the club was forged through geography, success, video games, and the media in the case of female fans.

#### *5.2.3.1. Geography*

Geography centred around the club being the fans' local club, a factor that clubs cannot **directly** control. The emergence of this finding shares similarities with the family agent, where many female fans' parents lived local to the club. However, separate to family connection, there was one example of how a team was their local club. For instance, LAG fan 81 discussed how when they became an LAG fan, there was only one club in LA, stating *"I decided by default due to there only being one club from my area and that was the LAG"*. This shows how prior to the expansion club, LAG fan 81 had no other choice in proximity to them, further suggesting an **indirect** nature to socialisation. What is interesting to note here is that local club, according to this fan, should be a default agent of socialisation, suggesting that to be a traditional fan, one must be local to the club (Giulianotti, 2002). Yet, the ability to welcome other fans is a



key virtue that has to be employed by authentic fans (Davis, 2015), showing the problematic nature around traditional fan types (Crawford, 2004). This was also identified within family, suggesting that many of the PCM-identified socialisation agents are maybe viewed as being expected even by fans. This has wider consequences, however. Fans may treat other fans who may not consume in a traditional way differently, due to frameworks ascribing distance to be (in)authentic. Despite Giulianotti's (2002) work being critiqued in previous chapters, examples like the above, highlight the taxonomy's continued relevance, yet also complexity and problematic nature (Crawford, 2004). For instance, fans hold views around what makes a true fan, whilst others are prepared to challenge notions of authenticity, which is identified through various examples throughout this thesis, showing the contrast in application surrounding Giulianotti's (2002) typology. However, authenticity is contested and problematic (Crawford, 2004; Davis, 2015; Dixon, 2016) and instead of one view of what is authentic or not, Davis (2015) believes that authenticity is borne out in many ways, not just in how Giulianotti (2002), and others, believes. Consequentially, by celebrating traditionality and authenticity, we are unlikely to understand what the named 'authentic' fan could be, by downgrading and ignoring their activities (Grossberg, 1992; Crawford, 2004). Meaning that this agent, amongst others, should not be judged through the prism of authenticity, but as a means to understand them.

### 5.2.3.2. Success

Success was found to contain underdog and non-dominant club as playing an **indirect** role in female fans' socialisation. For instance, fans cited how the clubs' underdogs characteristics are what made them aware of the club, and therefore socialised several fans. This was exemplified by LFC fan 113 who described how a move to the UK was how they gained awareness about the PL, yet how LFC fan 113 became a fan was through the club, LFC, being an underdog at the time, saying *"I was born and raised in Turkey where football is massive. I supported Beşiktaş. When I moved to the UK, I started watching Premier League. For me it was mostly support for the underdog as to why I supported LFC."* A similar notion to underdog is choosing a non-dominant club to support, leading to socialisation. EFC fan 12 embodied this, providing an interesting quote here, stating why female fans, in their opinion, choose a non-dominant club.

*"I think by choosing a smaller club was partly influenced by the perception that new sports fans who choose big clubs are "bandwagoners". I hate fans who gatekeep and I don't think there's a "real" fan definition, but female sports fans are especially targeted with that kind of criticism, so I wanted to avoid that"*

Despite this, as has been discovered with previous socialisation agents, fans' self-reflection implies that would-be fans are aware of what is acceptable and the consequences of choosing an overly successful club, amongst others. Previous literature has found that female fans dislike bandwagon jumping (Sveinson and

Hoeber, 2015), yet EFC fan 12 despises those who put labels on what a real fan is. Here however, EFC fan 12 chose to support a club with a lack of success to prevent being an outsider in the eyes of others if they chose a successful club and avoiding the labelling of a bandwagon fan.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that this fan believes that female sports fans are criticised and labelled as being a bandwagon fan. This supports authors who explored the experiences of female fans who shared similar thoughts of being an outsider compared to males or stereotyped (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Toffoletti and Mewett, 2012; Hoeber and Kerwin, 2013; Pope, 2013; Dixon, 2015; Esmonde et al., 2015; 2018). Yet, EFC fan 12 completed this to avoid the judgement of other fans. This is a consequence of much early typology work, which was created through a male-centric / hegemonic masculinity lens, like those highlighted above. In summary, it shows that for EFC fan 12, it was not just that EFC were viewed as being a non-dominant club that socialised them, but judgement from others too.

#### *5.2.3.3. Video game*

Video games, through the club's identity was found to play a role in socialisation of female fans. Studies have discovered that women are significantly less likely to play video games than men (Crawford, 2005) and more likely to partake within platform and racing games than sport (Stein et al., 2013). However, in 2021, women made up 45% of the video gaming population in the US (Statista, 2021). When it came to

socialisation and video games the club's name and identity, from within the video game, was what played a role amongst two fans. The club's name and identity are not unique to video games; however, in this case it is where fans became aware of the club's name.

For instance, LFC fan 1 told the researcher that *"I was 7 and I saw LFC in FIFA08, decided to play as them a lot because their name was funny"*, showing a non-serious element to the socialisation process. The club's logo was an additional role played, with EFC fan 12 cited witnessing the motto on the EFC logo due to it being in Latin, a subject EFC fan 12 were educated in school, on FIFA video games. Female gamers have been found to transfer game elements and characters into their own lives (McLean and Griffiths, 2013), like those who cosplay as their favourite film or TV characters. Cosplay is where individuals attempt to replicate what they have seen on their TV and film screens (Scott, 2015). From the identified findings from McLean and Griffiths (2013), it suggests why fans may follow up their awareness of a football club through a video game into real life support.

#### 5.2.3.4. *Media*

As discussed previously, media is established in socialisation (e.g., Wann et al., 2001b; Theodorakis and Wann, 2008; Melnick and Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014; Theodorakis et al., 2017). This study found the **indirect** role in the socialisation of female fans through media was achieved by watching football on TV (MUFC fan 30

and 63; LFC fan 74). One LFC fan described watching the World Cup in 2010 and deciding to follow the EPL afterwards, eventually falling in love with LFC (LFC archival data). An additional example is derived from MUFC fan 63 who stated that *“I found Wayne Rooney’s clips on ESPN on the sports centre in the morning, I remember that’s what you used to watch if your parents let you before you got on the bus to go to school”*. This suggests popularity of the club could increase access to the club. Additionally, online streaming has been found as building awareness of women’s football, allowing fans to increase their knowledge of the sport (Allison and Pope, 2021).

### 5.3. Long-distance fans

Defining a long-distance fan is important in introducing this section. A local fan was classed as living within the metropolitan area of Liverpool, Manchester, LA, and New York (Table 16), supported by Reifurth et al. (2019). Therefore, a long-distance fan lives outside of the areas highlighted below, this means they could be in the same or different country.

<b>Table 16: The Metropolitan areas of Manchester, Liverpool, LA, and NY</b>			
<b>Manchester</b>	<b>Liverpool</b>	<b>Los Angeles</b>	<b>New York</b>
Bolton	Liverpool	Los Angeles County	New York City
Bury	St Helens	Orange County	Long Island
Oldham	Wirral	San Bernadino County	Lower Hudson Valley
Rochdale	Sefton	Riverside County	Mid-Hudson Valley
Stockport	Knowsley	Ventura County	Northern New Jersey
Tameside			Central New Jersey
Trafford			Western Connecticut
Wigan			Pike County, Pennsylvania
Manchester			
Salford			

Considering the different and various countries highlighted by fans, Table 17 demonstrates where the long-distance fans in this study are located. This is also in relation to the eight teams. This was compiled based on the details provided by the participants (e.g., saying they are from the same country as a player or simply stating which country they are from).

**Table 17: Countries of residence of long-distance fans involved in study**

Country	EFC	LFC	MCFC	MUFC	LAG	LAFC	NYRB	NYCFC	Total
USA	9	26	33	10	7	2	1	9	97
UK	5	23	8	13	0	0	0	0	49
India	0	17	2	14	0	0	0	0	33
Australia	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
Sweden	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	4
Singapore	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	4
Philippines	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	4
Ireland	1	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	4
Holland	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
Greece	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Germany	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
South Africa	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Norway	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Malaysia	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Brazil	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Bosnia	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Venezuela	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Turkey	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Romania	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Portugal	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Pakistan	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Oman	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Nigeria	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
New Zealand	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Maldives	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1

Country	EFC	LFC	MCFC	MUFC	LAG	LAFC	NYRB	NYCFC	Total
Italy	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Iceland	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Hungary	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Egypt	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Czech Republic	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Croatia	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Costa Rica	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Canada	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1

Before evaluating the key findings for this fan group, the *Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework* is applied to long-distance fans (Table 18).



**Table 18: The Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework applied to long-distance fans**

Category	Socialisation agent	Roles played
<b>Person-Person</b>	Family	Gifting, from the city; history of support within the country; history of support within the family; obligation, shared experiences; job of a family member
	Friends	Shared experiences; discussing the club; behaviour
	Player / manager	Favourite player; another club; similarities; nationality; skill; manager
	Education	University; school
	Self-socialisation	Surgery; move to the city; job; holiday; culture; youth football programme
	Other fans	Famous fan, atmosphere
	Media personalities	Music; TV
	Individual infatuation	Shared experiences
<b>Club-Person: Direct</b>	Ownership	Sister club
	Marketing	Friendlies; promotions
<b>Club-Person: Indirect</b>	Success	Underdog; successful; popularity
	Geography	Geographic proximity; local club
	Media	Social media; TV

Category	Socialisation agent	Roles played
Club-Person: Indirect	Mega-event	Players
	Video game	Favourite club; demo version; club quality; first game won; club identity

### 5.3.1. Person-Person:

*A socialisation agent that is initiated by an individual onto the fan.*

The first aspect to consider is the role individuals play in socialising long-distance fans. Considering the model highlighted above, the **Person-Person** group contained a wider range of socialisation agents, compared to **Club-Person**. This section will address those socialisation agents and the role they played. These include family, friends, player / manager, education, self-socialisation, other fans, media personalities and individual infatuation.

#### 5.3.1.1. Family

This thesis identified family as a socialisation agent, finding members such as grandparents, cousin, siblings, parents, and uncle, pertinent to long-distance fans' socialisation. The discovery of family was an unexpected finding due to the lack of geographic ties with the club and the long-distance nature of their fandom (Hyatt and Andrijw, 2008; Pu and James, 2017; Delia and Katz, 2019). However, studies that have identified family members as significant socialisation agents have frequently acknowledged fathers, brothers, and uncles (Theodorakis et al., 2017). Despite this, previous work is limited in identifying the role played, with this thesis identifying family assisting in socialisation through gifting, being from the city, history of support within the country, history of support within the family, obligation, watching games, and the

job of a family member. This agent was also the most significant amongst female fans. This is similar to the findings from Delia and Katz (2019), who identified that many long-distance fans inherit fandom from their family, yet in a different long-distance context. Furthermore, this agent was the most prominently identified by long-distance fans. This section will discuss these roles in turn and within them will highlight which family members played this role.

When considering the role of family without any specific role identified, age was a factor, and one that reoccurs throughout. Age has been found to be significant in sports consumption surrounding when someone becomes a fan and what attracts them to a club or sport (Funk, 2008; Tinson et al., 2017; Bodet et al., 2020). Yet, this is missing from the extant socialisation work and represents an area of future research. This research found three fans who highlighted age, including LFC fan 146 who stated that their elder brother socialised them, saying:

*“My oldest brother was a LFC supporter, and my dad wasn’t into football as much, he was more of a rugby fan, so he didn’t always do a lot of sporty things with us. I would say my big brother had a big influence cause he’s 9-10 years older than me, so he could sort of influence you when your 6 and 7”*

This example is less **direct**, with their brothers not actively attempting to socialise. However, there are more active examples, as LFC fan 20 stated that their older cousin convinced them to support their club. Older sisters were found to play a role in the

socialisation of their sibling, but less noteworthy than brothers, suggesting males play a significant role in socialisation. In this case, LFC fan 5, from Greece, described how their older sister, once they became a fan, in their words '*even recruited me!*', even though they said at the time they did not understand the sport.

The first role played by family away from age is gifting, which emerged in long-distance fan socialisation alongside its emergence amongst expansion club fans. LFC fan 56, began this discussion by highlighting how they were "*gifted a fake replica LFC shirt by a relative in the late 90s. I think I started watching club football around 97-98, I think the PL was broadcasted then. Chose LFC because I had the jersey. I was 11 years old*". This shows how impactful gifting can be with this suggesting that they became a fan primarily because they were gifted a LFC shirt. A further example of gift giving was identified by LFC fan 50, who was presented with a gift from their parent.

*"I was bought a Michael Owen 2003 shirt and slowly started following the club! I was a kid and my parents bought it randomly. I didn't even know who Owen was...hahahaha"*

This was also identified amongst other fans, but with cousins doing the gifting (MUFC fan 8; LFC fan 3), with age of the cousin also reoccurring here too. This suggests that gifts are purchased by those older than the would-be fan, such as older cousins and parents. When considering motivations for gift giving, all the above examples are ones of social gift giving (Giesler, 2006) and helping to build relationships, identified above,

by sharing sport fandom. Furthermore, LFC fan 31 discussed how their father bought an LFC bag for them in 1977, however the reason for the gift was due to them being an Anglophile (someone who is fond of Britain and its culture). Therefore, it was not that fandom was passed from father to child, as LFC fan 31's father was not a LFC fan, instead it was the creation of awareness about the club, through the purchasing of a product related to the club. The purpose for this gifting in the mind of LFC fan 31's father is through engaging in normative gift giving upon returning from a trip from England (Giesler, 2006), rather than social, as they were not a fan themselves and therefore were not attempting to extend or build a relationship.

An overwhelmingly predominant role played by family in socialisation, cited by the majority of long-distance fans, was how they previously resided within the club's city (EFC archival data; MUFC fan 42 and 47; MCFC fan 6, 9, 43, 49 and 66; LFC fan 107, 108 and 112), showing the significance of this role. This echoes the findings identified by Delia and Katz (2019), where fans supported a club as a way of connecting to their home while travelling, although a different context in the case of this study. For MCFC fan 43 their parents previously lived in Manchester before moving to New Jersey, with parents passing their support of MCFC on to the child.

*“My parents are Irish journalists and when they got pregnant with my older sister they ended up in the Northern Quarter in Manchester. They moved to New Jersey in America in 1988, where I was born. Among the many values they*

*instilled in me was CTID [City till I die]! As far back as I can remember we always had European matches on our TV.”*

This example demonstrates the influence their parents had on them, displaying the very definition of socialisation. This was supported by LFC fan 108 and 107, with the latter becoming aware of LFC due to their mother’s side of the family previously living around Liverpool. MCFC fan 6 provided a similar example, with their father previously residing in Manchester.

*“My dad got me into it, when I asked what club, he supported he said “we support MCFC”. I never really looked back. We were living in the US at the time, and he had been supporting them since he grew up there so it was the obvious option”*

Additionally, MUFC fan 47 proclaimed “[my] Father was born in Manchester and raised me correctly. Please use that quote in your thesis”. These comments support Tamir’s (2020) notion of geographic ties within fandom, something that is therefore extended amongst long-distance fans.

A further example of how family socialised was derived by many fans having family with a strong history of support of the club leading to socialisation (MUFC fan 38 and 39; LFC fan 55, 96, 102, 103 and 106). The number of fans here identifies with previous work finding fandom being passed throughout the generations (Wann, 1995;

Funk and James, 2001). For instance, MUFC fan 39 highlighted that *“all of my dad's side of the family are supporters of MUFC”* and that they were guided to MUFC themselves. Furthermore, LFC fan 96 simply told the researcher that *“I'm a[n] LFC supporter because my dad is”*. Similarly, MUFC fan 38 told the researcher how all three of their grandparents were MUFC fans, stating that *“between them they did enough to turn me into a MUFC fan”*. This adds to a history of family support, despite the long-distance nature. Additional examples were also derived from LFC fan 106 and 55, as they suggested that they became a fan due to their family's history of support for the team. Additionally, MCFC fan 21 described how their uncle became an MCFC fan and how they then became a fan, without recalling when the decision was made.

*“My uncle is an expat living in Hong Kong, he's Filipino. His best friend is from Manchester and got made my uncle an MCFC fan. One Christmas (2011, I think) my uncle came to visit, this happened as I started to like football, and who he was a fan of came up. I don't remember making any conscious choice to support MCFC, but it happened anyway”*

This highlights how socialisation can occur almost subconsciously, in this case through a conversation with a family member who is a fan of a team. Additionally, MUFC fan 28 described how their brother's fandom *“eventually rubbed off”* on them. However, the use of term 'eventually' by both MUFC fan 28 and MCFC fan 21 suggests a long process which does not occur instantly. The formation of fandom is



dependent on a slow process of cultural diffusion and changes as fans interact with various institutions and agents (Wann et al., 2001b). This explains how for many fans, it may be a slower process that occurs through interaction with others.

A theme that reoccurred from female fans is that of obligation to support the same team as their family. They felt their fandom was ingrained into them or that they were obligated to follow their family's club, highlighted by a similar number of long-distance fans as female fans (MUFC fan 41 and 47; LFC fan 22 and 36). This is exemplified by MUFC fan 41 who recalled an occasion where family came to visit:

*"I've got family in Manchester, and they were in Hong Kong for a family do which matched with the 1994 FA Cup Final between MUFC and Chelsea. I'd never watched a football match before and my Manc uncle basically threatened me if I didn't support MUFC"*

This displays how family members go to great lengths to socialise others, even suggesting that they were threatened, more than likely not violently, if they did not choose to support the same club. These ideas support the notion that being a good sports fan is congruent with being a good parent or family member, as a good parent would encourage their child to support the same club (Hyatt and Foster, 2015). Added to this, LFC fan 22 highlighted that if they were to go against their father's support, it would have been the highest level of betrayal. Akin to this, LFC fan 36 suggested that they had their fandom engrained and brainwashed into them by their father. This study

on long-distance fans therefore adds to previous work surrounding obligation, which found fathers attempt to recruit their child to a club to preserve the family fandom heritage (Tamir, 2020). This suggests why family members may feel obligated to socialise them and the would-be fan feels an obligation to follow their family member's club. Family members would go to extremes to socialise their family members, with this maintaining domestic solidarity (Durkheim, 1897).

The act of family members watching games with the would-be fan also played a significant role in socialisation, echoing previous work (Bodet et al., 2020). This is exemplified by LFC fan 74's father, who, due to their liking of football, would often watch PL and UEFA Champions League games on TV whenever they were shown in the USA. Their father's enjoyment of this was what led LFC fan 74 to become an LFC fan too, resonating with the "bonders" segment devised by Tinson et al. (2017), as the father uses experiences to develop their family values of the club through fandom and therefore connect, or bond, with their child. A further example is derived from MUFC fan 13 who would watch Portugal games with their older brother, who was a Cristiano Ronaldo fan, during the European Championships in 2004 and afterwards became an MUFC fan due to their brother watching and supporting them, further contributing to age and socialisation.

As has been stated, it could be argued that football fandom, bound by geographic links and obligation could be part of the maintenance of family solidarity (Durkheim, 1897). Sport fandom is viewed as being tribal, with the findings discussed linked into this,

supported elsewhere also (Serazio, 2013). The findings found within all three fan categories all contribute to the idea of family and domestic solidarity, despite Durkheim's (1922) view that family should not play a role in socialising children as they are too soft, however this is limited to contexts in where children are learning more about societal norms than fandom.

#### 5.3.1.2. Friends

Friends have been found to be the most impactful agent in previous long-distance fan work (Theodorakis et al., 2017; Delia and Katz, 2019), with this study similarly identifying their significance. When it comes to friends and how they played a role in socialisation, it was found to occur through shared experiences, discussing the club and behaviour. Shared experiences firstly, were found to play a role in socialisation, as demonstrated by MUFC fan 7, who stated how watching games and meeting people through participation impacted them.

*"In school, I played for a refugee soccer club (I'm from NY) and since I wasn't a refugee, I was exposed to a lot of different languages and cultures that I have never seen in my white suburban town. I got to bond with these kids playing soccer I would've have ever met if I just played in my hometown. Anyways, there was this one African kid that I became good friends with. He would text me and tell me how much he looked up to me and thought I was amazing at soccer. At that time, I didn't watch soccer, but the kid loved MUFC. So, I would*

*watch streams of their games with him. And it was pretty dope, and when I was getting to know this awesome kid, I just started to like MUFC”*

This shows how friends socialise through shared experiences, such as those discussed above, supporting previous work (Delia and Katz, 2019). Further examples were derived from MUFC fan 27 who stated that they had friends in school, who would encourage them to watch games together. Friends in the University context played a similar role, socialising the would-be fan by either watching games together or because the socialising friend wanted someone to watch games with (LFC fan 16; MUFC fan 32). LFC fan 16 described their socialisation process:

*“My college roommate's dad is from Liverpool and supports Liverpool, I watched the 13/14 season casually then grew to love it, looked into the club's history and appreciated what the club and Liverpool stand for, now I'm here 6 years later”*

This helps to situate the PCM within this research, demonstrating how **Person-Person** socialisation agents in the awareness stage led people to become the loyal fan they now are, with LFC fan 16 suggesting it to be a slower process through different stages, further echoing the ideas highlighted previously (Wann et al., 2001b). This explains how for many fans it may be a process that occurs slowly through interaction with others.

Informal discussions taking place between the fan and friends was found to play a role in the **Person-Person** socialisation of long-distance fans (MCFC fan 35; LFC fan 10). For instance, MCFC fan 35, suggested it was simple, stating *“my friend talked about MCFC, even though I didn't care about football at all. One day I just decided to watch a game and I've been a fan ever since”*. In the case of LFC fan 10, they described visiting friends in Ireland from the USA and discussing football, they then asked their friends who they supported, with the answer being LFC. LFC fan 10 responded with *“ok cool I'm a LFC fan now”*. This shows how conversations with friends can form awareness. This was heightened by LFC fan 10's closing statement of *“had I asked anyone else I could've been a MUFC fan, so thankful for good friends”*. This suggests several contextual and serendipitous factors surrounding socialisation.

The final role played by friends in the socialisation process comes from their behaviours, such as the case of LFC fan 25 who described how their enthusiasm for LFC rubbed off on them and that *“it didn't take long before all other posters were down, and my room was just LFC”*. Similarly, LFC fan 110 found that when they moved to Liverpool, the passion their university friends had for the team was infectious. This highlights the notion of contagion discussed previously (Adorno and Bernstein, 1991; Duffett, 2013). Additionally, EFC fan 31 highlighted how a friend's positive behaviour socialised them.

*“I used to walk from school, with two other guys who lived slightly beyond where I lived and one of them was an EFC fan and one of them was an LFC fan now*

*at the time, I wasn't even aware of the whole you know, Merseyside Rivalry. You know, I would have been 6 or 7 or 8 or whatever. And I knew that the LFC fan was, he wasn't a bully, you know, it would be wrong of me to say, but he liked getting physical. He needed very little encouragement. He'd drag you down and he'd start not beating the crap out of you, 'cause it was fun. You know everything, the guy was lovely. You know, he was a gentle soul and he, they were both great at football. We played footy. We played everything as kids and we were all good at sports, so the only thing I can think of is that I followed EFC because of the nice guy being an EFC, ah nice, not even nice, nice is wrong. You know they were both good, I just thought that one was a bit of an annoying prick"*

This example expresses how socialisation can be formed through positive relationships, following the example of those who behave well around them, as fans learn about norms and values of clubs. This is important in the wider context of sports fans, showing how socialisation to a club occurs when those around them exert their fandom in their presence, whether that be through enthusiasm or through their positive or negative behaviours.

#### *5.3.1.3. Player / manager*

As highlighted previously, for players to be viewed as **Person-Person** and not **Club-Person**, it implies actions or factors from within the player and ones that the club

cannot control. For long-distance fans, this included favourite player, following from another club, skill, manager, similarities with the player and nationality. It centres around the idea that there were features that were felt by the fan that led to their socialisation. Firstly, player nationality was expected to be identified by long-distance fans (Hong et al., 2005; Bodet and Chanavat, 2010; Yu, 2010; Kerr and Emery, 2011; Pu, 2016) as fans identify with a player that they share a nationality with, highlighted by a majority of long-distance fans. Despite this, the nationality of players has yet, to the best of the author's knowledge, to be identified in the socialisation of long-distance fan and was the most significant role in this agent. Taking these players in turn, it was found Tim Cahill playing for EFC socialised several **Australian** fans simply because he is Australian (EFC fan 5 and 11; EFC archival data). EFC fan 5 provided further detail on how Cahill and his nationality created awareness of EFC:

*“There wasn't a way to watch English football, all that was showed was the **Australian** national team and highlights of Tim Cahill on the news. At this point, I was only 10 years old or so and didn't know who EFC were and just knew about Cahill. Wasn't until I started playing FIFA a year later in which I decided to take interest EFC. It sounds corny; however, PL football was a hidden world to a kid from **Australia**. If it wasn't for Timmy, a national icon, it'd be hard to say if I would have taken an initial interest in EFC”*

What this example highlights are the intersections between socialisation agents, in this case players and the media, but it was the player's nationality that increased

media attention, hence the focus on the player. Additional examples regarding player nationality were found with Richard Dunne (**Irish**) (MCFC fan 36), Steven Pienaar (**South African**) (EFC fan 6), Tim Howard (**American**) (EFC fan 7, 8, 10 and 14) and Javier “Chicharito” Hernandez (**Mexican**) (MUFC fan 20). Regarding Tim Howard and EFC, many fans discussed firstly being American as how they became aware of the club and secondly how the individual also played as a goalkeeper. However, the core theme was nationality.

*“As an American who played as a goalkeeper as a kid, I idolized Tim Howard and watching his highlight videos was my first introduction to the PL. After that it’s kind of just happened naturally”* (EFC fan 8)

*“I am an American who played goalkeeper. Timmy Howard was my idol growing up, so I supported him which meant supporting Everton”* (EFC fan 10)

Fan heritage also emerged, with MCFC fan 40 describing how having **Argentine** grandparents, meant they grew up watching the Argentine national team, which included Sergio Agüero, Carlos Tevez and Pablo Zabaleta. When they all signed for MCFC, MCFC fan 40 was then given awareness of MCFC and followed. High levels of purchase intentions and behavioural loyalty have been found amongst those who identify with players from their own country towards the league / club (Hong et al., 2005; Rocha and Fink, 2015), with socialisation having the potential to be included alongside these concepts. Zlatan Ibrahimović’s signing to LAG played a role in



**Swedish** fans' socialisation (LAG fan 1 and 2). This is exemplified by LAG fan 1 who expressed that *"he [Ibrahimović] is the best player to play for Sweden it's not that hard to 'fall in love' with him"*, showing the impact of nationality and patriotism, factors that those marketing the leagues and clubs should aim to understand (Rocha and Fink, 2015). This will help to better leverage fans' attachment to players and keep the fan onboard once a player leaves, something which does not always occur. Both LAG fan 1 and 2 stated they would not follow LAG once he left, showing that these fans were neither attracted, attached, or had an allegiance to LAG. Bodet and Chanavat (2010) support this as they believe there to be a risk for clubs surrounding player nationality as a point of attraction, exemplified by LAG fan 1 and 2. This risk is evident here as fans support may be temporary, however if the clubs are able, is something that can be leveraged upon to create long-term allegiance.

The identification of player skill within the player socialisation agent supports non-socialisation work (Pu and James, 2017), which shared similar significance to nationality. Notable examples include the skill of **Steven Gerrard** (LFC fan 11, 53, 74 and 113), **Xabi Alonso** (LFC fan 12), **Andy Robertson** (LFC fan 35), **Daniel Sturridge** (LFC fan 29), **Eric Cantona** (MUFC fan 6), **Cristiano Ronaldo** (MUFC fan 21), **Edwin Van der Saar** (MUFC fan 22), **David Beckham** (MUFC fan 37) and **Wayne Rooney** (EFC archival data; MUFC fans 43, 48 and 69), all playing a role in fan socialisation. Considering these in detail, MUFC fan 21 discussed how Cristiano Ronaldo socialised them, stating that by watching *"I was watching Euro 2004 matches in India and this skinny Portuguese winger with no 17 on his shirt doing stepovers*

*caught my eyes and I then followed MUFC*". Wayne Rooney socialised MUFC fan 48 who asserted that *"I saw Rooney play one game and fell in love with him. Then the club. He is still my hero. Loved the fire, the heart, and the world class ability. For me, it was Rooney then MUFC"*. This demonstrates that some fans form attachment to players first, prior to the club, supported many of the cool fan types (Giulianotti, 2002; Samra and Wos, 2014), despite their problematic and contested nature (Crawford, 2004; Davis, 2015).

A further example related to player skill is derived from LFC fan 29 who described how Daniel Sturridge socialised them into LFC, stating *"I watched a Sturridge highlight video 5/6 years back and just started watching the sport more and following the club. Just thought he was exciting and fun to watch"*. Supporting this, MCFC fan 33 provided an explanation on how David Silva, referring to them as a magician (the players nickname is El Mago meaning magician), socialised them.

*"It all seems very simple. Every time he touches the ball it is so smooth, every pass and run with the ball is elegant. Like a magician...I only started watching when either he or MCFC played, the more I watched the more I fell in love with MCFC"*

This shows that skill can play a role in the socialisation of fans, supporting previous work (Pu and James, 2017). These findings identify the role players play in football,

specifically in this case long-distance fan socialisation, supporting previous work (Theodorakis et al., 2017).

Another role played by players in this research is their move from one club, supported by the fan, to another club, who they eventually became a fan of. For instance, EFC fan 1 was an **LAG** fan when Landon Donovan signed for EFC on loan, in turn becoming an EFC fan. Furthermore, LAG fan 69 started supporting LAG due to their previous support of **MUFC**, the previous team of Zlatan Ibrahimović. The final two examples derive from Germany, with Edin Dzeko, who played for **Wolfsburg**, who MCFC fan 46 supported, and Roberto Firmino, who played for **Hoffenheim**, who LFC fan 15 supported. Both fans decided to stop their support of the clubs mentioned here and decided to follow MCFC and LFC respectively, due to the named players transferring to them. This suggests that some fans would move from one club to another if a player they are a fan of changes clubs.

This has two implications; firstly, it suggests that long-distance fans are less attached to clubs, meaning that they may not move through the PCM into allegiance, however this could be contested as MCFC fan 46 remained an MCFC fan after the Edin Dzeko left the club, but did not remain a Wolfsburg fan. Secondly, it highlights the difficulties clubs face in engaging and trying to lead fans towards allegiance with the club, something which unfortunately this study could not address due to only focusing on the point of becoming socialised.

Further supporting ideas surrounding factors from within the fan, several fans highlighted supporting a club because of a player who was their favourite. **David Silva** (MCFC fan 8), **Mario Balotelli** (MCFC fan 8), **Robinho** (MCFC fan 27), **Steven Gerrard** (LFC fan 49) and **Fernando Torres** (LFC fan 49) were all viewed as fan favourite's, directing them to support the club they played for. MCFC fan 8 highlighted **David Silva** and **Mario Balotelli** as their favourite player, providing an example of their point of socialisation.

*“After 2008 World Cup, I started watching La Liga games whenever I can, and Valencia is one of my favourite. That’s how I started following **David Silva** and for **Balotelli**, I think he is an interesting character. As young soccer fan that time I find him cool on and off the field”*

For the other players named, there was very little further reasoning behind why other than being their favourite. This may be caused by a lack of potential wider awareness, and connections, to the club. This may be caused by the long-distance nature of their fandom, where connections to the club are deemed lower and individualised, displaying similarities to the **flâneur** fan type (Giulianotti, 2002).

The final factor related to a player is found by similarities between the fan and players, further exemplifying players as being **Person-Person**. Fans displayed objective similarities, such as sharing birthdays or playing in the same position on the pitch. Similar findings were found with nationality, with **Tim Howard** and how several fans

played goalkeeper too, however for these fans, nationality was what played a role in socialisation. In contrast, MUFC fan 22 stated that when they started playing goalkeeper aged 8, this was the main factor in their socialisation, stating *“I saw MUFC playing in the 2008 Champions League final and **Edwin Van der Saar** became my hero. From then on, I watched every game I could and fell in love with the club”*. This was similarly felt by LFC fan 35 whose socialisation was initiated by **Andrew Robertson**, who discussed also playing left back. A further similarity was derived from LFC fan 74 who stated that they *“found out that **Gerrard** and I share the same birthday so that had me telling everyone I was [an] LFC fan.”* These examples of position, and further awareness of players, such as birthdays, can play a role in socialisation and on factors from within the fan. This shares links to SIT (Turner, 1975; Tajfel and Turner, 1986), with fans viewing themselves as like the players through the various examples highlighted, and that the characteristics that they share (Lock and Heere, 2017; Rhee et al., 2017), caused them to be socialised.

Away from players, two managers played a role in long-distance fan socialisation, highlighted by several fans. For instance, the arrival of **Pep Guardiola** to MCFC in 2016 helped socialise MCFC fan 45, who stated that *“Pep was Barça manager when I started watching football. And then [I] became an MCFC fan when Guardiola became MCFC manager”*, supported by MCFC fan 13 who said, *“I’m a Guardiola fan so that made me Man City supporter recently”*. However, MCFC fan 13 added a controversial idea stating *“I will most definitely follow Pep”* when he leaves, akin to that highlighted with player nationality. This potentially suggests that long-distance fans have an

attachment to people, rather than the club, supporting work by Giulianotti (2002). Additionally, managers' personality impact on socialisation emerged in relation to LFC manager, **Jurgen Klopp** (LFC fan 66, 23 and 24). LFC fan 23 stated "*I had always respected Klopp's approach to managing and just his outlook on life/personality so when he came to LFC it was a no brainer*". These factors all depend on the persona of the manager, not necessarily their managerial credentials, that played a role in socialisation. This resonates with SIT, where fans choose to align themselves to a group that best suits their identity (Turner, 1975; Tajfel and Turner, 1986), here the manager's personality. This highlights how managers can be why fans align themselves with a club, again as they seek groups and individuals, they share common characteristics with (Lock and Heere, 2017; Rhee et al., 2017).

#### *5.3.1.4. Education*

The education socialisation agents are split into two roles, school, and university, highlighting how specific people from these institutions socialised fans. This was identified solely by MCFC fan 92 who recalled starting a new school after moving to the UK and felt a need to support a club as everyone else in their school supported one. Many of them supported MCFC, leading MCFC fan 92 to them, with the individuals in the school creating awareness of the club. When considering individuals within universities, LFC 63 shared an example surrounding the role a professor played in their socialisation.

*“My Political Science Professor started calling me Xabi, after **Xabi Alonso** from LFC. My professor was also an LFC fan, from Liverpool, so I would talk to him about LFC games, and it turned into me actually being a fan”*

This example, akin to that in friends, shows how informal discussions and even jokes between teacher and pupil, can lead to socialisation.

#### *5.3.1.5. Self-socialisation*

Self-socialisation for long-distance fans was found to contain individual infatuation, university, surgery, job, holiday, and youth football programme as playing a role. The idea of myself being a socialisation derives from Theodorakis et al. (2017), which predominantly featured long-distance fans, where myself and no one emerged. Despite this, there was little understanding of how these terms were derived, a contribution of this thesis by providing detail on each socialisation agent. However, prior work chose to use self-socialisation (Hurrelmann, 2002), which was adopted for this research as it made the term clearer.

Youth football programmes in the context of this study, found that many young British individuals who spend their summer coaching young children in America, can play a role in socialisation. How these programmes played a role in socialising is not by passing their fandom on, but in the individuals who work on them:

*“The programme sent footballers from England to the US to perform these camps during the summer. We hosted 2 of the player/coaches for the week they were in my hometown. We loved having them stay with us and my dad being a fan of PL soccer, gave the players cash to send back some authentic jerseys for him, myself and my 4 bros. They sent me a MUFC jersey (long sleeve home 2002 no name or number on it) my older brother an Arsenal jersey, and my two younger bros got an LFC and a Chelsea jersey. I’ve been [an] MUFC fan ever since!”*

This suggests that cross-country programmes between countries with low (USA) and high (England) football awareness, can play a role in socialisation due to connections individuals make. The choice of clubs decided upon also brings in elements of success and popularity. For instance, in the 2001 / 2002 season, Arsenal won the PL title, LFC in second and MUFC in third with Chelsea finishing sixth. This explains why these clubs were maybe popular for an English person to choose, additionally, these individuals were not fans of the team. Further less prominent factors to play a role within self-socialisation include universities, culture, events, jobs, and luck. University for example, found that the colours of the University and EFC were congruent leading EFC fan 3 becoming an EFC fan, stating that *“the college club I root for is blue and white”*.

Culture considers the term Anglophile, with LFC fan 70, who is American, choosing to support England at the 2010 World Cup due to what LFC fan 70 described as being



*“a bit of an Anglophile in my early teens”*. This led LFC fan 70 to support LFC due to the amount of LFC players in the England club at the time. This has implications for clubs in England, who could leverage areas where Anglophile identity is prevalent. One job expected to cause long-distance fandom is the Army. LAG fan 71, when in the Marines, was stationed in San Diego, California, and had a free weekend and decided to go and watch LAG, despite there being 113 miles between San Diego and Carson. The location of this job is what provided LAG fan 71 with initial awareness of the team.

#### *5.3.1.6. Other fans*

Other fans became a socialisation agent for long-distance fans, with the role played being through TV and famous fans. This socialisation agent resembles the findings found by Delia and Katz (2019) who found that those who travelled abroad witness the traditions and rituals of the fans of the club they ended up supporting, showing an extension to non-local, non-displaced fans. For instance, LFC fan 13 and 18 highlighted how Champions League finals and the behaviour of fans socialised them. LFC fan 13 said they watched the 2005 Champions League final and were in awe of LFC fans, similarly, LFC fan 18 discussed the positive reaction of LFC fans to Lorus Karius' mistakes in the 2018 Champions League final. Within broader fandom literature there are suggestions that camaraderie is key in becoming a fan (Duffett, 2013; Stavros et al., 2014) and how fans wanted to be associated with this. This finding

was also identified, with greater significance, for expansion club fans in this study and the extant literature (Lock et al., 2012).

Famous fans can also socialise long-distance fans extending research on celebrity athlete influencers (Dix et al., 2010; Chaudhary and Dey, 2015; 2016). The identification shares similarities with the owners socialisation agent within expansion club and female fans. Additionally, using individuals or references native to fans can enable a club to be culturally accepted by fans (Ritzer, 2009; Pu and James, 2017). This study identified two famous individuals in John Green and Sourav Ganguly, who socialised two long-distance fans, from America and India respectively. This resonates with the extant work surrounding the use of global individuals to engage in local markets (Ritzer, 2009; Pu and James, 2017). John Green, an American author and Youtuber, supports LFC, with LFC fan 70 stating that because of this knowledge, *“I would watch their games if there was a choice”*. Sourav Ganguly, former Indian Cricket captain, supports MUFC according to MUFC fan 15, saying *“I was a big fan of Sourav Ganguly [former Indian Cricket captain], and once in his interview, he said that he supported MUFC. Since then, I have been a die-hard supporter of MUFC”*. This shows how famous fans can socialise would-be, long-distance fans. Arguably, in this role, famous people become influencers, even if unintended, however, both Sourav Ganguly and John Green have been involved with other clubs, Chelsea, and AFC Wimbledon respectively. For example, Sourav Ganguly has been paraded around Chelsea’s stadium (Figure 22), with direct competition between Chelsea and MUFC. Additionally, John Green is a long-term sponsor of AFC Wimbledon (Figure 23),

showing potential issues of credibility if LFC were to use John Green to directly impact fans, however the clubs are not on the same level.

**Figure 22: Sourav Ganguly attending a Chelsea game in 2017 (@ChelseaFC)**



**Chelsea Football Club**

5 Jan at 6:10p.m. • ⚙️

We were delighted to welcome Sourav Ganguly to a recent game at Stamford Bridge!

**Figure 23: John Green attending an AFC Wimbledon match (Cornell, 2019)**



Models of influencers suggest they should contain four factors: trustworthiness, expertise, credibility, and attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990). Arguably, by being used by, or supporting, other football clubs, influencers, or famous fans, may lose their credibility, therefore clubs may need to use famous fans and influencers, if indeed clubs do, carefully to avoid issues in the future. This may cause fans who are yet to reach allegiance to switch if they feel the influencers to be less credible.

#### *5.3.1.7. Media personalities*

The **Person-Person** media agent addresses the role specific people in the media, in this case TV and music, played. Media coverage has been found to impact long-distance fans previously (Kerr and Emery, 2011; Pu and James, 2017; Theodorakis et al., 2017), with this study contributing to the extant work by demonstrating how people

in media play a role. A feature of sport on TV is commentators, displaying the **Person-  
Person** element. In this case, LFC fan 41 described watching EPL games on TV in the USA, telling the researcher that *“American commentators compared MUFC to the New York Yankees. I f\*\*\*\*n’ hate the Yankees, so the choice to support their rival was an easy one”*. This demonstrates how those who front and present sport shows can influence opinion of clubs, by highlighting their own opinion and using examples that would resonate with fans in America. An interesting point here is where fans view rivals to be, with this fan viewing LFC as MUFC’s rival.

Following on from famous fans, and player’s partner highlighted within female fans, famous musicians such as **The Beatles** and **Oasis** assisted in the socialisation of two fans. The links the bands had with the cities, and in Oasis’ case, directly with MCFC, provided fans with awareness of the clubs (LFC fan 31; MCFC fan 48). MCFC fan 48 stated how Oasis assisted in their socialisation, despite being in LA.

*“I played football when I was young, but my parents let me stop when I was a teenager. Oasis was all always on the radio and I loved them. Everything discussed how both brothers were MCFC fans. It felt like the ideal team to support, plus I loved blue and I hated red”*

Oasis are musical icons of Manchester and famously fans of MCFC. This has been reflected in the branding of MCFC with the use of their songs during games, connecting MCFC to the Manchester place myth (Edensor and Millington, 2008). Both

LFC fan 31 and MCFC fan 48 are both from the USA, and the popularity of music compared football in the USA at the time potentially being higher, is arguably how awareness was developed, showing how popular culture and sport are intertwined. What was highlighted previously, is that engagement with the fans that sports clubs are seeking to reach should be done through indigenous references (Ritzer, 2009; Pu and James, 2017). This thesis contrasts with the extant work, as it suggests clubs could use references local to fans, such as Oasis or The Beatles, to resonate with long-distance fans. Although this is a **Person-Person** finding, it is still a practical implication that has emerged from this thesis, suggesting that clubs can leverage person-person socialisation agents in some cases.

#### *5.3.1.8. Individual infatuation*

Individual infatuation shares similarities with family and friends in relation to wanting shared experiences, yet surrounds having a crush on someone, leading to their socialisation. For instance, LFC fan 17 was impacted by a group of female fans they had a crush on, yet they were the only fan to cite this.

*“I was following what everyone else was doing, which meant I was an MUFC fan, but then some girls in my school supported LFC and I took notice of them and changed teams, even though we were not doing well then. By the way, I did not have a crush on any of those girls \*grins”*

This adds to the examples highlighted by female fandom, identifying long-distance male fans that can be socialised by females they have a crush on. This switches the findings of previous work which identified that females attempt to connect with males (Whiteside and Hardin, 2011), yet this requires further exploration. Additionally, LFC fan 17's use of 'grins' suggests they are trying to deflect and play this down. This notion was identified within female fandom also, as they almost accept that it is not traditional, attempting to prevent others jumping to these conclusions (Duncan and Brummett, 1993). However, the emergence in male fandom provides an interesting extension, as here males flip the sporting conventions and prevent judgement from others (Messner and Cooky, 2010).

### **5.3.2. Club-Person: Direct**

*A socialisation agent that is initiated by the club and within their control.*

There were limited examples of how long-distance fans are **directly** socialised by clubs, with fans seemingly relying upon the **Person-Person** agents identified above. Fans reported how owners and marketing acted as **direct** socialisation agents.

#### *5.3.2.1. Ownership*

The owners socialisation agent when highlighted by long-distance fans found that sister clubs played a role. Sister clubs have been found to leverage the support for

global clubs but mainly in the case of expansion club fans (McDonald et al., 2010), now however, extended by this study to long-distance fans. However, there were less examples of this occurring than in expansion clubs, with just three fans citing ownership as an agent. The sister clubs identified by long-distance fans were **New York Yankees**, who socialised NYCFC fans, and the **Boston Red Sox**, owned by the Fenway Sports Group (FSG), who socialised LFC fans. This demonstrates the role sister clubs can play in the socialisation of long-distance fans of both expansion and established clubs. The sister clubs were found to socialise across sports too, with New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox both being baseball clubs. Firstly, New York Yankees, due to their well-known history in the American sports scene, may have a significant impact on long-distance fans, as individuals may have greater awareness nationally, in this case to fans of NYCFC, such as NYCFC fan 46.

*“When I had heard that the NY Yankees had joined with MFCFC to create a new club, I made a choice to become a NYCFC fan (Lifelong Yankees fan, although I don’t live in NYC)”*

The Boston Red Sox, another Baseball club, further supported the idea of a shared ownership or sister club link, through LFC’s relationship with the club. FSG own both LFC and The Boston Red Sox, which for LFC fan 39 and LFC fan 67, was how they were socialised. LFC fan 39 for example stated that they were a *“Big fan of the Red Sox so when FSG bought LFC I had to support the financial group”*, showing that they potentially feel that by becoming an LFC fan, it supports the baseball club too through



their use of the term 'supporting'. What has previously been identified is that long-distance fans often choose to support a club abroad when there are similarities, often tangible features related to team identity (Hognestad, 2006; Chanavat and Bodet, 2009). However, this thesis found similarities could be highlighted within ownership of their local team, showing why fans support the long-distance team. This demonstrates how high levels of popularity of sister clubs within other sports can assist in socialising long-distance fans, just like sister clubs were found to do so with expansion club fans. These factors therefore show, building upon expansion club findings, that clubs should look to establish connections with other sports clubs, in this case, through shared ownership of clubs, assisting in the socialisation of long-distance fans of both established clubs (LFC) and expansion clubs (NYCFC), in which previous work has found significant benefits for the larger team through social media followers, for example (Martorell et al., 2020). There is a sense of obligation here too, suggesting that fans feel that by supporting the sister club, there is a wider benefit to the organisation.

#### *5.3.2.2. Marketing*

The two elements of marketing found to play a role in socialising long-distance fans in this study were pre-season friendlies and promotions. Friendlies abroad, or closer in proximity to long-distance fans, allow fans to experience the club, a benefit of such devices (Bodet et al., 2020). Many of the examples of pre-season friendlies outlined by long-distance fans, were international friendlies, however, there is one example

from within a country. MUFC fan 46 recalled being taken to an **MUFC vs Birmingham City** friendly in Birmingham and decided that they liked the red club best, adding a notion of club identity, however the friendly was what provided the fan with awareness.

The international friendlies identified were mainly played the USA involving English clubs, a feature of friendlies generally (Menary, 2018), which not only socialise fans but also create many memorable moments. Pre-season friendlies have been found to play a role in maintaining fandom for those who became fans abroad (Delia and Katz, 2019), therefore an extension of this work is to account for friendlies role in socialising fans, not just maintaining their fandom. A significant number of fans highlighted to the researcher the impact friendlies had, the most of any direct role identified. MCFC fan 10 and 34, both recalled a game between **MCFC and LAG**, where Mario Balotelli attempted a “*Maradona turn*” shot on goal and recalled this friendly as how both fans became aware of MCFC. MCFC fan 10 highlighted that “*I've been a fan ever since*”. Another friendly that year for **MCFC against Club America**, socialised MCFC fan 39, showing the impact a pre-season tour can have. Additional friendly matches in America involving other clubs included **MUFC vs Philadelphia Union** (MUFC fan 63) and **LFC vs AC Milan** (LFC fan 9). LFC fan 9 recalled the experience, detailing how prior to the game they supported Arsenal.

*“I heard in the car on the radio that LFC would be playing AC Milan in a friendly where I was from. I had never been to an actual football match, so I bought tickets to go with my friends. The stadium was almost 80% Liverpool fans and*

*the atmosphere! The game was an absolute dream for someone like me and the noise made by the traveling kop was intoxicating! I went to that game without a team, but I walked out a LFC fan, even got my first scarf"*

The examples highlighted demonstrate how friendlies play a role in socialisation, first in providing access but also in experiences. The identification of friendlies is one widely supported (Richelieu and Desbordes, 2009), with mediated experiences and interaction with other fans found to develop fandom (Koenig-Lewis et al., 2018; Bodet et al., 2020), with similar findings identified within wider customer experience work (Verhoef et al., 2009). Developed clubs, such as those in this study, should consider how they use pre-season friendlies as they can cause clubs to undermine domestic football fans in a bid to attract new fans (Menary, 2018). However, long-distance fans cited the experiences of being at pre-season friendlies, showing the attraction and benefit for the club's growth in fans.

There were only two examples of clubs attempting to engage long-distance fans through promotions, potentially displaying the difficulties of accessing and therefore socialising long-distance fans. The lack of breadth and range of roles identified by long-distance fans in this study adds support to claims of previous work, which suggests that when marketing to fans in emerging markets, strategies should differ, and it should not be assumed that their needs will be the same (Maderer et al., 2016; Pu and James, 2017). One promotion idea that did play a role was free tickets. LAG fan 68's ex-girlfriend received free tickets for a LAG game upon donating clothes,

which provided awareness of the club. Secondly, following the idea of free tickets, is free merchandise. LAG 67 received a free signed LAG shirt, saying *“I won a jersey signed by the entire squad after submitting my goal in FIFA 15 into one of their contests. Been a fan ever since I got the jersey”*. These examples provide two forms of promotions that clubs could use to engage long-distance fans. However, there is a need to further understand how clubs socialise long-distance fans. This study finds that clubs either provide limited marketing towards long-distance fans, clubs do not market effectively, or long-distance fans have more significant agents that play a role in socialisation, such as **Person-Person** agents identified.

### **5.3.3. Club-Person: Indirect**

*A socialisation agent that encompasses the club but is out of their control.*

In contrast to **direct, Club-Person** socialisation agents, the **indirect** group contains a greater range of agents from long-distance fans in this study. This suggests that clubs play a passive role in socialising long-distance fans. The agents identified include success, geography, media, mega-events and video games.

#### **5.3.3.1. Success**

Success as a socialisation agent supports previous studies (Kerr and Emery, 2011; Theodorakis et al., 2017; Sullivan et al., 2021), with this thesis providing nuance to the

term, discovering underdog, success, and the popularity of the club, which played a role in socialising long-distance fans. Underdog considers how fans subjectively view, believe, and appreciate that the club they chose to support, was an underdog. Previous research has found however that if the underdog appeal diminishes then so can the appeal of the club (McDonald et al., 2016; Mastromartino et al., 2019a). How underdog emerged in this thesis was either within a specific game or season or in comparison to other clubs. Regarding the latter, MCFC fan 20 highlighted the term 'noisy neighbours' used by MUFC fans to describe MCFC. MCFC fan 20 thought *"it would be cool for the 'noisy neighbours' to become better than MUFC"*, therefore chose the underdog.

LFC were deemed as a popular underdog club in specific games. The Champions League final in 2005 was highlighted by LFC fan 7, who stated that with LFC losing at half time, and all their Scottish-Italian family supporting AC Milan, LFC fan 7 decided to support LFC.

*"I always lean on the side of the underdog in a match if I am neutral. I hadn't seen the determination and belief that LFC have until that moment and from then on out it changed me into a fan"*

LFC fan 7 felt that LFC chose them as the club aligned to their own identity, sporting or otherwise. This is supported by LFC fan 65 who highlighted how *"I chose Liverpool (or rather it chose me) because they were always the underdogs (I used to hate sides*

*that always win*)". This demonstrates how fans like to align themselves with clubs who are underdogs. This is related to SIT, which suggests individuals, like LFC fan 76, associate themselves with others to reinforce, and represent their own self-concept (Tajfel, 1974; Turner, 1975; Cohen, 2017), feeling that the club chose them because it aligned with their own beliefs.

When considering specific seasons, two MUFC fans highlighted how they wanted MUFC to overtake Arsenal's invincible team, with underdog playing a key role here. MUFC fan 9 for example told the researcher how they chose to support MUFC due to *"a mix of supporting an underdog who were so passionate and a club whom I believed that they could beat their stronger rival"*. MUFC fan 33 also wanted to *"see the leaders get toppled"*. This shows how fans can often be drawn to underdog clubs.

Success is expected to impact fans, with successful clubs likely to have a higher profile and therefore more well known to the emerging football market fans. This emerged in equal significance to underdogs, showing their ability. Summarising this, LFC fan 104 noted that *"LFC were winning lots in those years and I think that sucked me in"*, showing the role success plays and how fans are socialised by successful clubs. Like underdogs, fans were impacted by the club being successful in specific games. EFC fan 29 decided to become a fan once they discovered that EFC won the FA Cup in 1966. Similarly, MCFC fan 11 said that they became aware of MCFC, *"When MCFC won home and away against United in 2007/2008"*, showing the impact of success. LFC fan 109 and EFC fan 32 discussed how success play a role with children and

young people. EFC fan 32 stated that *“when you support a successful club you get a lot less stick at school”*, showing that it was partly down to how EFC fan 32 believed they would be treated, with success as a buffer for this, sharing similarities with the findings for female fans. This shares similarities with BIRG-ing (Cialdini et al., 1976) and explains why people identify with successful groups to boost their self-esteem (Heere and James, 2007), in this case, through acceptance from others who support other clubs. These examples highlight the role success plays in socialisation. One consequence of success is an increase in popularity. MUFC fan 12 cited how they *“decided upon MUFC because other than Arsenal, MUFC is very popular as an English team in India”*, showing how popularity played an **indirect** role in socialisation.

#### 5.3.3.2. Geography

As highlighted earlier, there are several surprises with geographic socialisation agents impacting long-distance fans, such as geography or infrastructure (Theodorakis et al., 2017). However due to the size of America, several fans will view clubs as local or proximate to them, despite living in a different state. This is due to the size of the country and the number of clubs in the league, with 50 American states, but only 27 MLS clubs in 2021 and 30 by 2023 (as shown in Figure 24). All the long-distance fans in this study were non-local, non-displaced fans who had no previous geographic connection to the metropolitan areas of the city (Reifurth et al., 2019). For fans who cited locality or geographic proximity they did not cite any other terms outside of the two geographic terms. This suggests MLS and the USA as contextually pertinent,

rather than anything club specific. For example, fans of NYRB may live in the state of New York and be a long-distance fan, despite the proximity of New York and New Jersey state. Additionally, fans can live near Canada and NYCFC be their closest club.

**Figure 24: Map of MLS clubs in 2020 across the USA (Sport League Maps, 2021)**



As highlighted, NYCFC fan 55 stated how they “*wanted to support a “local” club (I live up near Canada...haha)*”, showing that sometimes living away from the state and city can still result in being a local club, highlighting issues with the league. The use of “*haha*” further supports distance issues around MLS (Figure 24) and issues



surrounding the authenticity of long-distance fans, sharing similarities with previous findings. Instead, we need to understand what the named 'inauthentic' fan could be, by understanding and appreciating their activities (Grossberg, 1992; Crawford, 2004).

Prior to NYCFC's arrival into MLS, NYRB, for people living in NY, were the closest club, despite being based in a different state. For instance, NYRB fan 25 stated how NYRB were their local club, as *"I was born in and now live in NY State. When I became a fan of football in 2010, NYRB was the only club representing New York"*, showing how timelines are important to consider in socialisation to understand critical moments.

A further surprising factor within long-distance fans is proximity, cited by two fans. When cited by an MLS fan, it shows the lack of clubs in MLS for the size of the country. NYCFC fan 47, who lives in Connecticut, where there is 100 miles between the state of New York and Connecticut, stated how NYCFC was their closest club and were not concerned with the convenience of the team (Collins et al., 2016). Away from MLS, LFC fan 95, said LFC were the *"closest [PL] club to me growing up. Now the closest club to me full stop that isn't Sunday league"*, showing that proximity has a distinct impact upon long-distance fans in a search for a top-flight club, showing a desire for higher quality football (Pu and James, 2017).

### 5.3.3.3. Media

Media coverage has been found to impact long-distance fans previously (Kerr and Emery, 2011; Pu and James, 2017; Theodorakis et al., 2017), yet with little regard for either how, or which aspects of the media, contribute to socialisation. Therefore, this study highlights **indirect** media elements, TV and social media, that socialised long-distance fans. Theodorakis et al. (2017) highlighted how TV and social media represent fandom behaviours of long-distance fans in Qatar, but not as a socialisation agent, with this study identifying media as playing a role in socialisation.

Social media was rendered **indirect** due to the fans' awareness not being received through official social media channels, instead, LFC fan 59 discussed being on Reddit and learning about LFC, saying *"I've had Reddit for a while and found out about r/LiverpoolFC, the memes were legendary"*. This demonstrates the ability of social media to play a role in the initial awareness, and therefore socialisation of long-distance fans. Previously, it was identified that fans gather in online areas (Gibbons and Dixon, 2010; Pegoraro, 2013; Stavros et al., 2014; Smith, 2017; Yoon, 2019; Teng et al., 2020) and in this study, media has been found to be able to socialise fans.

For long-distance fans, several fans highlighted how TV was where their awareness was formed, with this being the most significant indirect role amongst long-distance fans. For illustration, some watched PL football on TV before eventually choosing either LFC, MUFC and MCFC, as these clubs were regularly shown in their respective

countries (MUFC fan 30; LFC fan 6, 30, 41, 43, 57, 65 and 93; MCFC fan 38 and 42). This shows how larger, more successful clubs, are shown on TV more in developing football nations, which create greater opportunities for fans to be socialised. Fans also cited watching a specific game on TV (MCFC fan 4 and 28; LFC fan 148, 27, 54 and 18) or watching a documentary about the club (MCFC fan 22; LFC fan 46), which played a role in their socialisation. LFC fan 97 and 105 were exposed through UK TV shows called Final Score and Match of the Day, again, where LFC featured prominently. Recently, documentaries have seen clubs provide a media crew with wall-to-wall access of the club. One of the first to occur in the UK was LFC in 2012, where Fox Sports produced a fly on the wall documentary of the club's pre-season tour in the USA, introducing LFC fan 46 to the club. Similarly, MCFC fan 22 named the Amazon Documentary, "*All or Nothing: Manchester City*" as playing a role in their socialisation. These are unique in relation to the existing literature, with films the only similar factor attributed to socialisation (Mastromartino et al., 2019a), but not attributed to long-distance fans.

There are several games that fans cited as making them aware of the club, often watching through TV due to the long-distance element. Firstly, LFC fans cited Champions League finals as being how they gained their awareness of the club in 1977 (LFC fan 148), 2001 (LFC fan 27), 2005 (LFC fan 54), and 2018 (LFC fan 18). For instance, LFC fan 54 described how the fairy-tale-esque nature of their performance in the Champions League final in 2005, was how they became socialised

into LFC. There was one specific MCFC game provided MCFC fan 4 with awareness about the club:

*“But all changed on that May 13th on 2012. I was watching TV and got myself watching THAT game against QPR. Normally I wouldn't stay within the sports channel too long, but the announcer was SO HYPED that it inevitably caught my attention. The game was at 94 minutes and then this happened. Man... It was AMAZING. I can say that this moment changed how I see football forever. Since then, I've been following MCFC day by day (Heck, I don't even follow my family club at all) and I'm so proud to say "I'm a Citizen". I don't even care 'bout some people telling me thing like "Hah, you like the club on because of this money huh", the only thing that matters to me it's how that game changed my vision on football forever”*

This example shows the impact that a specific game had, not just on their fandom, but on their outlook of football. Yet, there is a consideration of success here as MCFC won the league for the first time in this game.

When considering the role news played, LFC fan 64 recalled learning about Michael Owen saying, *“the news was buzzing about a young kid from England and he was everywhere”*. Further demonstrating how media helps with access to the club, LFC fan 52 needed heart surgery in 2005 and decided to watch the Champions League as they recovered. This was the year LFC won the league, providing LFC fan 52 with

knowledge of the club, during these critical moments in their life. Furthermore, EFC fan 29 described learning about EFC, highlighting that they managed to get access to a sports news service on the radio.

*“In 1966, I was 11 and a half, 12 years old, there was a youth group at the church which used to meet after mass so my parents would go to a 9:00am mass with all the kids except me and then there is a sports results service, you could call and that’s the year EFC won the FA Cup in 1966 and I used to have the British soccer scores come through and for some reason I liked EFC then they went and won the Cup, no vision or anything, and I’ve just followed them ever since purely as a result of not going to church on Sundays”*

This highlights the importance of TV and news programmes in informing and impacting fans, yet these are largely outside the club’s control.

#### 5.3.3.4. Mega-events

The occurrence of mega-events, in this case World Cups or European Championships, as a socialisation agent for long-distance fans identified players as playing a role. The scale of mega-events and the number of long-distance fans to cite this role, shows the significance of them to fans outside of proximity of the team. Players listed included **Michael Owen** (LFC fan 48 and 98), **Steve McManamon** (LFC fan 4), **Steven Gerrard** (LFC fan 38, 70 and 149), **Luis Suarez** (LFC fan 32), **Kevin**

**Sheedy** (EFC fan 22) and **Tim Howard** (EFC fan 30). The heroics of players at mega-events has been found to cultivate awareness about players in previous work (Kerr and Emery, 2011). Understanding these in greater detail, EFC fan 22 discussed Kevin Sheedy, noting how at the *“1990 World Cup. 7 years old. Who's this Kevin Sheedy guy? He looks the business. I'm following his club”*. Similarly, LFC fan 4 became invested in the England national team and Steve McManamon at the 1996 European Championships and followed this up by becoming an LFC fan.

MCFC fan 7 described becoming aware of **Carlos Tevez** by watching him at the 2006 World Cup whilst in South America, this awareness meant that when Tevez joined MCFC in 2009, MCFC fan 7 were introduced to MCFC. MCFC fan 29 provided further detail on their socialisation through the 2006 World Cup and the Argentina national club, containing **Pablo Zabaleta**, **Sergio Agüero** and Carlos Tevez, who were yet to join MCFC, but would eventually, as the way they played was *“perfect soccer”*. This suggests the role World Cups play in socialising sports fans, giving fans initial access to clubs and players. However, for clubs leveraging this becomes difficult, as the club does not have direct control within the event. Yet, it has been shown through this research and previous work (Kerr and Emery, 2011), that awareness can be developed through mega events, therefore clubs should try and leverage this with marketing pre, during and post games, to socialise fans.

#### 5.3.3.5. Video games

**Indirect** elements of video games emerged for long-distance fans with club identity, favourite club, demo version, club quality and first club the fan won with playing a role in socialisation. Although it was across multiple roles, a significant number of long-distance fans cited video games as significant. Fans became aware of and were socialised through aspects of the club's identity in video games. This becomes evident through MCFC fan 12 who told the researcher *"I got to manage them in Football Manager 2008, and I liked the club and the sky-blue colour"*. A further example is provided by MCFC fan 87 who when asked how they became aware of MCFC and socialised, said:

***MCFC fan 87:** I started playing Fifa and started choosing Manchester City and from then I was familiar with the players and then they just kind of naturally grew from there where I started watching the team and watching their games and eventually the more I learned around the club and the more I read and the more I kind of learned about football and all the different teams, I identify a lot with Manchester City and their team and their culture and their history*

***Researcher:** so about with Man City and FIFA and why was it city for you?*

*MCFC fan 87: Bad news! Haha, I think I like the eagle this was back when they had their old crest and then kind of went on from there I think, I like the culture and the history too and I like the color blue*

The use of “bad news” makes it seem that fans judge themselves on whether their socialisation may potentially be untraditional or inappropriate. This therefore creates difficulties with video games in the socialisation process, due to fans’ view of them. This provides similar insights to female fans who used laughing emoticons to justify their socialisation, being aware that it was potentially not traditional or acceptable within traditional fandom, flipping sporting conventions, according to Messner and Cooky (2010) and preventing others concluding this (Duncan and Brummett, 1993).

Players assisted in the formation of awareness for fans, with this element not **Person-Person** due to it being players’ virtual-selves and how awareness was within the game. Players mentioned included **David Beckham** (MUFC fan 10), **Carlos Tevez** (MCFC fan 19) and **David Silva** (MCFC fan 5), as leading the would-be fan to support the player’s respective club. However, fans who cited the aforementioned players did not provide great amounts of detail other than identifying players in the video game. MUFC fan 11 however, discussed the role a player played in socialisation, saying *“used to play FIFA 14 mobile and the best player in my club was **Marouane Fellaini**. So, I just got attached to MUFC”*, showing the role players can have on fans through video games. Additional aspects highlighted by fans were through their skill or performance on the video game. This socialised MCFC fan 3, who said *“I scored a*



*bike [bicycle kick] with **Aguero** on FIFA mobile. My heart was set after that*". The examples above point towards that the players featured in a video game can play a role in socialisation.

Fans also formed favourite clubs through video games, which led them to support that club outside of video games, such as in the case of LFC fan 19. Additionally, EFC fan 2 told the researcher how they became aware of EFC through the video game FIFA:

*"I loved playing EFC on FIFA, so once I gained access to the PL it made sense to support them. Stupid? Yeah, but as a young Norwegian kid it felt ordinary to support my favourite club on FIFA"*

The acknowledgement of it being stupid, shows that fans realise some aspects of socialisation may be seen as inauthentic, reflecting other aspects of video games and within other groups of fans and socialisation agents. However, it shows a need to understand their practices, rather than ignore them (Grossberg, 1992; Crawford, 2004), like previous works would.

A factor of video games is that they often provide consumers with a demo version for free, allowing individuals to try the game before they buy, which for some may be their only access to the game due to a lack of finances. LFC fan 19 hints at these financial issues, stating that *"I didn't want to buy it because I didn't want to bother my mom"*, therefore LFC fan 19 just played the demo version. Another feature of demo versions

is that they are often limited to a certain number of clubs. MUFC fan 19 highlighted this, finding that MUFC were the default club, demonstrating the lack of options and likelihood of fans being more aware of these clubs. MUFC fan 18 emphasises this, saying *“I used to play a demo form of FIFA 07. In it however there where only five clubs that you could play with and MUFC was one so I would keep choosing MUFC”*. These examples show how demos can provide opportunities for fans to develop awareness, contributing to the broader role of video games in socialisation.

There were examples of long-distance fans highlighting the club’s quality in the game that transferred into real life support of a club. For example, MUFC fan 31, who played FIFA 10, stated that because of MUFC’s quality in the game they decided to support the club in real life, again showing the potential for video games to provide awareness. An additional example was found from LFC fan 68 who told the researcher *“to be honest, I became addicted to playing FIFA around 2014 and at the time LFC had so much pace up top that I was able to exploit the game with it”*, adding to the role of video games. This element of video games shares similarities with success, but the fans’ virtual success, as fans chose to support the club they first won with in the game. For instance, MCFC fan 2 told the researcher:

*“I’m playing FIFA 13 on Xbox 360 and can’t for the life of me tie a game, let alone win one. I tried all the big five-star clubs at the time and nothing. Tried MCFC, managed a tie and eventually started winning. Started following them since”*

Five-star clubs are club ratings within the video game. MCFC fan 15 recalled a similar story, with MCFC being the first club they defeated their best friend with, showing how virtual success can help to socialise fans.

#### *5.4. Summary of findings*

The findings and discussion chapter highlights how this thesis has made a significant contribution to knowledge. Firstly, it indicates that there are several socialisation agents, namely friends, family, promotions, media, and geographic proximity, stated by Funk and James (2001), that were also identified by this thesis. Yet, what also emerged was a wide range of unique agents, with many specific to expansion club, female and long-distance fans, one of the key contributions of this thesis. A second contribution was identifying the role each agent plays in socialising fans, going beyond much other sport fan socialisation research. This section will compare the three fan categories and the salient agents and roles which socialise fans. For further comparisons, Table 13, at the beginning of Chapter 5, highlighted where crossovers exist between the three fan categories and can be found at the beginning of this chapter.

Firstly, the *Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework* allows clubs to understand the most prominent areas in which they can socialise fans. The model consists of **Person-Person, Club-Person: Direct** and **Club-Person: Indirect** emerged from this thesis. However, not all were prominent for all three fan categories. For female fans, there is a lack of **Direct** agents socialising fans, with personal networks (**Person-**

**Person**) more pertinent, supporting the work of Mewett and Toffoletti (2011). Similar findings surfaced for long-distance fans, with a greater importance placed upon **Person-Person** and **Indirect** socialisation agents. This demonstrates the difficulties clubs have in engaging female fans and fans from afar. In contrast, **Direct** socialisation agents exerted greater awareness upon expansion club fans, with clubs playing an active role in their socialisation. Additionally, it suggests that there is a lack of individuals able to generate **Person-Person** socialisation in the early stages of a club's existence.

A unique and prominent **Direct** socialisation agent identified by expansion club fans was community. The agent was identified by Funk and James (2001), but the role played here issues significance for expansion club fans, who have been found to have a strong identification with their club's city (Kolbe and James, 2000; Lock et al., 2011; Heere and Katz, 2014). How the community socialisation agent was enacted was through the club identity sharing features of the city, signing players that represent the population's demographics (as proposed by Jewell, 2017) and marketing the club as belonging to the city. This adds nuance to a previously identified, but nebulous, socialisation agent.

In **Person-Person** socialisation, gifting, both social and normative (Giesler, 2006), by family and friends emerged, bringing gifting into the socialisation field. The role was only identified by long-distance and expansion club fans. For expansion club fans, gifting, the sole role played by family members, was activated through the passing of

tickets by friends and family. An implication identified previously found that fans want to create memories with family and friends through sport (Mastromartino et al., 2020a), therefore promotions which enable the gifting of tickets could develop club socialisation. For expansion clubs, this thesis would encourage approaches which allow the gifting of tickets to occur due to the obvious socialising benefits gifting brings, especially when awareness of the team is still being formed. Further discussion of this implication will occur in Chapter 6. In contrast for long-distance fans gifting occurred through merchandise, showing games as being less accessible compared to expansion club fans. The non-existence of gifting with female fans suggests individuals involved in **Person-Person** socialisation may not see the gifts as being appreciated as they may not be aware of the receiver's willingness to follow the sport. Therefore, to assist in socialising long-distance and female fans, clubs should engage in marketing campaigns which encourages the gifting of merchandise to non-fans, assisting in **Person-Person** socialisation of these fan categories.

As already highlighted, gifting was the sole role played by family members, but with other fan categories a greater range of roles in relation to family were identified. While previous work has identified family as playing a limited role in long-distance fan socialisation, largely due to the lack of close geographical ties to the club (Hyatt and Andrijw, 2008; Pu and James, 2017; Delia and Katz, 2019), this study identified their prominence. Family emerged as playing a role in long-distance socialisation through being from the city, history of support within the country or family, obligation, shared experiences and job of a family member. With female fans, male family members (e.g.,

fathers, brothers and partners) were prominent, playing a role in socialisation through obligation, shared experiences, being from the city and history of family support.

Shared experiences are a role that was identified for both female and long-distance fans, however, for female fans, the finding resonates with the work of Dietz-Uhler et al. (2000). They identified that females are motivated to watch sport by being able to do so with others. Since then, researchers have found that females watch, and even support, a sports club to connect with males, including their partners (Mewett and Toffoleti, 2011; Whiteside and Hardin, 2011). This contributes to hegemonic masculinity which exists within football and how males gatekeep the game (Cleland et al., 2020). An additional theme that contributed to both female and long-distance fan socialisation by family members was geographic ties and obligation, a theme previously identified outside of socialisation (Tamir, 2019b; 2020). Through these roles, family members may feel that they are preserving family heritage by socialising a family member, leaving the eventual fan to feel obligated to support the club (Tamir, 2019b). What is identified through the roles of gifting, shared experiences and obligation, is how previously identified features linked to sport fandom and consumer behaviour, can play a role in socialisation.

The extant literature has struggled to fully understand the role of geography. Previous work identified geographical connection (Greenwood et al., 2006) and local team (Kolbe and James, 2000) in relation to expansion clubs, but with little else beyond that. Geographic related terms became prominent in this thesis, but it was not as straight-

forward as simply being in close proximity to the club, as the PCM suggests (Funk and James, 2001). Firstly, the term infrastructure emerged as a **Direct** socialisation agent in relation to expansion club fans, containing the roles access to the stadium and the club's location. This suggests that clubs, especially expansion clubs, should consider accessible transport links to the stadium and endeavour to situate, and keep, the club within the city after it is named. These factors are all elements under **Direct** control of the club, however an **Indirect** agent identified across all categories of fans was geography. The roles played by geography was through proximity and local club, the latter identified previously for expansion club fans (Kolbe and James, 2000). In this thesis, one female fan said being local to the team, in their view, was a standard way to be socialised, with other female fans citing local club too. This suggests that links of traditionality with locality (Giulianotti, 2002) are still relevant, however contrasting with this thought, authenticity and traditionality can be borne out in many ways (Davis, 2015) and the behaviours and process of all fans, authentic or otherwise, should be understood and not ignored or judged (Grossberg, 1992; Crawford, 2004).

The prominence of geography amongst long-distance fans highlighted several context specific issues at play. It is useful to restate that in this study long-distance fans were defined as non-displaced, non-local (Reifurth et al., 2019), therefore have never lived within the club's location. Therefore, the issues at play for fans in America is the size of the country and the number of MLS clubs. This meant that a NYRB fan in this study, prior to NYCFC, could live in the state, and even the city, of NY and be a long-distance fan. Whilst for expansion club fans, a NYCFC fan could live near Canada and NYCFC

would be their closest MLS club. This represents a need for greater understanding of agents and fans alike, completed by this thesis.

Geographic notions extended to the **Person-Person** socialisation agent, media personalities. Long-distance fans identified the bands Oasis and The Beatles as being key in their socialisation. Due to these band's outward links to the city, and even the club, clubs have attempted to connect themselves to the city using these media personalities as a vehicle for doing so. For instance, MCFC are known for playing songs by Oasis and engaging them in activations, connecting them to the Manchester place myth (Edensor and Millington, 2008). Additional famous fans have been identified by, again, long-distance fans in this thesis, as playing a role in their socialisation, encompassed within the other fan agent. Similar findings have been identified in relation to celebrity athlete influencers (Dix et al., 2010; Chaudhary and Dey, 2015; 2016). Yet, both celebrity fans identified in this study, John Green and Sourav Ganguly, have engaged with other clubs. If clubs ever used these players as influencers, they would need to manage their perception as influencers should be trustworthy, have expertise, be credible and attractive (Ohanian, 1990). More credible other fans identified were existing fans of the club who are non-celebrities by expansion club and long-distance fans. This shows how clubs could promote these fans stories to assist in **Person-Person** socialisation, avoiding the risk of celebrity fans.



There were several roles played by players, either through the player themselves (**Person-Person**) or through player signings (**Club-Person: Direct**). A stereotype of female fans is that they only support a club or like a sport because of an attraction to an athlete (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Toffoletti and Mewett, 2012; Esmonde et al., 2015; 2018). However, it emerged here as playing a role in **Person-Person** socialisation, despite previous work identifying attraction as not impacting club choice (Esmonde et al., 2015). When this has emerged in previous research, female fans used humorous techniques to deflect and prevent other fans from judging their fandom (Duncan and Brummett, 1993; Messner and Cooky, 2010). Such techniques were potentially used by fans in this thesis, with one fan using the term “LOL” when discussing their attraction to David Beckham. Joking techniques such as this may also be being used as they are already aware of the potential for their socialisation to be viewed as inauthentic and untraditional (Giulianotti, 2002; Jones, 2008; Esmonde et al., 2018), yet authenticity is borne out in many ways (Davis, 2015), so we should be careful in making such problematic discussions to avoid such behaviours from occurring and understand all fan.

For long-distance fans, player nationality, expectedly, played a **Person-Person** role (Hong et al., 2005; Bodet and Chanavat, 2010; Yu, 2010; Kerr and Emery, 2011; Pu, 2016) in socialisation. However risks have been identified for clubs relying on this being a factor in fandom (Bodet and Chanavat, 2010). This emerged in this thesis also, with Swedish fans who supported LAG because of Zlatan Ibrahimović stating they would stop supporting the team once he left. Therefore, clubs need to either manage

these risks or capitalise on players whilst they can. Similar findings linked to nationality emerged in the community socialisation agent for expansion club fans, as fans noted that such signings were intended to represent the local community. **Direct** player signings, such as Designated Players (DP), are in control of the club and emerged in expansion club fan socialisation. DP have been found to have a positive impact on fan attendance in MLS, however more widely, star players have been found to have varied impacts (Lock et al., 2012; Kunkel et al., 2016). This demonstrates a need for future research in this area.

Club owners, a further **Direct** socialisation agent, emerged across all three fan categories. The most prominent role of this came through sister clubs. For instance, there are ownership links with MFC and NY Yankees to NYCFC. In the case of long-distance fans, a further relationship was identified, with LFC and the Boston Red Sox both owned by Fenway Sports Group (FSG). This results in MFC and NY Yankees and Boston Red Sox as being sister clubs with NYCFC and LFC respectively. These findings reveal implications for the management of clubs. For instance, fans felt they were supporting the ownership group by supporting LFC, which in turn would help the Boston Red Sox. Additionally, eventual fans of NYCFC saw links with MFC as elevating the club's status, with resemblances in philosophy and club identity in NYCFC. Therefore, clubs could create links with other sporting entities to increase awareness, leverage support and increase commercial activities for both clubs (McDonald et al., 2010; Martorell et al., 2020).

Previous work surrounding video games identified their suitability as a marketing tool to reach and attract fans (Kim et al., 2008). Furthermore, they play a key role in the development of fan knowledge and identity (Crawford and Gosling, 2009). Recently, video games have been identified as a socialisation agent (Mastromartino et al., 2019a). Similarly, female and long-distance fans in this study identified video games, adding them as a **Club-Person: Indirect** agent. For long-distance fans, there was a wider range of roles played compared to female fans, who only acknowledged club identity. Long-distance fans also identified club identity, alongside favourite club, quality of the club, first club they won with and demo version as playing a role in socialisation, through the vehicle of video games. The demo version game was prominent with fans stating how they could not afford the full version, with demos being free. The demos often contain limited teams meaning fans have access to often better teams, showing how they may have been socialised to MUFC, MCFC or LFC. Therefore, clubs should endeavour to be on football video game demos to attempt to reach a wider range of fans.

With a range of socialisation agents and their roles discussed in this section, where relationships between categories of fans was highlighted, the following chapter will conclude this thesis. The chapter will highlight the unique contributions made by this study, its implications and finally reflect on this thesis.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations**

Chapter 6 includes the unique contributions, implications, limitations and areas for future research of this thesis. Firstly, the chapter pulls together examples from the three fan categories (expansion club, female and long-distance fans) to demonstrate how each research objective contributes to the field of socialisation. The chapter then addresses the practical implications of this study and makes recommendations for how football clubs can operationalise socialisation agents into the point of becoming a fan. This is followed with directions for future research and reflections upon this thesis.

To recap, the aim of this study was to address the socialisation of football fans into the point of them identifying themselves as a fan. This then split into three fan categories and three objectives:

1. To **explore** which socialisation agents impact:
  - a) Expansion club fans
  - b) Female fans
  - c) Long-distance fans
2. To **identify** the role that the identified socialisation agents play in the socialisation of:
  - a) Expansion club fans
  - b) Female fans

- c) Long-distance fans
3. To create a framework which **operationalises** the socialisation agents identified and the roles they play.

In brief, the objectives were to **identify**, **explore**, and **operationalise** the socialisation agents that drive awareness of football clubs, to expansion club, female and long-distance fans. This study clearly met these aims and objectives and contributes to the field of socialisation.

The first contribution was identifying new and unique socialisation agents that resonate with expansion club (Chapter 5.1.), female (Chapter 5.2.) and long-distance fans (Chapter 5.3.). This thesis, therefore, extends previous research into these three fan categories (e.g., *expansion club fans*: Lock et al., 2009; 2011, *female fans*: Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011, *long-distance fans*: Theodorakis et al., 2017; Delia and Katz, 2019) by the identification of distinctive agents. Not only does this thesis identify agents specific to these groups, but it explores how each agent plays a role in creating awareness of the club. For example, the emergence of sister clubs within the ownership agent, gifting within family and player nationality within players. This answers calls which aim to identify the meaning behind socialisation agents (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Theodorakis et al., 2017; Mastromartino et al. 2020a). This represents the second contribution. The third contribution comes from the emergence of the *Person-Centric Socialisation Framework*, operationalising socialisation agents. It demonstrates to clubs which agents are relevant for the three fan categories and

action them in the form of marketing initiatives. Furthermore, the model allows clubs to view agents that they are not in complete control of but could create initiatives to help socialise new fans and discourage fans from choosing another club.

### *6.1. Contribution*

This thesis makes two key theoretical contributions. The **first** is the **identification** of specific socialisation agents in relation to the three categories of fans. **Secondly**, the study highlights the important **role** these agents play in socialisation. The final contribution is a practical one in which the socialisation agents identified are **operationalised** through the creation of the *Person-Centric Socialisation Framework*. This is assessed in greater detail in section 6.2.

#### > **Identifying new and unique socialisation agents**

This section identifies a range of agents which were newly identified or specific to the three fan categories to demonstrate this thesis' contribution. Firstly however, it is not just new agents that arose, but agents previously identified in the PCM. These are spouses, parents, siblings, friends, school, community, geographic proximity, media and promotions (Funk and James, 2001), all emerged in some form. This helps to consolidate wider understandings of existing agents. For instance, the pervasive hegemonic masculinity in sport fandom (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014) and how football is largely masculine (Caudwell, 2011; Melnick and Wann, 2011; Parry

et al., 2014; Cleland, 2015; Cleland et al., 2020) was reinforced by largely male **Person-Person** agents. This included male family members (fathers, brothers, uncles, and cousins), friends, other fans, players, and media personalities. This suggests that there is a significant male role in the socialisation of fans, especially female and long-distance.

This study identified additional socialisation agents that were not previously identified which adds a greater understanding to the field, adding new and unique agents. These included owners, infrastructure, atmosphere, mega-events, another club, and success, all of which played a role in the socialisation of fans. These agents have not, to the best of the author's knowledge, been outlined elsewhere, and their identification outlines the benefits of qualitative research in deriving new agents (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Theodorakis et al., 2017). Despite certain agents being out of the control of the club, depending on the role each agent plays, clubs can still influence them. The qualitative CGT approach allowed fans to freely explain which socialisation agents played a significant role in becoming a sports fan, rather than being provided with a pre-determined list. **This is a clear and significant contribution of this research.**

To conclude this contribution and the discussion around it, it is useful to highlight which agent, and therefore role, which was most significant for each category of fan. For expansion club fans, community was deemed the most important socialisation agent, specifically through the club representing the city. This aligns with the wider literature which found that expansion club fans significantly identify with their city (Kolbe and

James, 2000; Lock et al., 2011; Heere and Katz, 2014) and therefore want their club to do so too. For female fans, the most prominent socialisation agent was family, showing from female fans on their personal networks and the struggles the football clubs in this study have in raising awareness of their club. Within this agent, shared experiences was deemed significant and shows how joining others in their fandom, is leading to socialisation into the point of becoming a fan. Female fans have been found to rarely watch football alone (Ben-Porat, 2009), explaining how socialisation occurs. Finally, for long-distance fans, family again was the most prominent agent. Furthermore, a significant number of fans cited how their family being from the club's city previously, echoed with fans who have travelled previously and aim to connect with their home city (Delia and Katz, 2019).

> **Highlighting the important role these agents play in socialisation**

Previously, studies have simply identified a single term / person when considering how fans are socialised. Therefore, this thesis responded to calls from previous research for a more in-depth, qualitative understanding into how each agent plays a role in socialisation (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Theodorakis et al., 2017; Mastromartino et al., 2020b). Consequently, a significant advancement of knowledge is the exploration of the role played by each socialisation agent; examples of which will now be discussed. Additional roles played are also highlighted within the implications section of this chapter, showing how the roles identified in this thesis can be operationalised by sports clubs.



Family played a range of roles in this thesis. This included shared experiences, being from the city, history of family support and obligation, however, a notable finding was gifting, one of the most significant Person-Person roles. This role was the sole role played by family members and friends when socialising expansion club fans but was also exerted upon by family to long-distance fans. All gifting examples were found to be either social or normative gifting (Giesler, 2006). Expansion club fans were gifted tickets, whilst long-distance fans were gifted merchandise, demonstrating their lack of ability to attend games in person. Therefore, watching games on TV together and sharing those experiences is more suitable for long-distance fans than attending games, with similar findings emerging from female fans. The lack of gifting towards female fans suggests gift givers may not view them as someone who would appreciate being gifted merchandise or tickets as they may be unaware of any football interest. However, females are more likely to gift than males (Ward and Tran, 2008), this demonstrates how clubs may be better leveraging upon female fans to gift, as found in expansion club fans. Further details on gifting implications are covered in section 6.2.

A unique agent, specific to the socialisation of expansion club fans, is infrastructure, emerging as **Club-Person: Direct**. The roles identified in this agent were location and accessibility. Location covered stadium location and amenities around the ground, whilst accessibility discussed the ability to use public transport to attend games. Fans often contrasted these roles with the other team in the city. Additionally, geography was recalled as a **Club-Person: Indirect** socialisation agent by all three fan

categories. The agent contained proximity, an objective notion, and local club, being subjective. The identification of infrastructure and geography allows for a more nuanced understanding of geographic-related terms which was lacking in previous work. The qualitative approach of this thesis to unearth detail on these previously vague terms which included local or hometown club (Kolbe and James, 2000; Heere and James, 2007; Theodorakis et al., 2017), is a significant contribution of this work.

Previous research identified 'myself' (Theodorakis et al., 2017), named outside of sport, and in this thesis, as self-socialisation (Hurrelmann, 2002) as an agent in sport team socialisation. However, Theodorakis et al. (2017) identified a limited understanding of what 'myself' could entail. However, this thesis identified moving to the city, city identity, university, culture, luck, job, holiday, and youth football programme as playing a role within self-socialisation, a **Person-Person** agent. This highlights the range of ways in which an individual fan can socialise themselves and is thus a unique to this thesis. This has implications for clubs as it allows them to understand factors in which they can contribute to roles internal to the fan. This includes engagement with youth football programmes, marketing to tourists and linking with local universities, all in a bid to socialise fans.

## *6.2. Implications*

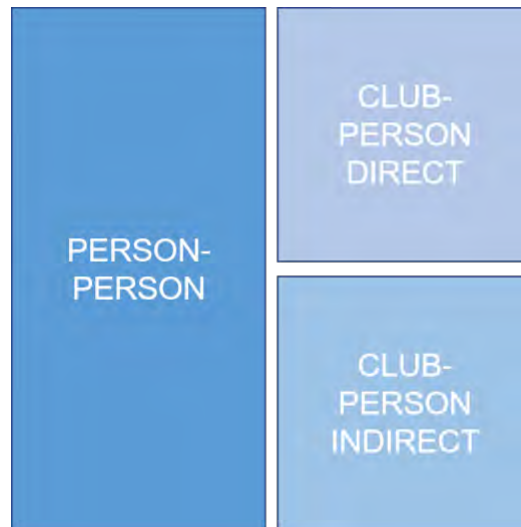
One of the contributions of this thesis was to create a framework which operationalises the identified socialisation agents. Previous studies tended to focus on the fan-initiated

role of socialisation, such as parents, people in school or peers (Mastromartino et al., 2020b). Mastromartino et al. (2020a) discovered a need to focus on how socialisation agents can be used by organisations, with this thesis responding to this call. This was achieved through the development of the *Person-Centric Socialisation Framework* (demonstrated in Figure 25), completing the third objective of this thesis.

- **Person-Person:** A socialisation agent that is initiated by an individual onto the fan.
- **Club-Person: Direct:** A socialisation agent that is initiated by the club and within their control.
- **Club-Person: Indirect:** A socialisation agent that encompasses the club but is out of their control.

**Figure 25: A visual, simplified image of The Person-Centric Socialisation Agent**

**Framework**



Variations were found between the three categories of fans surrounding the prominence of either **Person-Person**, **Club-Person: Direct** or **Club-Person: Indirect** agents. These were highlighted throughout section 5.4. These variations have significant implications, as firstly, expansion clubs manage to have a **Direct** impact on their fans. This includes community activities or engagement, marketing, owners or simply by being a new club. This highlights a lack of individuals who can socialise expansion club fans in the early stages of a club's development. Secondly, there were a lack of **Direct** socialisation agents which exerted awareness on female and long-distance fans. This demonstrates the difficulties clubs have in marketing to these fan categories. Therefore, an implication is that sports clubs should consider how to market to potential female and long-distance fans, otherwise they risk fans being

socialised into other sports clubs. Specific ways for how this could be done will be addressed in this section.

Gifting has been discussed several times in this thesis, however it has clear and obvious implications. NYCFC's Blue Card is an existing, operationalised example of gifting. All season ticket holders are provided with a blue card to pass on to people they encounter to redeem for two free tickets. The scheme was not identified by fans in this thesis but can be modified based off the findings of this research. For instance, the recipient cannot sit near the provider of the card with the scheme's intention for the card to be passed onto a stranger (NYCFC, no date), not family or friends. Therefore, adapting the scheme to allow the receiver to sit with the giver could enable shared experiences to occur, a factor highlighted by fans who received tickets as gifts and as playing a role itself. Furthermore, with the significance of personal networks amongst female fans, and how they tend to watch sport with others (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000), there is potential to encourage ticket gifting towards female fans. Examples of this could include targeted promotions aimed at gifting tickets showing both male and females receiving these tickets.

Despite their on the pitch role, players as agents played a notable role in **Person-  
Person** fan socialisation. An evident role occurred through player nationality, a factor identified in previous fandom studies (Hong et al., 2005; Bodet and Chanavat, 2010; Yu, 2010; Kerr and Emery, 2011; Pu, 2016). Despite its identification in **Person-  
Person**, like gifting, it can still be operationalised in how clubs market players. For

instance, preceding work has identified links between patriotism, identity with a league and behavioural intentions (Hong et al., 2005; Rocha and Fink, 2015). However, leveraging player nationality and patriotism has risks, with examples in this study and beyond (Bodet and Chanavat, 2010) of fans moving clubs on once the player does. Therefore, a consideration should be how they can keep fans support in the long-term or to maximise in the short term on the impact before the player, and potentially the fan, move on. This could be achieved by delivering marketing campaigns in countries where these players are popular, whether that be through billboards or localised content, or by competing in friendlies in the country a player is from. The latter has been identified as a way for tourist fans to maintain their fandom (Delia and Katz, 2019). This could potentially lead to increased shirt sales and interest in the team, building upon fans connection to their country and national team player.

A notable implication of another **Person-Person** socialisation agent is players, with the role of player attraction being salient amongst female fans. Previously identified as a stereotype in females' motivation to become a fan (Melnick and Wann, 2011; Mewett and Toffoletti, 2012; Esmonde et al., 2015; 2018), with this study identified their role in socialisation. Female fans not motivated by attraction, have been found to reject those who are, stating that these women are letting other female fans down (Jones, 2008; Esmonde et al., 2018). Furthermore, Giulianotti (2002) suggests that the idolisation of players is not a traditional form of fandom. Therefore, sports clubs could benefit from normalising these perceptions amongst other fans by producing content which highlight the range of ways female fans become fans.

Players emerged as playing a further role in socialisation, this time through their signing to the club. Designated Players (DP), identified in **Club-Person: Direct** within the player signing socialisation agent, are often highly skilled and high-profile players who can be brought in off budget from the MLS salary cap. This role was particularly prominent for expansion club fans, yet high-profile players have been found to not exert influence on Australian expansion club fans (Lock et al., 2011). Therefore, league or country-specific factors may mean the value of star players differs across regions, an area that warrants future research. However, an implication of DP occurrence was how some fans chose to switch to the expansion club, because of a DP at their previously supported club as they felt the player signed, and was signed for by the club, for financial reasons. Selecting a DP where these motivations are not evident, is crucial for clubs to manage fans perceptions.

The owners of the clubs in this study, either as individuals or sister clubs, was a socialisation agent that was uniquely identified. The agent was grouped as **Club-Person: Direct** and was emerged across all three fan categories. Firstly, this study identified examples of specific famous individuals who own or part-own, in this case, expansion clubs. These individuals, including Will Ferrell and Magic Johnson, played a role in the socialisation of LAFC fans, with Mia Hamm socialising female fans of LAFC through her US women's national team connection. There are further examples of famous individuals purchasing or part purchasing clubs, such as MLS club, Austin FC co-owned by Matthew McConaughey, showing wider use of this approach. Additionally, for fans in the USA, where football is yet to fully take hold compared to

other sports, becoming sister clubs with other well-known sports organisations, has implication for socialisation. The connection with NY Yankees and MCFC to NYCFC allowed expansion club fans to see credibility with the team. Furthermore, long-distance fans cited Boston Red Sox, who are owned by FSG, who own LFC, in their socialisation, with one fan suggesting they felt obligated to support FSG by supporting LFC. For larger clubs, creating partnerships with smaller organisations has the potential for mutual benefits (Martorell et al., 2020), with examples of fans moving from the smaller club to the larger club. These examples clearly issue the benefits in creating relationships with other clubs, or inviting famous individuals into the ownership group, to forge awareness among fans. Therefore, an implication for sports clubs is to consider future ownership models due to their benefits in socialisation.

Gaining access to the club's stadium and its location would seem like a factor that would not attracting fans but simply making their lives easier. However, infrastructure, the overarching term, represented a novel socialisation agent and carries significant implications. This finding suggests that clubs, expansion or established, should build stadiums with good transport links. However, the location of the stadium within the city and proximity to points of interest (e.g., pubs, bars, restaurants) is crucial in socialisation. This is known to enhance stadium experiences (Fernandes and Neves, 2014; Edensor et al., 2021). Fans also suggested how poor infrastructure from the established club led them to switching to the expansion club, showing how it needs to be managed. Furthermore, NYCFC are yet to build their own stadium and currently are based in Yankee Stadium. As one of the key selling points of NYCFC being that



the club is in NYC, they need to be sure to be located within one of the five Boroughs of NY to maintain their fanbase.

Video games have previously been identified as a socialisation agent (Mastromartino et al., 2019a), with this thesis providing roles surrounding this **Indirect** agent. For long-distance fans, demos were especially prominent in socialisation. For instance, fans, especially in developing nations, may only be able to afford the free version of the game. Demo versions often contain more successful and popular clubs, showing why clubs such as LFC, MUFC and MCFC became popular among fans in this thesis. This strongly suggests that clubs should seek to be included in such versions in a bid to reach fans in developing nations.

### *6.3. Limitations and future research*

Despite the clear contributions of this study and the emergence of the *Person-Centric Socialisation Framework*, limitations and avenues for future research arose. Firstly, all the clubs in this research are in cities with at least two clubs. Therefore, to contrast the findings identified in this thesis, future research should explore socialisation agents, and the *Person-Centric Socialisation Framework*, in the context of one club cities or regions. In the expansion club context this could include Charlotte FC, Inter Miami or Austin FC, with additional one city or region clubs resembling those in this research including Newcastle United FC, Leeds United FC, Chicago Fire FC or Philadelphia Union. Furthermore, expanding this research to fans of women's football

clubs would extend existing work (Guest and Lujten, 2018; Allison and Pope, 2021), considering both expansion and established women's football clubs. Other contexts in which the *Person-Centric Socialisation Agent Framework* should be applied to includes the socialisation of fans of individual athletes, for examples Formula 1 Drivers, golfers and tennis players. Finally, understanding the socialisation of fans with differing sexualities would broaden the scope of knowledge around the impact of demographic factors (Allison and Knoester, 2021).

Using different recruitment and data collection methods would also allow for a greater understanding of the various cultural factors that may have been missed by this thesis. This includes geography, with the scope of this thesis largely limited to the USA or UK (as demonstrated in Table 20). Online methods too may only attract fans with high levels of attachment (Kozinets, 2015), meaning findings may differ between casual and highly identified fans. Additional to this, despite gaining responses from 41 female fans (11= interviews; 30= netnographic responses), a wider range of female participants is required in the future to test the model proposed within this study. This is a drawback of the netnographic approach undertaken. For instance, female fans often hide their gender on sport forums to avoid judgement from males (Fenton et al., 2021), with such forums a relied upon source of data collection in this thesis. Furthermore, only 4% of female internet users use Reddit (Duggan and Smith, 2013) and only 31% of Reddit users are female (WebsiteBuilder, 2021).

Not only did fans select player related socialisation agents through roles such as skill, nationality, DPs, from another club and attraction, but all cited were attacking, exciting and goalscoring players. This is a reoccurring theme across MLS DP signings (Coates et al., 2016; Jewell, 2017). Yet, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is little work beyond this thesis around the role player position has in fandom, not to mention socialisation. This represents a further area of future research. Furthermore, differences were found between how fans from various countries view star players. Future socialisation research, therefore, notably surrounding expansion clubs, should take a cross-cultural approach to better understand the impact of high-profile players (Lock et al., 2009).

Conducting this research at a different time may also provide varied results. For instance, this research was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, where games were played behind closed doors. The agents identified, and the roles they played, related to attending games, may have taken on new meaning or new agents may have emerged due to consumption changes. Additionally, how people become fans as adults is lacking in knowledge, with an overt focus on socialisation in their youth (Delia and Katz, 2019). Therefore, asking fans the year they became socialised will help create a timeline of socialisation agents, which could assist in understanding when socialisation occurs, alongside critical moments in life and history. Consequently, continuing efforts to gain in-depth knowledge on the roles agents play, would increase understanding of socialisation. Therefore, testing the *Person-Centric Socialisation*

*Agent Framework* is key, to understand further emergent roles through qualitative research, significantly advancing the field.

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## Chapter 8: Appendices

### *Appendix A- Reflexive journal*

#### **March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019: Deciding to GT**

The decision was made to use GT due to the teaching of sessions from Professor Cathy Urquhart, through the Doctoral Training Programme at Manchester Metropolitan University. The sessions helped me to realise the creativity and benefit of using GTM and alongside my previous research into fandom, the need for GT to be used in sports fandom. Since then, many issues have been brought up to me, such as how it is viewed within journal articles and the age of the methodology. However, personally, I am committed to making this method work and using it with any journal articles I developed and be honest with how I used it and defend it also. Once I set about using GT, I discussed it with Professor Urquhart and discussed some ideas such as

Group Differences	Data on Category	
	Similar	Diverse
<b>Minimized</b>	Maximum similarity in data leads to: Verifying usefulness of category; Generating basic properties; Establishing a set of conditions for a degree of category. These can be used for prediction.	Identifying/developing fundamental differences under which category and hypothesis vary
<b>Maximized</b>	Identifying/developing fundamental uniformities of greatest scope	Maximum diversity in data quickly forces: dense developing of properties of categories; integrating of categories and properties; delimiting scope of theory

maximising and minimising differences within categories, something that she was keen for me to further explore.

Applying this across the sample I have and am using, means that English clubs would be minimised-similar and American clubs would be maximised-similar. However, for future research, Women's sports would be minimised-diverse, and another sport would be maximised-diverse. This therefore opens up the ability to extend the theory and make it stronger, which would be discussed in future research.

### **June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019: The first interview**

The first interview was very daunting. I wrote down after I asked the first question "calm Matthew!", I'd like to think I was after this point. I imagine this is natural as part of the data collection process and not wanting to make any mistakes. As the interview also developed, I also kept saying 'uhuh' often and therefore noted down, trying to stop doing that. I aim now to look further into techniques for conducting interviews, even small things by asking questions and saying, I will let you talk until you have finished etc.

### **October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019: Being blocked from Reddit**

Today, I decided to post onto the Manchester United subreddit (reddevils), which has 194,000 members, therefore expecting rich amounts of data. However, within hours

the site was locked by moderators due to a breach in community rules, the one in particular:

*Self-promotion without contribution:*

*Self-Promotion by itself is not an issue. However, we have always had a stance that someone must also be willing to contribute to other people's topics and discussions as much as they promote their own. Anyone seen to be promoting their own websites/Social Media channels/Blogs/Surveys without offering anything in return, will see their sites banned, and potentially a user ban too.*

*Please refer to [Reddit's guidelines for Self Promotion](#) for guidance.*

At the time, I didn't see myself as in breach of this issue, however due to not being a MUFC fan, I was never going to want to contribute to the site, in hindsight, I see why this would have been an issue. As a result of this locked site, my post only received 26 comments and I was not able to reply to the comments and ask further information and therefore the detail of each participants received compared to other posts is lower, meaning I could not always ask about location, age and therefore not engage in an interview with the fans online. However, I have posted onto a smaller site, which has not been taken down, but still gained small amounts of fans, but I at least gained some further insights. There is a plan in the January 2020 to post onto the main forum sights of each club, apart from NYCFC as that has been completed, which should allow for more comments- as long as I remain within community rules.

## October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019: Field noting Netnographic Data

Upon gaining ethics for my project, I stated about conducting netnographic research and part of this was collecting and analysing data that I had not co-created or that they knew that was going to be the purpose of their post. Although, one of the issues I have is keeping the data rich, without using full quotes. I had seen an example of it being used in a placement I have been on, where they coded pieces of data from frequency. So, I emailed my **Director** of Studies to understand how she would conduct such process, stating:

*Sorry to bother you, but found some more Reddit sites looking at how people chose the clubs they support but was trying to work out how I can write about them (like make field notes on them) without it being basic if that makes sense?*

*For example: My best friend is from St. Helens, Merseyside. I didn't have much to do with football back then. But one day, I was really down (my girlfriend and me broke up) he showed me the DVD of the 2005 CHAMPIONS LEAGUE final. That kinda made me interested in football and I started watching with him. Over time I became a Liverpool supporter as well. YNWA*

*I don't just want to say: best friend, success etc.*

*However, I have seen with CFG putting all the quotes in an Excel sheet and coding them on there and doing it quantitatively? Any thoughts or advice on this would be greatly appreciated with it being a netnography.*

I also, emailed an author of a journal article, “von Benzon, N. (2018). Informed consent and secondary data: Reflections on the use of mothers’ blogs in social media research. *Area*.” I believed this author had done what I was attempting to do and understand, however it seemed not, but through email she did state that the best way would be to analyse them as normal and then decide at the end if I would use the full quotes or paraphrase, based on ethics, which based on ethics, I would paraphrase and allow them to support or build contribution in that sense.

**EDIT:** This was also supported by one of the scrutineers in my RD2 Viva on November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Towards the end of the PhD process, I eventually decided to paraphrase all netnographic quotes, elicited and archival.

### **November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019: Discovering the core category**

Today, I believed I discovered my core category of ‘becoming a fan’ and began to focus on what are the questions surrounding this category. For example, ‘how?’ has become one of the key questions asked to fans and also ‘why?’, as there is some literature surrounding these issues. However, I started to focus upon other questions such as ‘what?’ as in what did they engage in?, what made them a fan? (this may



overlap with other issues however). Another question was 'who?', who were the key socialisation agents?, who did they engage with?, who encouraged them? Finally, is 'when?', when did they become a fan?, when did someone take them to a match?, when did someone buy you a top?. This would then focus upon issues of time and potentially age, but some of the fans on the Reddit posts did not always provide a date and instead was just a specific word, for example Zlatan- but then we do not understand any of their life timings at this point, only time points in history, i.e. Zlatan joining the club in 2018. Therefore, there may be two time points, age (when the fans became a fan in their life) and time (when they became a fan in the clubs life). As a result, I started to note down some significant codes and place them onto each question, however as stated above, there are several overlaps with each other, for example who and why- family and players may be both. Therefore, this needs to be thought about whether who will feed into why, i.e. My Dad (who) because he supported them (why).

### **November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019: What is the Player code?**

One of the issues has been for me, as I come towards the end of my data collection is understanding what the codes mean and where they will go in my end theory. For example, when someone mentioned a player, I coded it 'player', but then down the line it was understanding whether it was a discussion about a player, the skills they displayed or the fact that a player effected their decision to become a fan of the club. Therefore, I decided to break down some of the factors into whether they followed the

player (from national club or another club) or chose the club because of a player, so I decided to define both to help moving forward.

- Following players in my eyes is to do with a player who played for another club or their national club at the time and followed them to a club that they now identify as a fan of.
- Choosing a club because of a player is due to behaviours of a player encouraging a fan to choose to support them.

However, issues here are whether this is classed as following, therefore the main code being **support because of a player** followed by- *national club/good player mention skill/ support previous club/ marquee signing (big name) etc?*

### **November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2019: Further Self-promotion**

As stated in my ethics, the original plan was to post into all the major forums related to each of the eight clubs, however some of the issues with these forums were that they have specific rules about self-promotion without contributing to the forum. This meant that some of forums were not as productive as others. An example of Everton's forum, which did not accept my post once it was moderated, however the NYCFC forum, allowed it and participants engaged well, therefore the consistency was not as good. I also experienced similar problems on Reddit on the large MUFC site, however, the smaller site allowed me to post, but was not as engaging. Therefore, I made the

decision to include Reddit posts that I had concluded so far, but not do any further club specific forums apart from the ones I had already done.

### **December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019: Defining a fan**

After consulting some of the literature, I realised that defining a fan was not easily completed, alongside discussions with one of my supervisors, who kept saying what is a fan and how do we define a fan and who can be a fan in this study. Therefore, a decision was made to post onto the eight clubs Reddit sites, 'how would you define a fan?'. This allowed me to get different opinions of what a fan is, but could have also been controversial, as some fans will have different opinions of what a fan is, and some will believe that they are more of a fan than someone else. Therefore, I did state that they could message me personally with their response if they did not want to share it, if it was deemed controversial. This also allowed for fans to debate what they thought a fan was and engage in others different opinions.

### **January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020: Feeling lost on what next**

After potentially finishing my data collection, I was left feeling a little lost on what to do next. During this time, I was in between waiting for a meeting with my methods supervisor and writing down my thoughts, emailing them to my Director of Studies, helped me realise what I needed to do next and what the next short-term steps were also. Below, is the email that I sent, followed by what I actually completed.

*One thing I know I am going to need to do, is sort my Reddit posts into different segments/types for each club as when it comes to segmenting them, it may prove difficult if I follow the idea of taking away pieces of data to show most frequent options for each segment, i.e., Long distance fans or Female Fans for instance. I think then, I will recode everything again, but based on motivations, processes and becoming an influencer.*

*I have also started to do some reading and writing around some of the segments, and this is based around reading some other GT PhD's. This leads me to what we discussed in the last meeting about how I would frame and structure the analysis section. I think it would probably look like this at the moment:*

- *General motivations and processes- comparisons of*
- *Segment, split into motivations and processes*
  - *Context*
  - *Literature*
  - *Data*

*Then repeat this for each segment.*

- *Then potentially 'becoming the influencer.*

*Therefore, some of the applied literature in the document I have sent, for example on the SFMS, might then be in this section, when looking at gender. Similarly, long distance fans etc.*

*However, all this leads me into my aims and objectives:*

- *To assess how people become a fan of:*
  - *A new soccer club;*
  - *A club they have no geographic connection with*
  - *A club they have a geographic connection with*
- *To establish how clubs can understand the journey a fan goes through to support them*

*Therefore, do I need to look at motivations?*

*Sorry, I know this feels like an essay, but this has come from doing a bit of thinking this week and based off our conversation this week, with probably not a lot to show for it. But my aims have always been to understand how different groups of people become football fans and if we have distinguished that how,*

*is separate to why, in the literature, then looking at processes done by either the club or external to the club, is what I should be focussing upon?*

*Following this, I then:*

- *Read through the Reddit posts I completed and copied every parent comment I received and segmented them into one or more of, local, national, international, female fan, multiple club fan, mention of their heritage away from where they live. I do not need to break it down based on club segments, as they were grouped based on the club they support.*
- *The next stage is to focus code these segments, focussing specifically on the 'how', the process they took to becoming a fan.*

It was also useful to receive some reassurance from my Supervisor at this time, mainly due to not going through the GT process before.

### **March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020: Developing a framework**

Trying to develop a manageable framework for which to articulate the theory, has been a difficult task. One that read correctly and could be tested easily also. This resulted many changes in frameworks such as the one below. However, that resulted in finding enough cases of becoming influencers and therefore was not logical and therefore this

framework eventually changed and re-developed into something that is more realistic and manageable and testable.



## April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020: Naming the core category

After spending a significant amount of time calling my research core category as either how someone becomes a fan or processes, after searching literature, I worked out I was assessing the socialisation of fans into football and the agents that impact on this process. This was a real lightbulb moment for me and although there have been several pieces of work in this field, as discussed in the next chapter, there are several issues with it and a general lack of consistency, therefore warranting further study in this area. The chapter comes after methods naturally, as it was discovered after data collection was uncovered, although socialisation agents was discussed in the PCM, which fits into the literature review chapter previously, at the time it did not seem like the natural fit for this research. Socialisation agents and the previous research around

it, helps to significantly place this research into the field and follows the procedures of a GT approach.

### **May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020: Writing up findings**

During the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown, I spent some time writing up findings based off a PhD I found, that investigated HE lecturers using a constructivist approach. In this thesis, the author, Dr. Eve Rapley, who I have since spoken to, writes almost a results section, reporting her findings and structuring them around the core categories. Upon reading it, it made great sense to me around how to proceed and decided to write up the socialisation agents of new club fans, something I enjoyed doing and found really though provoking and interesting. One of the issues however is that just that small segment totalled nearly 12,000 words and if I did that 5/6 times more, it would be a large thesis! Therefore there is going to come a time where this may need refining or I may be able to stop myself from repeating myself the more I write about each segment, whichever happens, it really helped develop my writing style and also think about my research with some more clarity and with a different lens. It was almost like writing memos but with more structure and a thought towards some of the theory discovered that was mentioned in the previous journal entry.

### **May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020: Revisiting objectives**



As I was writing my findings, it occurred to me that with nearly eight segments, the PhD would be too big and therefore revisiting the objectives made me focus more onto what was being assessed and change the objectives slightly. The current objectives below mean that I focus solely on these three groups of fans.

- Assess how people become a fan of an expansion club;
- Assess how female fans become fans of a club;
- Assess how long-distance fans become fans of a club;
- To operationalise how people become fans of clubs to be used by practitioners

This means also that my findings are limited to these three groups and although the typology will be broadly applied to all football fans in this research, they will be specifically applied to the three groups above.

### **June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020: Writing a journal article**

In light of planned conference attendance being cancelled due to Covid-19, I decided to write a journal article which not only helped get feedback on my writing style from my supervisors but also feedback on my data and its analysis. This not only helped hone in my ability to be concise but also sparked new areas of thinking within my work.

This meant that my work took a new **direction** from the framework developed previously to a typology of socialisation agents. This not only makes a theoretically stronger framework but also provides something that can actually be used by practitioners, an objective of this research.

### **August 20<sup>th</sup> 2020: Completing Manual Coding**

I eventually realised that using NVivo for my coding was creating an out-of-control document that was becoming hard to move categories around and visualise them. Therefore, I started to separate the data into the three objectives, long distance, female and expansion club fans, with the fan identification number (Everton fan 1, MUFC fan 40). Field note data was tougher to sort but for expansion club fans all field note data was used and for long distance fans, when fans mentioned their country, it was easier to identify.

When coding this data, I also looked for either the main impact (My father made me a fan), multiple impacts (My father was watching it on TV (father and media)) or the first thing the fan mentioned. This went against what I completed previously, where I had selected everything, the fan mentioned, for example, "my father took me to a game once and then I went and learnt about the history and liked the kit and players". I would have coded father, game, history, kit and players, whereas this time I coded father as this was what made them aware or had the biggest impact. This has resulted in more refined codes and will help long term in the development of a theory.

## **January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2021: Considering next stages**

I was starting, at this point, to consider how to move the development and flow of my research to the next stage. Therefore, the aim was to start to complete the bulk of my sections, making sure the content was broadly there, with the intention of making sure the word count, references, tables and figures could be fully understood and situated. I then set out a plan to complete work at specific points. Then I could start to make sure the word count was within the limits and account for duplication of references. The aim of merging methods and literature review by March 2021, before then a focus on the findings. The findings are also being adapted as I write a journal article around expansion club fans and therefore refining key elements of my analysis.

## **July 7<sup>th</sup> 2021: Framework expansion**

One of the key questions to arise from feedback recently, is what is my grounded theory? This therefore has forced me to think deeper around my contribution much wider too. However, the main consideration around my theory is developing further two considerations. 1) expanding greater on **Person-Person** and **Club-Person** framework and honing on that and 2) considering greater the role of socialisation agents and how my contribution is being brought on through the identification of new agents and developing the role that these agents play. This has led me to look further into the literature around fan-initiated socialisation agents and also look back deeper at my data around the framework. Furthermore, writing in greater detail and freely

about the framework will also help, therefore returning to memos to help clarify further my thoughts.

**October 23<sup>rd</sup> 2021: Feedback from submitted journal article**

In the Summer of 2021, I submitted a journal article to European Sport Management Quarterly, focusing upon the Expansion club fan area of this thesis. This reflection will focus on the feedback provided and attempt to cover how it was addressed and will be addressed.

Feedback from reviewer	How has it been addressed/response?
<p>Kozinet's work on Netnography implies a method far more immersive and intensive than posting a question and coding the answers. My understanding of your netnographic approach was posting a question (how did you become a fan of club) on forums, and coding the responses. Is that really Netnography? There were also vague comments about archival sources, but never much detail about what that entailed. I have doubts about whether coding responses to a single question you posted on a forum really constitutes Netnography.</p>	<p>Since gaining this feedback, I have gained more supporting references which aim to justify and identify previous research which have used the form of Netnography I have used. Furthermore, this thesis provides further in depth details generally than a research paper can offer.</p>

<p>For the interview sample, 11 participants feels very small without really deep and immersive interviews/observations. I recognize GT does not have a strict sample size requirement, and rather strives for theoretical saturation – but even Charmaz uses numbers like “25” as appropriate for small studies in her book. There is no discussion of saturation or other factors leading to an appropriate sample size.</p>	<p>The whole thesis uses 30 interviews, with various numbers of these split across the three groups of fans. Additionally, the copious amounts of netnographic responses throughout this whole thesis, further justifies the support of interviews and netnographic responses. As for saturation, this is covered in greater detail when</p>
<p>How can socializing agents represent an emergent core category? Wasn't that the focus of the paper from the beginning? I don't see what is emergent about this, or how it the general topic of the study can be the core category.</p>	<p>This was one of the difficulties in writing a grounded theory paper with limited words, with issues in how to provide a narrative and story throughout. Within the thesis this is addressed better, by splitting the two literature reviews and highlighting how the emerging category was formed through interviews and archival netnographic data.</p>
<p>Does “infrastructure” qualify as a socialising agent? Clearly that depends on the definition/operationalization of socialising agent. I hope you can provide more clarity on that topic as you move forward with your research.</p>	<p>This was further addressed by re-coding and reading whether some of the factors are socialisation agents.</p>

<p>You do a good job briefly explaining how you will advance knowledge in socialisation but I would like to see the same type of argument for advancing knowledge on the development of fans for expansion clubs. I would like to see more discussion on why you chose expansion clubs in large markets where MLS clubs already existed rather than including an expansion club that is the first and only MLS club in the market. It seems like there would be differences in the development of new fans in these different environments and would result in a more holistic understanding of expansion club fan development.</p>	<p>This comment has attempted to be addressed through a better and more expansive introduction, that allows for justification for the advancement of this area, both academically and more widely, in the context of the league and clubs. Especially in comparing them to the socialisation of fans of single city expansion clubs, which this study does not do.</p>
<p>Charmaz has an entire chapter about how literature reviews fit within grounded theory (a controversial topic!), that discussion was absent here. About how researchers consider both the experiences of the participants and it depends on the researcher's views and experiences. That discussion was absent. Charmaz also stresses the importance of memo writing in constructing grounded theory – again absent from the research process.</p>	<p>Many of these areas are covered within the methodology chapter, something which, due to word counts, was not able to be addressed within the research paper.</p>

**December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021: Naming the framework**

In a further bid to respond to comments from reviewers around whether this is a CGT, I aimed to name the framework formed to solidify it as a GT and a contribution of this thesis. The framework, at its core, has fans at the centre, naming the socialisation process identified as **Person-Person** or **Club-Person**, therefore, the framework was named the *Person-Centric Socialisation Framework*. The naming of this should make it evidently clear what the GT that was developed is.

#### **April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022: Finishing the thesis**


As I approach the final stages of my thesis, I have found it difficult to maintain motivation. I believe the issue with this has been in the scale of the changes I have been making, I have not been able to just sit down and write and see the number of words at the bottom of my screen increase. Instead, the number has remained the same or decreased at times due to editing. Furthermore, although I look forward to finishing this piece of work, I also think I am going through almost an early grieving process. I have listened to several podcasts recently which have discussed Olympics athletes working for years towards reaching a gold medal and once they have won it, they never know how to react or what to do afterwards. Although I am not an Olympics athlete, I still have this feeling, of what next? I also fear that my mind has been overcome with this feeling, rather than finishing the thesis at times. So, although this part of my thesis is probably mainly for me and the examiners, I hope others realise and accept how hard this stage of the PhD process is and despite it all, keep on going!

Appendix B- Context on the eight clubs

Name and logo	League	Founded	Stadium	First Division Titles	Owners
<p>MCFC</p> 	EPL	1880	Etihad Stadium	6	City Football Group
<p>MUFC</p> 	EPL	1878	Old Trafford	20	The Glazer Family
<p>LFC</p> 	EPL	1892	Anfield	19	Fenway Sports Group



<p>EFC</p> 	EPL	1878	Goodison Park	9	Farhad Moshiri
<p>LAFC</p> 	MLS	2014	Banc of California Stadium	1= Supporters' Shield	Larry Berg, Brandon Beck and Bennett Rosenthal, plus a consortium of other co-owners.
<p>LAG</p> 	MLS	1994	Dignity Health Sports Park	4= Supporters' Shield  5= MLS Cup's	Philip Anschutz (AEG)
<p>NYRB</p> 	MLS	1994	Red Bull Arena	3= Supporters' Shield	Red Bull Group

<p><b>NYCFC</b></p> 	MLS	2013	Yankee Stadium	1= MLS Cup	City Football Group
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*Appendix C- Participant details*

Pseudonym	Age	Club	Gender	Location	Profession	Season ticket holder?
EFC fan 29	64	EFC	Male	Indianapolis, USA	Professor	No
EFC fan 30	30	EFC	Male	NY, USA	Social Worker	No
EFC fan 31	57	EFC	Male	Dublin, Ireland	Producer	No
EFC fan 32	40	EFC	Male	Reading, England	Student	No
LAFC fan 32	55	LAFC	Female	Los Angeles, USA	Financial Consultant	Yes
LAFC fan 33	33	LAFC	Male	Arizona, USA	Soldier	No

L AFC fan 34	26	L AFC	Male	Orange County, USA	Student	Yes
L AFC fan 35	20	L AFC	Male	Hawthorne, USA	Student	No
L AFC fan 36	29	L AFC	Male	California, USA	Maths teacher	No
L AG fan 80	42	L AG	Female	Temecula, USA	Support group	Yes
L AG fan 81	26	L AG	Female	Michigan, USA	Data Analyst	No
L AG fan 82	33	L AG	Male	Fountain Valley, USA	Tax Attorney	Yes
L FC fan 146	41	L FC	Male	Preston, England	Medical Trainer	No
L FC fan 147	25	L FC	Female	Manchester, England	Student	No
L FC fan 148	50	L FC	Male	Middlesbrough, England	Teacher	No
L FC fan 149	31	L FC	Male	Pune, India	Café Owner	No
M CFC fan 87	29	M CFC	Male	California, USA	Maths teacher	No
M CFC fan 88	49	M CFC	Male	Dublin, Ireland	Commercial Manager	No
M CFC fan 89	41	M CFC	Male	Utrecht, Netherlands	Project manager	No
M CFC fan 90	23	M CFC	Male	Pune, India	Software Engineer	No

MCFC fan 91	25	MCFC	Female	Plymouth, England	Retail and Events	No
MCFC fan 92	49	MCFC	Male	Devon, England	Retired Teacher	Yes
MCFC fan 93	59	MCFC	Male	Peterborough, England	Business development manager	Yes
MUFC fan 63	24	MUFC	Female	Chesterfield, England	Student	No
NYCFC fan 62	41	NYCFC	Female	Long Island, USA	Chef	Yes
NYCFC fan 63	22	NYCFC	Male	Brooklyn, USA	Social Media Strategist	Yes
NYCFC fan 64	29	NYCFC	Male	Brooklyn, USA	Environmental non-profit	Yes
NYCFC fan 65	48	NYCFC	Male	Long Island, USA	IT	No
NYCFC fan 66	24	NYCFC	Male	Brooklyn, USA	Non-Profit	Yes
NYCFC fan 67	33	NYCFC	Male	New Jersey, USA	Web-developer	Yes
NYRB fan 30	35	NYRB	Female	Brooklyn, USA	Producer	No
MCFC fan 94	25	MCFC	Female	Manchester, England	Teacher	No
LFC fan 150	21	LFC	Female	Manchester, England	Student	No

MUFC fan 66	29	MUFC	Female	Manchester, England	Retail	No
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*Appendix D- Example interview transcript with NYCFC fan 65*

**MH:** First of all if you don't mind me asking how old you are?

**S:** I'm 41.

**MH:** And do you live in New York?

**S:** Yeah, yeah.

**MH:** And how long have you lived in New York?

**S:** My whole life.

**MH:** And your occupation?

**S:** I'm a Chef

**MH:** Remember you telling me so really the 1st question is, if you can tell me how you became to support New York City FC right from the start as far back as you can remember even kind of your experience of football or soccer, which would you prefer?

**S:** Either

**MH:** As a child, so just as far back as you can remember, just go you're your soccer, football journey.

**S:** OK, well, it started when I was younger, my family always supported Celtic. My parents are Scottish so. We always were supporting Celtic and then sometimes we were able to watch matches. It's like through family members and things like that so. Yeah, so I've since birth really. I've been a soccer fan, then we I didn't really have much access to watching any soccer at all. Except for like the Olympics and things like that, so I followed the women's national team for the US. And like World Cups and things like that, then What I was able to get you know? I'm not able to get the Scottish Premier League. But I can get English Premier League. So that I was looking for a team and I was watching some matches and then like the style of play that Man City had so they kind of found me when I was Like looking for team you know, and then we went to watch the Man City play to match at Yankee Stadium against Liverpool here, And then that's when we found out that they were going to have a sister club in New York City. So it was immediately then what I became interested because I never supported MLS before because I never really liked the style of play never really was

like? Exciting for me and there was always very like kinda choppy and long and whatever and then we didn't have a local team the New York Red Bulls are in New Jersey, so we don't really. I would never have gone there, so now, especially now. I don't like Jersey. But yeah, so, so that pretty much fully getting from the first time I found out I guess it was 2014 that we were going to have a club. You know, we were on board and we went to the first match at the Yankee stadium and then we became founding members towards the end of that season. And then we've been to almost every match- every home match ever since and one away at DC 2 years ago so.

**MH:** Cool an did you play football as a child then?

**S:** Oh yeah, I did, when I was younger. I played for the school football team and everything like that, so up until middle school I played but then I had I had a weird arch foot so I couldn't play anymore. 'cause I had to be on crutches for like 3 years. So it kind of ruined everything but I still support it

**MH:** so. I guess you're kind of the how reason of how you kind of came about being a fan was kind of saying about how Man City came and played at the Yankee Stadium that you found out about the New York City, there and obviously you mentioned at the start of little bits, but why would you say then NYCFC- what it is that New York City has done that pulled you in?

**S:** Uhm you know, even from the beginning, it was kind of like. Like when we when they announced the signing of Villa, it was like OK. They're like serious about it, then they announced Pirlo and Lampard, like OK. That's good alright and then. You know first season was a little bit rough, the coach that we had wasn't. He wasn't really good for us. I don't think our goalie that we had was good enough. so it was really it was a rough like first. But then we got Patrick Vieira, coming to coach and he changed the style of play more fluidity because he was on the city youth coach the EDS coach before he came to us so he kind of brought that same style and. Yeah, and it's just New York, like it Got from day one, what New York is. Which is I don't know, it was like OK this is actually a team that represents New York and it's like OK we got this. So we've done you know, we've gone to the playoffs every season we haven't gone past the semi-finals, but I feel like this season. We're definitely going to be Kicking some butt 'cause we got some great strikers and got some They're all playing as like a piece, a unit, which is awesome

**MH:** so. When did you know you were a supporter of New York City then? When did you know it was real and was going to stick?

**S:** Um probably towards the end of the first season when we became founding members. You know like once we were able to go to every match and be part of it. Invest. It came on from there on. we're just obsessed. Yeah, like today. I'm going to play in a in a New York City, FIFA tournament so well. Yeah, so at the training facility,



**MH:** very interesting, yeah, and you find out through being a founding member find things like that out, and you be able to go to those things?

**S:** Cause I'm I guess like we get emails and everything. So I entered a raffle, or a lottery. And erm I was chosen to participate so. Should be fun and probably get my butt kicked by a young one, but it'll be a fun time so?

**MH:** You obviously mention about being a Celtic fan and man city do you still follow those teams or is it kind of just New York City FC now?

**S:** Uhm I follow Celtic just like. Through like online and like I'm not able to watch any of the matches really sometimes. I could watch like the when they play Rangers. That's usually a bigger match and they put it on different stations here usually just a replay, but I usually watch all the highlights and everything. So I follow their team. Man City we, we watch all the matches so.

**MH:** And would you say would you say without Man City you wouldn't have supported New York City FC?

**S:** It might still happen because uh if I as long as I feel like as long as I found out that we were going to have a team I would have at least gotten interested in it, and then Yeah, I mean, I feel like maybe because it's part of city it was easier. Because we were already in that kind of Fan base anyway, yeah.

**MH:** Did anyone tell you not to support New York City FC or was it quite easy to get involved?

**S:** I'm not nobody. I don't think I've actually I'm not sure if. I'm not very swayed with the sports. I will get my whole life that they aren't winning to you, you know, I'm not going to be sweet for Whatever you know like even though we didn't do well at first. Then the Red Bulls kind of owned us, the first season and things like that that I ever was like Oh Maybe I should say I feel like that. Just maybe kinda go harder at it

**MH:** yeah, so do you like being the underdog?

**S:** I guess so yeah, yeah. But I mean in after the first year it isn't been like that

**MH:** Yeah, so the in terms of your first game remember which game it was and what was it like for you?

**S:** It was the inaugural game at Yankee Stadium in the first season in 2015 it was against the revolution it would be Villas 1st goal and there is just. It was kinda like it was made for movie pretty much is like alright- perfect. like our star scores the first and we were sitting in the section on the on the half of the field that where he scored It was just amazing. So it was just like OK. This is it got me

**MH:** what's the kind of atmosphere, like before the game during the game after is anything that happens that you get involved in?

**S:** Uhm well, we try to get there early before the match starts so we live in Long Island. So it takes about 1/2 an hour to get there. To try to get their kind of for when the gates open and we just we walk around. We usually take a are selfie and we try to get up on the menus. For every match. I think made it up there, of like me, 14 out of the of the whole matches that we got so far, so we're kind of big when it comes to it, so all of the we've gone to a few different events last year. I was in like cooking competition with them, like today I'm going to the FIFA tournament so we try to we try to be involved with them as much as possible, yeah.

**MH:** So there's been any key moments in your support then of New York City that really stand out for you?

**S:** Um. I'd say when yeah, when Jack Harrison, he was now he plays for Leeds right now, he's up. Yeah, we're going to follow him because he was. He's through with us. He you know, we got we drafted him and he's just freaking love it is just a great guy, so whenever we were able to meet him he was just such a little gentleman so when he's yeah, when he when he scored his goal and his mom was there. It was just it was just great, so the first time the first time I really saw him but He set up a goal for Villa and it was, it was sick and it like it was just amazing. So it was good stuff, yeah, I mean, there's been a lot of great moments some. Crappy moments you know, we lost

by a huge margin to Red Bulls one year. So we've been trying to you know avenge that ever since. We're doing a good job. These couple seasons like right now New York is blue. You know, we, we tied one we won the other match so New York is blue this year. We only had this year 2 matches. They've changed the format of MLS so we've had fewer matches. A shorter time than last season, last League matches was I think October this year is like the first weekend of October, MLS isn't doing international breaks so. Like we have now we have, like six big players on international duty and we have 3 huge matches this coming week. So it's weird. It's a very weird scene is in this year. But it's the playoff structure and make it more competitive because it was going from March to all the way to December pretty much. Players have gotta push it too far and then they started training in January again. It may be like flat later the next season, yeah, so 'Cause that's why they made the changes. It just stings. You know half of our players like our starters are going on international when we need them kind of the most. But some of them have chose to stay,

**MH:** so what is it then that keeps you supporting New York City FC then?

**S:** The fight that they have they never give up And I like that, like the same thing with Man City that they just play hard until the end. And I get that. I think that that's great like we don't seem to have any selfish players. Everybody is close and Yes I think it's just going on this season.

**MH:** Is there any conflicts or any other different interest stopping your support or is it quite easy just to support New York City FC in terms of your lifestyle?

**S:** Yeah, I mean, In the last couple of seasons, I've pulled out sick to go to matches and things like that this season we're fortunate enough to be able to go to a lot of them partially, because I think we have had 6 matches that are on Wednesday or Thursday. So those are easier matches for us. Yeah, so there have been times where I you know pulled out sick to go to matches. And yeah, we you know, we've kind of And did birthday parties early, so we can get to the match or go home and watch the match and things like that, we've brought and made a few of our friends who are soccer fans into New York City fans, so we go and watch it with them sometimes yeah, so I guess. Nothing really stands in our way, Yeah, at this point we're kind of die hard. So we are planning on moving across the country next year, but we're still going to be New York city fans. And hopefully when they come out there, we can go to those matches, but yeah,

**MH:** so you said about there about influencing friends to become fans. How many people have you influenced and why? do you think it is important for you to influence people?

**S:** I think it is like um when I first when I first met my wife. she didn't even know anything about soccer. The first match I had her watch She asked when the commercial was gonna be so she can go to the bathroom and I told her in 45 minutes. You know, so

and then she didn't know anything and now she's now She's a die hard fan, so I think it's great, yeah, and then just a few of my other friends are kind of like they have jerseys and things like that, like I think I've made like 3 die hard New York City fans, and then there's one little the other one couple their daughter is a [New York] city fan, too now. So it's good stuff

**MH:** and how did you get them to be a New York City fan?

**S:** Uh we invited them to, like there was a few matches that I couldn't go to for work. So I gave them our tickets. You know and then other matches. We invited them to come with us so we've gone through a few things and then like I said, we have gone over to their house and watch some of the matches, away matches together so. So just trying to bring other people into this, this crazy life, I guess.

**MH:** What does being a fan of the club mean to you then?

**S:** I don't know it means a lot like it's there's been a few people that say, you know like But New York is Red, No- It's really not like, New Jersey would be red not New York because they're from Jersey. But yeah, I think it's I know it's giving me something to uh. To look forward to every weekend so it's good stuff

**MH:** you mentioned there about the New York being blue and New Jersey being red is that was that kind of another why you decided to choose to support New York City, was it or was it not that important?

**S:** No yeah, it's definitely important like I said, we didn't- so before they became Red Bulls They were the Metro stars. But they were still there. Still, like Jersey team, they had Henry as a Metro Star and as a Red Bull. I believe so like they had some big stars but I feel like there. It's just an attitude difference. I don't know how to explain it, you know, so it's a different. It's a different sense of like. Probably guess New Yorker wanted just like kind of kick it to everybody else, yeah.

**MH:** So I think you kind of mentioned it a little bit, but what role does the club play in your life and apart from just a match days.

**S:** we're not part of the supporter groups, a lot of them kind of. Based out of the city out of the Metropolitan area and like I said, We're on Long Island. So we don't really get to go to those kind of things. But when like we, we moved our seats from the first two seasons to move closer to the supporters section because like Not sure if you've been into Yankee Stadium, but it's a baseball stadium so it's a different kind of setup. We were really far away from where already that the chants were, and like the songs that everything so we were like One of I think 5 or a couple of 5 people that like singing in our section, Along with everybody because You know, even though I don't know half the words that I'm singing but I just kind of try to get into it because I think that

that's like one of the best parts of watching the matches. And from in the English League like you just hear all like it just doesn't happen here in MLS but it does they do that here so. So yeah, I mean, I feel like it's a very Big part of my life being You know. I feel. If it we didn't get a New York City team, I probably wouldn't support MLS because there wouldn't be anything for me to like fight for in my heart, I guess. Is that I know that sounds cheesy.

**MH:** So is there anything else that the club does to engage you? Obviously, we mentioned the FIFA tournament and the cooking competitions. But outside of those, how does the club engage with you as a founding member?

**S:** you know, we've there's like other things that we've been part of city send offs and we can go on since we've been able to go out to the match to the pitch like to watch them warm up before the match so they do have a lot of good things, they offer the city send-off is like, at the end of the match after they come out after they finish like showering and everything they come out the players come in like a select group of fans That we get through our Citizen membership. We have to use points to get those things. But I think that's really, and the players all go out of their way to make the time you know and I feel like I don't know if that's the club kind of pushing that or if that's like the players themselves, but it's just what they do for the fans, is I think great. Yeah, and in New York, I think over the Next from the beginning for the next 5 years is supposed to be at least like 55 soccer little mini soccer pitches that, they made all throughout the city right so every like. You know in New York is always basketball



courts always like baseball fields, and things like that. But now there's little mini pitch is coming up so people like and it's like kind of like the street soccer pitches like very like small pitches like 5 aside kind of games that they play both. The stuff that they're doing it's really a lot of people involved you know and Yeah, like the even the are used to make the Academy team won their first trophy, so like they do a lot, yeah, and they make sure that the fans know Yeah, and then we now we have a girls Academy Alright, Yes, it's building, yeah, yeah, so You know, I think that I think that the. Club is doing a great job. Honestly, the best job that we could do is get a stadium. You know, we need our own stadium. We need a soccer specific stadium, but you know that's a lot, that goes into that building a new thing inside New York City. You know, so they have to do a lot of red tape that they have to go through. But as soon as that happens, I don't think there's going to be anything, stopping them yeah.

**MH:** And what is it that impresses you about your club then?

**S:** Just the just the grit and the fire that they have you know they. The players want to win the club wants to win and to the fans so. Yeah, yeah, we definitely get a lot of good stuff, you know, we have. You know, I think our Crest is killer. You know our badge is Amazing like I think it represents us, yeah, yeah, yeah, so it's a great time. Yeah.

**MH:** so in terms of New York Red Bulls. What do you kind of respect about them and what are you not a fan of?

**S:** Um they? I'm not just saying this because I'm a city fan but I feel like they play a lot of dirty soccer. They have one player that's like just he just goes for, he just goes after players and tackles and not sure how he hasn't gotten a ton of red cards. You know like he kicked he kicked the ball into like 1 fan one day because he was pissed and all Our players don't do that, you know, we like they have. I'm not at. I don't know that they have the passion that we do. We've been dominating for the last at least 2 seasons if not 3 so. And it's so and it shows in their play. You know they're very they're very chippy. They go after players and it's not just New York City players that think they go after anybody every matches, then it just they just- I don't like when they're selfish play I don't like when there is chippy play and when people are just in it to get like somebody hurt that's what they seem like they do?

**MH:** Have you heard of any fans who have moved between clubs?

**S:** I'm not sure I think that. I think that we did gain some supporters from Red Bulls with Good cause and then we have a like a uh they're not in the MLS, they are USL is a United Soccer League. It's like I guess like our championship League for here. But there's another team that's always, in New York and they kind of Their fans kind of Came along with us as well, you know the New York Cosmos, I feel like I don't think that anybody's jump ship from us to go to Red Bulls Yeah. I feel like the ones that came from Red Bulls to us, yeah, I mean, it's just it's just easier when the when the team is just has got like New York spirit I guess and that's what city has so.

**MH:** How important than obviously we mention a little bit about being New York's team, How important would you say the city of New York is that in your decision to support the team and if and if so how does the club get involved in that?

**S:** Well, I feel like I'm always a New Yorker. Live a Long Island, but I'm definitely a New Yorker, New York is a huge state so like when I say I'm a New Yorker I'm usually like talking about just purely the city. So I think that's a big part of it and like I said, before their community outreach that New York City is doing is just tremendous and it's getting more people involved in soccer, you know soccer or football is not huge in the US. But it is getting bigger and especially when you have seen them coming into different areas, you know, we've had a few other expansion clubs coming every season so it's and it's you know, I think it's progressing that way you know. I think next year, we're having 2 new teams join the league, yeah, or one or 2 or so You know it's just going to make it more competitive and greater for us and I think that that's going to be great

**MH:** is there anything that the club has used in terms of the cities characteristics or features in their brand in marketing or engaging you in anyway?

**S:** Uhm well with the, We you know the training facility that we have is very it's reminiscent of the training facility in Manchester. It's obviously like for us on a much smaller scale You know, but they're trying to bring all of that kind of, that kind of hype over here and I think that that's great. We went there last year for to watch the guys

train once and then we're going there today for that tournament so it's you know it's big it's huge so like I think that without City group I don't think that we would have the same kind of Flex I guess as we, we do you know, and I will I am kind of surprised that we don't already have our own stadium being from City group. But as I said it's right for New York part of it the New York Metropolitan part of it, too and Try and find us a right area that's going to kind of Build up everything around it 'cause I don't think they're going to give us a stadium until we can prove that it's going to just build up the whole area and I think the unfortunately that's only going to come with a championship. But you know because we don't have a soccer specific stadium We don't have something like that I feel like we're kind of on the lower tier of OK well maybe things won't go our way as when it comes to like home Field advantage for the playoffs we you know the Yankees are going to be the start of their season while we're in the playoffs. So we're probably going to have to go to a different venue probably going to like the Citi field, or someplace in Connecticut. Yeah, and they change they changed the rules for the Champions League so that so that we weren't in it cause we don't have a soccer specific Stadium. Atlanta got a brand new stadium, 60-70,000 seater, yeah, you know, and that's huge so. If we have if we had a stadium that I'm not. Obviously he's not saying we're going to have like a 60,000 seat stadium yet. But I think if we had a deal with the ability to build up then I. I don't see any reason why we wouldn't be like just the we wouldn't just take it and run with it kind

**MH:** from following little bits on social media that some fans would be obviously kind of keen for it to be in the 5 boroughs the ground. is that important to you as well?

**S:** It is because you know it's NYC's team not New York's team, You know like I said it is different. It's like the Metropolitan area is a whole different kind of animal when it comes to New York. So it is important that we get there because that we get in kind of the Metropolitan area, or in any of the five boroughs. Because of the transport system it allows people to get there easier and just that the most important thing for the people that live in the city is being able to take the train A few stops and get to the matches in all, I feel like if it goes outside to Westchester by the city training facility. I feel like they will Maybe not lose a lot of fans, but it will be harder for a lot of fans to get there, so the attendance might not be as stellar right off the bat. But if they get it inside like Queens or Bronx or Brooklyn. I think that we would, the season tickets would just skyrocket and the fans were just be able to go easier so I think that I mean, I would love it closer to me, so I don't have to travel that far. But I think it's important that's inside The five boroughs. You know they were going to bring it closer to like the Nassau County. They were fitting for a site there, which is about 40 minutes from me right on the in traffic. You know which would be awesome. For me, but I think that we would lose a lot of city fans. Like New York City resident fans if that were to happen. So I think it's important that we don't go into the Metropolitan area,

**MH:** How far from you is Long Island? How far away is that from the Yankee Stadium at the minute for you?

**S:** It's about an hour and a half with no traffic right. Yeah, it's about 55 miles from us. Yeah, 1 bridge

**MH:** so in terms of your geography are You closer to Yankee Stadium are you closer to Red Bull Stadium, just try to workout my geography?

**S:** Yankee Stadium, Yankee Stadium. I feel like it, it might actually be a little bit similar, but Yankee Stadium. I only have to go over 1 bridge if I were to go see those guys. I have to go over two bridges and a tunnel, but nobody wants that definitely not

**MH:** So what would you say could stop you from support in New York City in the future?

**S:** Um we just you're stuck, you're stuck with them. I feel like I'm going to be very hard for my life. Yeah, I will be a little bit disgruntled, if we don't get a stadium if we just Stay yeah. right now It's easy, but I don't. I don't think that's a that's a good system long running because when it comes time for the end of the seasons for end of the both of our seasons the New York City Club and the Yankees club if they both progress. It's going to be hard, because, like I said, We might with our playoffs, we might have to go to where the Mets play which actually a much better stadium and we went there one time for a soccer match and it was it was the seating was even better closer to the pitch and everything like that, so I'd prefer that one also being a Mets fan I prefer to go to You know city, to Yankee Stadium but yeah, I think that I'll support it no matter what like I said, We're planning on moving across the country so we're going to be supporting it from afar, anyway, yeah. You know when they do get their stadium. We'll be back in and will go to that first match of our first opening stadium

**MH:** and where do you where you plan on moving to?

**S:** Oregon

**MH:** alright OK. Portland?

**S:** Yeah, Portland area.

**MH:** I did have one more. You said about your support the Mets. That's baseball yeah?  
Do you support other sports in New York?

**S:** Hum. No. I'm the I don't really, My wife is, so actually the I go to the games with her and I do know a lot more now than I ever did so like she told me about American football. I talk to her about real football. You know, we don't I don't really go to hockey matches or hockey games. Things like that. Yeah, it's just really the Mets, and um NYCFC here, yeah, you know.

**MH:** So the last question is if there's anything else, you'd really like discuss in relation to how you became a New York City FC fan?

**S:** Oh no, I feel like I feel like you got, I got everything so I think that it really it really is a testament to City Football Group as a whole, they were just bringing it. You know they brought the I think that they wanted the style of play that that pep has to come

over here and so kind of infect MLS as well as I think they've done it. Yeah, so I think that it's I think that City Football Group being part of it is huge. I wish that we would get our own stadium. That's the only thing, I think.