

# Spectator identification and consumption motives in a sample of South African football fans: Exploring the mediating role of social media engagement

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## ABSTRACT

The sport industry has been resilient and inherently buoyant despite difficult economic circumstances. This can largely be attributed to the level of sport fans' experience of identity with team. Notwithstanding this insight, empirical work that explores the relationship between fan identity and the psychological motives for sport consumption is limited. Moreover, little is known of how to pragmatically leverage the association between sport spectator identity and consumer motives, which is ultimately the informer of purchasing decisions. The objective of this research was to analyse the relationship between identity with team and the underlying motivations for sport consumption among a sample of South African football fans. A secondary aim was to evaluate the extent to which social media engagement could mediate this relationship. A sample of 1 855 football fans of one of South Africa's largest and most successful professional football clubs participated in the study. Only one premier league football team was selected, as identity with team is contextual. A cross-sectional research design was implemented. Statistical analysis by means of structural equation modelling revealed direct paths between identity with team and the sport consumption motives of these fans. Furthermore, a single significant mediation effect was revealed between these variables through frequent social media engagement. The postulated research question was defended from the theoretical context of values, and attitudinal and customer engagement (CE) theory. Results are discussed and recommendations made. Seen from a sport-marketing perspective, the research indicates the commercial potential of sport fan identity to inform the psychological decision to purchase on the part of sport fans. Further to this, it suggests social media to be a pragmatic tool to leverage this relationship.

**Keywords:** identity with team; sport consumption motives; social media engagement; fans\*; structural equation modelling; football; South Africa

*\* The terms 'fan' and 'spectator' are used interchangeably*

Despite difficult international economic and retail of products, the motives that lead sport circumstances, the business of professional sport fans to invest monetary resources in pursuit of has been salient, attracting sustained high levels of direct consumer spend (Giampiccoli, Lee, & Nauright, 2015; Koenderman, 2013). With global conditions posed unfavourable for marketing their consumer needs have remained largely intact, and have in some cases even enhanced (de Burca, Brannick, & Meenaghan, 2015). PricewaterhouseCoopers (2011) predicted a 6%

annual growth rate for the professional sport sector internationally immediately after the global financial crisis – which has been met and is growing unremittingly. KPMG (2014) estimates the business of sport to be generating direct revenue worth in excess of US \$600 billion per annum and reveals continuing positive growth prospects into the future. This trend has also been observed locally in South Africa. Chan (2010) estimates that sport contributes 2% to the total gross domestic production (GDP) of the country. In 2017, the projected contribution of sport to overall tourism and leisure sector in South Africa is set at R19,5 billion (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2013). According to Africa Investor (2012), formal business sponsorship in South African sport is worth around US \$137,646,873 per annum – by far the most valuable of any country on the African continent.

By in large, the commercial success of sport, both abroad and locally, has been the high levels of brand identification which fans establish with their favourite teams (Cornelissen, Bob, & Swart, 2011; Wann & Craven, 2014; Yoshida, Gordon, James, & Heere, 2015). Gencer (2015) comments that fans form a deeply meaningful psychological attachment to their preferred professional sport team which directly informs their level of consumer spend on products related to that brand. Hickman (2015, p. 170) argues that ‘identification with an organization, such as a sports team, is thought to lead to the progression of strong consumer-brand relationships’. This is accurately described by Potter and Keene (2012, p. 349) as ‘oneness with a sports team’ and has been regarded as one of the quintessential drivers of sustained consumer spend in products of major sport teams (Stander & de Beer, 2016; Wann & Craven, 2014).

The complex and subjective nature of fan identification and the parallel success of the global and local business of sport has led to a substantial gap in the sport-marketing literature and deserves priority research (de Burca, Brannick, & Meenaghan, 2015; Koenderman, 2013). Through its transcendental configuration, sport fan identity has clearly been a component of sustained consumer expenditure among fans

(Reese et al., 2015). This being said, the rapid evolution of the industry has not been met with an equal robust understanding of the relationship of sport spectator identification with the underlying psychological motives for sport consumption (Wann & Craven, 2014; Yoshida, James, & Cronin, 2013). In this regard, two prominent enquiries necessitate an empirical investigation. Firstly, it is necessary to evaluate the multifaceted relationship between identification with team and the basic motives for sport consumption. Secondly, it is critical to understand how this relationship could be leveraged, i.e. what practical interventions could be put in place to ensure the growth of the industry on the back of a sustained investment climate. Samra and Wos (2014, p. 264) have articulated that ‘understanding different spectator motivations can be of significant benefit to the sport marketer looking to boost team revenues and gate receipts’. This research enquiry is based on this understanding. Firstly, the relationship between identification with team and sport consumption motives is explored. Secondly, a practical current marketing movement in the sport industry is examined as well as its role within this relationship. In this current research, the possible role of social media engagement as a mediator between sport consumption motives and identity with team is scrutinised.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Conceptualising sport fan identification*

Various conceptualisations of sport fan identification exist. Sutton, McDonald, Milne, and Cimperman (1997, p. 13; studies across various professional sports in United States) refer to it as the personal commitment and emotional involvement customers have with a sport club’. Theodorakis, Koustelios, Robinson, and Barlas (2009, p. 459, professional football, Greece) describe it as the ‘psychological attachment’ that exists between a sport fan and his/ her preferred professional sport team. At its core, sport fan identification is about the level of alignment that exists between the personal values, ethos

and culture of a sport fan and his/ her favourite team (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). It designates the extent to which a fan affiliates personally with the brand of a particular sports team, with high levels of affiliation directly associated with increased, sustained and heightened levels of product purchase among these fans (Wann et al., 2001). The higher the level of affiliation, the more inclined the fan is to purchase the brand products of his/ her favourite team; in an effort to reaffirm this identity, strengthen the psychological bond with his/ her team; and to experience the deeply internal rewarding closeness that comes with the association of identity (Follet, 2015; Hickman, 2015; Koo, Love, & Kim, 2007; Swanson, Gwinner, Larson, & Janda, 2003; Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Yoshida, Gordon, James, & Heere, 2015). The importance of sport fan identification in the buying decision is clear. However, the gap in the literature is the relationship of such identity with the underlying motives of consumption. Although some studies have been undertaken in the South African context, for example Stander, de Beer and Stander (2016), who have established sport fan identity to be related to merchandise expenditure among South African football fans, and Goldman, Chadwick, Funk and Wocke (2016), who revealed team identity as a component of social relatedness in South African rugby supporters, little knowledge exists pertaining to the link between identity with team and underlying psychological motives for consumption. Without a rigorous understanding of these motives as they relate to spectator identity, knowledge of the power of identity with team as a revenue generator will remain sternly limited.

### ***Motives for sport consumption***

Trail (2012) defines sport consumption motives as the drivers that influence the decision of sport consumers to invest monetary resources in sport and sport-related products. Trail and James (2001) were the first authors to understand that the motivations that lead sport fans to consume were mainly psychological in nature. Fans are foremost human beings and as consumers of products related to their favourite sport teams, the motives of these fans are as distinguishable as the diversity of their personalities (Dos Santos

& Rios, 2014). It is these unique dimensions that led to the development of the motivation for sport consumption theory (Trail & James, 2001). The theory postulates that the drivers of sport consumption are psychological in nature and vary from sport fan to sport fan. Shank and Lyberger (2014) point out that these psychological motives validate the fan's decision to purchase products of his/ her favourite team, since on a conscious level, the perception of value is precipitated when the sport fan's motive for sport consumption is met. The motivation for sport consumption theory has, since its inception, been evaluated and refined in numerous sport consumer contexts and various sporting codes in the professional domain around the world. Table 1 below reflects the eight core dimensions of fans' decisions to consume sport, based on the operating manual of the Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC; Trail, 2012).

**TABLE 1.  
PRIMARY MOTIVES FOR SPORT  
CONSUMPTION AS PER TRAIL (2012)**

Dimension	Description of fan consumption motivator
Vicarious achievement	Consumption motive associated with the experience of self-esteem, empowerment and validation.
Acquisition of knowledge	Consumption motive associated with obtaining new information, knowledge and learning.
Aesthetics	Consumption motive associated with the appreciation of the grace, beauty and artistic value of sport.
Drama/ eustress	Consumption motive associated with pleasurable stress that arises from watching a closely contested sport match.
Escape	Consumption motive associated with the experience of diversion from menial everyday life through sport.
Physical attractiveness of players	Consumption motive associated with the appreciation of the physical (or 'sex') appeal of well-conditioned athletes.
Physical skill of the players	Consumption motive associated with the appreciation of the superior athletic ability of career athletes.
Social interaction	Consumption motive associated with social cohesion, relatedness and community with other sport fans.

By differentiating sport consumer motives it became possible to market products and services

of a professional sport team to consumers based on their preferences, unique attributes and clusters of needs (Cottingham et al., 2014). Wann and Craven (2014) highlight that a major need exists to explore how the dimensions for sport consumption relate to identification with team, as this will render new insights into the fan product purchasing decision. This is also emphasised by Lee, Trail, Lee, and Schoenstedt (2013, p. 40) by stating that 'how consumers identify themselves in a particular role may influence their respective attitudes and therefore their subsequent consumption behaviours'. From this point of departure, the role of identity with team in the underlying motives for sport consumption of fans is evaluated.

### ***Theoretical evidence for the relationship between identity with team and consumption motives***

Two theoretical explanations provide a contextual setting to postulate that identity with team and sport consumption motives will be related. This includes the theory of value and of attitude. The value theory underlines the importance of higher dimensional values that shape the extent to which a consumer experiences alignment of the self with a product/ service available for purchase (Schwartz, 1992). Fans seek to purchase products related to their team which they believe to strengthen and confirm their own unique personality (Yoshida, Gordon, James, & Heere, 2015). It is thus clear that social parity should exist between identity found in team and sport consumption motives. The attitude theory argues that a sport spectator will make a subjective evaluation of his/ her sport consumption intent, which is revealing of the identity of that fan (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Through this, the attitude theory implies that a reciprocal relationship may exist between fan identity and the sport consumption motives. Du Plessis and Rousseau (2003, p. 260) argue that 'attitude constitutes the overall evaluation of an object, which implies that any attitude is preceded by some form of evaluation, or assessment, of certain realities, characteristics, perceptions and facts'. The sport consumption motives in themselves infer an evaluation procedure on the part of the

sport consumer as they are geared towards the subjective drivers of why fans invest resources in their sport team's products or services (Trail, 2012). The ensuing consumption action is thus an outcome of the attitudinal appraisal and by extension reveals something of the individual's fan identity with a particular team (Wann & Craven, 2014). This research will evaluate whether there is an association between the sport consumption motives and identity with team of sport fans.

### ***The effect of identity with team on sport consumption motives mediated by social media engagement***

The secondary objective of this research is concerned with whether the relationship between identity with team and sport consumption motives can be leveraged by means of a practical intervention such as social media engagement. The emergence of social media has fundamentally shifted the manner in which professional sport teams communicate with fans (Kuzma, Bell, & Logue, 2014). McCarthy, Rowley, Ashworth and Pioch (2014) comment that Twitter-follower statistics in the English Premier Football League totalled 8,5 million as of March 2013. The Global SportsMediaConsumptionReport(2014) surveyed sport fans from 16 different international markets and established that ardent fans spend on average at least two hours per week on social media sites relating to their favourite sport teams. Kuzma, Bell, and Logue (2014) have found that 74% of adult sport fans have access to and actively use social media platforms in their sport consumption efforts. On the back of a progressively growing social media presence, global sport media rights revenue has increased 3.8% compounded and year on year as from 2010 (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2014). The business centrality of social media is also evident in the South African sports market, with an active consumer following illustrated by such figures as the Cricket South Africa official Facebook page (more than 3,5 million followers) and Kaizer Chiefs Facebook fan page (more than 2,3 million followers) as of 2015 (Stander & De Beer, 2016).

When conceptualising a delineation of social media, a formal definition is put forward by Boyd

and Ellison (2007, p. 211) as 'web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system'. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have dramatically enhanced the reach of brands and in this instance the business of sport has been a frontrunner (Assaad & Gómez, 2011). Shank and Lyberger (2014) argue that sport fans are a passionate constituency of consumers who crave information on their favourite sport teams and brands; and that social media platforms have afforded the management of these brands the opportunity of interacting with fans in real time. Witkemper, Hoon Lim, and Waldburger (2012) state that the swelling influence of social media has allowed major sport clubs to connect with new fans from across the world, allowing them access to new markets. Comm (2009) refers to the ability of social media to create virtual communities which, from a relational point of view, is a major priority for the brand currency of professional sport teams. Through the digital reach offered by the various social media platforms, professional sport brands can access and share information which is instantaneously available (Pickton & Broderick, 2005). It is this accessibility feature of social media that has led to major international sport brands growing an abundance of online presence, as illustrated through the more than 68 million people globally who follow the Facebook page of the Manchester United Football Club, or the more than 17 million followers on the Twitter page of Barcelona Football Club (statistics as of February 2016).

Although social media use has been widespread in sport marketing, little is known of whether it can serve as an amplifier of consumption motive through the psychology of identity with team. This must be empirically explored. Seen from a theoretical perspective, Witkemper, Hoon Lim and Waldburger (2012) attempted to approach the rise of social media usage by leading sport firms as an example of relationship-marketing theory. This implies an on-going effort of cooperation between marketer and client and is built on the

premise that an individual who experiences an emotive connection and affiliation with a brand is more likely to consume the products of that brand on a regular basis. This is consistent with the customer engagement (CE) theory, which implies that the existence of an emotional connection between product and consumer and the subsequent strength of such connection largely influences the regularity with which such consumer will purchase products related to the brand in question (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilic, 2011). One must consider that the decision to support a particular sport team is a subjective and often emotive one on the side of the sport consumer, informed in large part by the idiosyncratic value systems and preferences of the individual fan (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001); therefore the accessibility to the sport brand, which is facilitated through the interaction available on social media platforms, caters for the individuality of the unique sport fan. It is this accessibility which presses the authors to argue that social media engagement will serve as a mediator between sport fan identity and consumption motives. Early evidence of this was suggested in a recent study by Lim, Hwang, Kim, and Biocca (2015) who utilised social networking sites to bolster the customisation offering of live mega-sport event broadcastings in South Korea. By providing real-time conversation platforms, they provided a customised individual experience which catered for the diverse fan consumption motives; in turn enhancing identity experienced with team and, ultimately, a larger audience.

The flow of traffic to social media has been a result of commercial factors and an increased awareness on the side of marketing executives from major sport clubs. The scientific exploration of the effect of social media engagement phenomena on the identification experience of fans and their subsequent consumption motives has not kept pace with this trend, and research that explores the empirical explanation for this movement is limited. Several authors agree that literature is needed to validate the clearly directed effort of professional sport entities to leverage the great potential of social media platforms in their conversation with fans (Filo, Lock, & Karg, 2015; Larkin, Fink, & Trail, 2015; Parganas,

Anagnostopoulos, & Chadwick, 2015; Suh, Lim, Kwak, & Pedersen, 2010; Witkemper et al., 2012).

### **Research preamble and objectives**

Despite the resilience of the sport industry through spectator identification and the surging continued motive for consumption of fans both abroad and locally, little is known of the relationship between these variables. Moreover, empirical work is needed insofar as pragmatic moderation strategies are concerned to leverage the effect of sport fan identity with team and consumption motives.

The objective of this research is to a) examine the relationship between sport spectator identification and consumption motives and b) examine the impact of social media engagement on this relationship.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Design**

A cross-sectional, quantitative research design was utilised. This was for convenience purposes and to assess phenomena at a particular point in time. The research approach was exploratory and descriptive.

### **Participants**

This study was conducted among a sample of South African football fans. The rationale for this was the fact that football is the country's most popular consumer sport (Department of Sport and Recreation, 2014), with an estimated 54% of the entire adult population actively supporting a professional team (Saayman & Rossouw, 2008).

**TABLE 2.  
DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION OF THE SAMPLE (N = 1855)**

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Valid Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	1484	80.6
	Female	358	19.4
Race	Asian	29	1.6
	African	1769	95.4
	Coloured	38	2.0
	White	16	0.9
	Other	3	0.2
Level of Education	Grade 11 and below	260	14.0
	Grade 12	796	42.9
	Diploma	432	23.3
	Degree	232	12.5
	Postgraduate degree	134	7.2
Social media use	Every day	1255	67.7
	Four to six times per week	210	11.3
	One to three times per week	250	13.5
	Less than once a week	87	4.7
	Almost never	52	2.8

\* Disparity in results is due to missing values

To further contextualise the study, fans of one of the largest and best supported professional football clubs were engaged. This club is based in Gauteng and was selected based on its social media following. Table 2 below describes the demographic composition of the sample.

### **Measuring instruments**

The Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS; Wann & Branscombe, 1993) and the Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC; Trail & James, 2001) were utilised for purposes of this study. These two instruments are included in this paper as Addendum A. To gauge social media usage, a biographic scale was applied.

#### **SSIS**

The SSIS in original format is a seven-item self-report questionnaire scored on an eight-point Likert-type scale with responses varying from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'. Three items of the original scale were utilised in this study, based on highest levels of internal consistency revealed by the authors Wann and Branscombe (1993), as well as by Heere and James (2007). A recent study by Theodorakis, Wann, Carvalho, and Sarmiento (2010) revealed high reliability of the measure with  $\alpha = 0.76$ , and composite reliability of 0.80.

#### **MSSC**

The MSSC is a self-report measure that comprises 24 items (three items for each of the sport consumption motive dimensions). It is scored on a seven-point Likert-type rating scale ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 7 ('strongly agree'). In the most recent operating manual, Trail (2012) reported sufficient internal consistency for the measure, ranging from 0.75 to 0.91 through Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) values. The MSSC has also proven reliable in a South African context by Stander and Van Zyl (2016), with  $\alpha = 0.86$  in a two-dimensional factor structure (more information on the revealed properties of the MSSC in this study is discussed under statistical analysis).

### **Biographic measure of social media engagement**

A simple biographic measure was used to assess the regularity with which participants engage with the social media platforms of the club under investigation. Respondents were requested to indicate their frequency of social media use by selecting one of the frequency indicator clusters highlighted in Table 1.

### **Procedure and ethical considerations**

The research was conducted by means of uploading the surveys onto a pre-designed digital landing platform that was captured onto the Facebook page of the partnering football club. Formal permission to do this was obtained from the marketing executive of the club. Participants were briefed on the research project purpose and were informed of the voluntary and confidential nature of their participation. Participants could log on to the digital platform by means of accessing a hyperlink. They were also requested to complete an informed consent letter online, stipulating that they participate in the research at their own free will. The digital landing platform was open for one full month to the participants. Although no risks were foreseen for the study, the researchers did obtain formal institutional ethical clearance to conduct the research.

### **Statistical analysis**

Mplus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 2014) was used to analyse the data. Structural equation modelling was used to evaluate latent variables as factors in the research model. Maximum likelihood estimation was applied. First, a measurement model of the data was evaluated, considering both an eight-factor (as original) and a one-factor model for the sport consumption motives, and a one-factor structure for identity with team. Confirmatory factor analysis for factor reliability was implemented. By means of Comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis index, fit indices of the models were evaluated. Satisfactory values were reflected through values of 0.90 or higher and a value of under 0.08 for Root mean

square error of approximation (RMSEA). After specifying the most suitable measurement model, regression paths were added to scrutinise the paths between the specified variables. To investigate the indirect effects between identity with team and consumption motives through social media use, the method as proposed by Rucker, Preacher, Tormala and Petty (2001) was applied, with bootstrapping resampling set at 5 000 draws with 95% confidence interval levels. In terms of statistical significance of the research model, this was set at the 95% level for all parameters, i.e.  $p \leq 0.05$ .

## RESULTS

### *Measurement model*

The measurement model was shown to be an excellent fit to the data. Specifically, the following fit indices were shown: CFI = 0.97; TLI = 0.96 and RMSEA = 0.03. Table 3 below shows the information regarding the loadings of the specified factor structure in the confirmatory factor analysis. The factor loadings of all the observed indicators were acceptable for all of the latent variables.

**TABLE 3.**  
**FACTOR LOADINGS FOR THE LATENT VARIABLES ON THE INSTRUMENTS**

Latent variable	Item	Standardised Loading	Standard Error	p-Value
Identification with team	ID1	0.62	0.04	0.001
	ID2	0.84	0.02	0.001
	ID3	0.76	0.04	0.001
Sport consumption motives				
Vicarious achievement	VA1	0.77	0.02	0.001
	VA2	0.87	0.01	0.001
	VA3	0.80	0.02	0.001
Acquisition of knowledge	AK1	0.73	0.02	0.001
	AK2	0.79	0.02	0.001
	AK3	0.74	0.02	0.001
Aesthetics	AE1	0.64	0.03	0.001
	AE2	0.73	0.03	0.001
	AE3	0.61	0.03	0.001
Drama/ Eustress	DE1	0.60	0.03	0.001
	DE2	0.68	0.03	0.001
	DE3	0.71	0.03	0.001
Escape	ES1	0.79	0.02	0.001
	ES2	0.87	0.02	0.001
	ES3	0.63	0.02	0.001
Physical attractiveness	PA1	0.75	0.02	0.001
	PA2	0.93	0.01	0.001
	PA3	0.69	0.02	0.001
Physical skill	PS1	0.72	0.02	0.001
	PS2	0.84	0.02	0.001
	PS3	0.79	0.02	0.001
Social interaction	SI1	0.81	0.02	0.001
	SI2	0.89	0.01	0.001
	SI3	0.80	0.02	0.001

**TABLE 4.**  
**CORRELATION MATRIX FOR THE LATENT VARIABLES**

Variable name	R											
	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1. Vicarious achievement	0.80	1.00										
2. Aesthetics	0.67	0.45*	1.00									
3. Drama/Eustress	0.76	0.17	0.38*	1.00								
4. Escapism	0.80	0.33*	0.31*	0.34*	1.00							
5. Acquisition of knowledge	0.85	0.37*	0.52**	0.38*	0.30*	1.00						
6. Physical skill	0.87	0.23	0.41*	0.34*	0.29	0.52	1.00					
7. Social interaction	0.88	0.32*	0.37*	0.31*	0.27	0.52**	0.48*	1.00				
8. Physical attractiveness	0.81	0.29	0.06	0.20	0.28	0.16	0.24	0.24	1.00			
9. Identity with team	0.79	0.26	0.48*	0.27	0.21	0.50**	0.35*	0.41*	-0.01	1.00		
10. Social media use	n/a	0.09	0.10	0.01	0.01	0.17	0.04	0.10	-0.06	0.17	1.00	

Notes:  $p < 0.01$ ;  $\alpha$  = alpha coefficient;  $r$  = correlation coefficient; \* = medium effect; \*\* = large effect; n/a = not applicable

All correlations were in the expected directions, except the correlations between Physical attractiveness with Identity with team and Social media use which was negative but also statistically non-significant. Therefore all the Sport consumption motives were positively correlated with one another, mostly with medium or near-medium effect sizes. Identity with team showed a large correlation with Acquisition of knowledge ( $r = 0.50$ ). Social media use's correlational relationship with Identity with team and Acquisition of knowledge was statistically significant and similar ( $r = 0.17$ )

### **Structural model: Regression paths**

With a measurement model specified and proper fit statistics established, a structural model was evaluated, considering the direct paths from identity with team towards the sport consumption motives and considering also possible direct structural paths between social media engagement and these motives. Table 5 depicts the results of the structural model.

Identity with team had significant predictive relationships with all the sport consumption

motives. Identity with team had a small negative relationship with physical attractiveness ( $\beta = 0.05$ ;  $p = 0.029$ ). However, this relationship was approaching non-significance and the variance explained in physical attractiveness by Identity with team was non-significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). Of specific importance is that note be taken of the relationships between: Identity with team and Knowledge acquisition was significant ( $\beta = 0.49$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ); Identity with team and Social media use ( $\beta = 0.17$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Furthermore, Social media use showed a statistically significant relationship with Knowledge acquisition ( $\beta = 0.09$ ;  $p = 0.003$ ), indicating a potential mediating effect.

### **Structural model: Mediating effects**

The bootstrapping resampling revealed a significant indirect effect from Identity with team to Knowledge acquisition through Social media use (0.014;  $p = 0.008$ ). This indicated a complementary mediation model since the direct relationship of Identity with team with Knowledge acquisition was also significant (previously known as partial mediation).

**TABLE 5:  
REGRESSION PATHS OF THE RESEARCH MODEL**

Regression relationships	Standardised Estimate	Standard Error	p
Identity with team → Vicarious achievement	0.25	0.03	0.001*
Identity with team → Knowledge acquisition	0.49	0.05	0.001*
Identity with team → Aesthetics	0.47	0.05	0.001*
Identity with team → Drama/ eustress	0.28	0.05	0.001*
Identity with team → Escape	0.22	0.03	0.001*
Identity with team → Physical attractiveness	-0.05	0.03	0.029
Identity with team → Physical skill	0.36	0.05	0.001*
Identity with team → Social interaction	0.40	0.05	0.001*
Identity with team → Social media use	0.17	0.03	0.001*
Social media use → Vicarious achievement	0.04	0.02	0.082
Social media use → Knowledge acquisition	0.09	0.03	0.003*
Social media use → Aesthetics	0.02	0.03	0.345
Social media use → Drama/ eustress	-0.04	0.03	0.147
Social media use → Escape	-0.04	0.03	0.110
Social media use → Physical attractiveness	-0.05	0.03	0.029
Social media use → Physical skill	-0.02	0.03	0.378
Social media use → Social interaction	0.03	0.03	0.230

\* Significant direct paths

## DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The objective of this research was to a) examine the relationship between sport spectator identification and consumption motives and b) to examine the impact of social media engagement on this relationship. From the perspective of the first research goal, direct structural paths were revealed between identity with team and all the sport consumption motives, with the exception of physical attractiveness. A possible practical explanation for this could be bias in terms of the gender distribution of the sample, with the majority (80.6%) of respondents being male. For the other dimensions, the positive regression relationships represent an important contribution to the sport-marketing literature as it reveals early evidence that identity with team is directly related to not only the purchasing decision on the part of the sport fan but moreover inclined to influence the underlying psychological considerations that

inform such a decision. This validates the views of authors such as Sutton et al. (1997), Theodorakis et al. (2009), Follet (2015) and Wann et al. (2001) who have argued that the level of 'oneness', or connectedness that a fan experiences in relation to his/ her favourite sport team, is a direct reflection of entrenchment of their unique value systems into the purchasing decision. It supports value theory (Schwartz, 1992); which holds that a perception of alignment between personal values and that of one's preferred sport team will positively reinforce consumption decisions as it speaks to the fundamental emotive connection a fan will have with that team through identity. It is also consistent with attitude theory (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), which suggests that the subjective and personal evaluation of a product/ service originates from the idiosyncratic reality of the individual consumer and by extension reveals the level of self-identity that specific consumer experiences when consuming a particular product/ service.

Seen from a practical perspective, the results put forward significant information for consideration. Through the support of the structural paths as revealed in the research model, the executive teams of professional sport clubs are strongly encouraged to utilise the identity dimension which fans experience in their support of a team to leverage greater psychological intent for purchasing the commercial properties of that team; and as revealed through the underlying motives for sport consumption. Clubs are actively encouraged to introduce interventions geared towards the accentuation of fans' identity in an effort to stimulate the psychological motives for consumption and by extension directly inspire the enhanced investment in all commercial properties, products and services of that club. Interventions can be structured on a strategic level; such as organising marketing campaigns that publicly proclaim the team's value system and ethos and invites fans to engross their own identities in such ethos, or more operationally; by for example allowing customisation of supporters' team clothing for a more personalised feel. The leadership teams of professional sport clubs must investigate specific interventions unique to their fraternity of fans and by relating the identity dimension to particular psychological motives in a cluster-marketing strategy that will leverage the buying decision of different groups of fans on the same principle.

The secondary objective of this study, which sought to introduce social media engagement as a potential mediator between identity with team and the sport consumption motives, revealed interesting results. Firstly, it was established that identity with team directly relates to social media use, suggesting that, the higher the level of connectedness fans experience with their favourite team, the more inclined those fans will be to utilise the social media platforms of the club. This in itself is self-explanatory and understandable, but additionally does provide support for the first research objective of this paper, which postulates identity with team as a key strategic driver of favourable behaviours from sport consumers. In the direct interest of the second research objective, however, social media use was only revealed as

a mediator between identity with team and the consumption motive of knowledge acquisition, with no clear statistically significant indirect effects towards any of the other seven consumption motives. This does reveal, on practical level, insight into the intent of social media users as far as their sport consumption motives are concerned and further on the way social media platforms should be organised to gain maximum value as far as consumption intentions of fans are relevant. The results of this research suggests that social media use can amplify the identity with team of consumers towards greater consumption motive by addressing the needs for acquiring information on their teams that fans have. Kuzma, Bell, and Logue (2014) argue that social media platforms have shifted the way that professional sport clubs from across the world communicate with their fans, creating brand accessibility and a shared identity fans can relate to in a close community. Drawing from the results of the research under investigation, it will be important to structure social media platforms in a manner that will share frequent information and new knowledge concerning the club and its developments with fans. This will likely inspire greater consumption of the social media properties itself but more importantly stimulate greater investment in the broad commercial properties of the club overall. Shank and Lyberger (2014) have argued that fans with high proclivity for buying club products are consistently looking for information on trends and developments of the club and that social media is an ideal platform to provide for this need. This observation is supported by the findings of this research.

## **LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study was not without limitations. The cross-sectional nature of the research design poses risk of common method bias. Future studies with a longitudinal design will greatly benefit the literature as one would be able to gauge whether the fan identity pattern dynamics over time will have any impact on the configurations of results as observed here. The study was conducted in the context of a South African professional football

team, which was useful, seen from a practical point of view as it remains the country's most popular consumer sport and has grown rapidly in commercial size in recent years. However, future studies should be conducted in other sporting contexts to validate findings and to ensure that the scientific integrity of the results is replicable in alternative settings.

In terms of practical findings, the study laid a solid foundation regarding the association between identity with team and the sport consumption motives. However, future studies should assess specifically how this can be leveraged towards specific motives as appealing to different clusters/groups of fans. This will allow for a segmented and targeted marketing effort on the part of club leadership teams.

In view of the social media use dimension of the research, much can be done in future studies. This study was concerned only with frequency of social media use, reflecting an accurate picture of the regularity with which fans engage in digital platforms, but not exploring in detail the manner in which these fans interact with their club on these platforms. The rapid evolution of social media and its subsequent alteration of sport marketing in general necessitate a more robust enquiry into how social media platforms can be designed to enhance the identity of fans with their teams, and how these platforms can mediate positive consumer experiences into clear buying intentions. This is applicable not only to the motive of knowledge acquisition, as was revealed in this study, but moreover towards other consumption motives as well.

In conclusion, this study addressed a significant research gap by relating identity with team, a significant revenue generating dimension, to the underlying psychological motives that inform purchasing decisions on the part of fans. In this respect, much can be learned to leverage identity with team effectively in future through practical interventions to ensure the industry of sport remains resilient despite challenging economic conditions. This will enable further commercial growth, create jobs and enhance the already heavily impacting contribution of sport.. The study also provided a point of departure for future

research in the effect of social media in the sport consumerism domain, providing early possible empirical evidence of the value of social media platforms in influencing consumption motives and in creating revenue. Much can be done in future to explore more extensively how social media can be utilised to create an engaging and fulfilling sport fan experience. As sport marketing becomes increasingly sophisticated, this will certainly be useful information in the hands of sport-marketing executives.

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## ADDENDUM A

### *Instruments and items*

Instrument	Dimension	Item
The Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS; Wann & Branscombe, 1993)	Identification with team	How important is it to you that your team wins?
		How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of your team?
		If a game is showing, how closely do you follow that game
Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC; Trail & James, 2001) All items are precluded by I support my sport team because...	Vicarious achievement	It increases my self-esteem
		It enhances my sense of self-worth
		It improves my self-respect
	Acquisition of knowledge	It can increase my knowledge about the activity
		It can increase my understanding of the strategy by watching the game
		I can learn about the technical aspects of the game
	Aesthetics	I enjoy the artistic value
		I like the beauty and grace of the sport
		It is a form of art
	Drama/Eustress	I prefer close games rather than one-sided (easy) games
I like games where the outcome is uncertain (hard games)		
A tight game between two teams is more enjoyable than a walk-over (easy) game		
Escape	It provides me with an opportunity to escape the stress and problems of my daily life	
	I can get away from the tension in my life	
	It provides me with a distraction from my daily life	
Physical attractiveness	I enjoy watching players who are physically attractive	
	The main reason why I watch football is because I find the players physically attractive	
	An individual player's "sex appeal" is a big reason why I watch football	
Physical skill	Of the skill of the players	
	Of the performance of the players	
	Of the athleticism (ability) of the players	
Social interaction	I like to socialise with others	
	I like having the opportunity to interact with other people	
	I enjoy talking to other people	