Social Media and Sport Fan Identity
in a Local and Non-local context

Master Thesis

by

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Abstract

The increased digitalization of sports through social media has led to a wider audience segment to target for professional sports teams and it allows for the geographical boundaries and physical spheres of individuals to be rendered inconsequential (Collins et al.: 2016; Georgiou: 2006). Individuals express their love of their favourite sports team with public displays of fandom on "personal web sites, fan forums, and blogs" (End: 2001 in Phua: 2010: 192) and nowadays, social media (Phua: 2010; Schellenberg et al.: 2013). Social media is becoming an intrinsically part of being a fan (Clavio & Walsh: 2014), which is why knowledge of fans' use of social media can benefit the managerial side of a sports organisation as it indicates how to utilise social media as a way to connect with fans and how to advertise to the fans (Watkins: 2013; Meyer: 2014; Riketta: 2008; Eagleman: 2013).

The study assess how fans of a local (Aalborg Pirates) and non-local (international) professional hockey team use social media as a part of their social sports fan identity and how they maintain their identities to both teams through social media and attending games in person.

This thesis also provides knowledge of how the fans' social sports fan identities and their use of social media can be translated into knowledge adaptable for a social media marketing strategy for Aalborg Pirates.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research Problem

Academic literature on sport fandom has been growing in recent years and is traditionally grounded in a multi-disciplinary theoretical approach from the disciplines of sociology, psychology, consumer theory and marketing. There has been foci on social identity theory in the research of sport fandom (Riketta: 2008; Meyer: 2014; Collins et al.: 2016; Krier: 2017; MacIntosh et al.: 2017), but in the academic literature on personal identity and fandom is sparse (Clavio & Walsh; 2014; Vale & Fernandes: 2018); in particular the notion of double fandom with a local and a non-local international sports team. There has been a few studies on the fan as an individual (Clavio & Walsh; 2014), but none with the intention of analysing how a fan use social media as a part of their personal and social identity and their fandom and how this can benefit a sports team's marketing strategies. Knowledge of fans' use of social media can benefit the managerial side of a sports organisation as it indicates how to utilise social media as a way to connect with fans and how to advertise to the fans (Watkins: 2013; Meyer: 2014; Riketta: 2008).

Delving into the territory of double fandom and personal identity is beneficial to the existing academic literature on sports fandom, because it gives a new perspective on sport fandom in the academic literature. Furthermore, as sports branding has become a central part of the marketing strategies on professional sport teams (Watkins: 2013; Tsiotsou: 2013; Vale & Fernandes: 2018; Clavio & Walsh: 2014); studying social media use among sports fans is a burgeoning area of research that can help the marketing of sports fans on social media.

1.2. Demarcation of Research Problem

Identity is based on representation. According to Hall (1997 in Georgiou: 2006: 28), "We give things meaning by how we represent them. Meaning is what gives us a sense of our own identity, of who we are and whom we belong".

Most identity theorist argue everybody has social identities, which according to Wann et al. (2011) is because humans have a fundamental need of social relations and social groups, informal as well as formal, which is bound in the desire to experience a sense of belonging within groups (Jacobson: 2003; Wann et al.: 2011; Riketta: 2008).

Meyer (2014) posits an individual's varying social identities, such as language, nationality and hometown, is determined by external factors, whereas other identities, such as sport fandom, is self-appointed and labelled by an individual's own subjective hierarchy of importance. Social identity complexity is a theoretical concept that discusses the manner in which an individual manages these multiple social identities, which will be one of the theories used for this study.

The academic literature on social identity, social identity complexity and identity theory has not focused on the understanding and management of these multiple social identities in the environment of the sports fan, or how these multiple social identities may impact the sports fans' decisions around their consumption of sport through social media. Research has rather been focused on the role of team identification and group identity (Meyer: 2014).

Furthermore, because of digitalization and the increasing use of social media, fan attending live games are no longer the only audience segment to target for professional sports teams. However, to successfully incorporate new marketing strategies, knowledge about the wants of fans on social media is necessary, which is the focus of this study.

1.2.1. Social Identities and Sport

Sport fandom is generally considered a social endeavour (Wann et al.: 2011; Crawford: 2004), which is why social identities is intrinsically linked with sport fandom, and why so much research already exist on social identity and sport fandom in various forms (Crawford: 2004). There is already a considerable amount of studies on fans on group settings attending 'live' games (Crawford: 2004), whereas research on social media from the fan perspective is sparse (Vale & Fernandes: 2018).

One of the key theories on sports fandom is social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner: 1986), which is focused on inter-group relations and postulates group identification is born out of the notion that people strive for a positive identity and self-esteem. Form the concept of social identity theory comes social identity complexity, which is a theory concerned with the individual and how an individual manage their array of social identities (Meyer: 2014). The reason why it is important to look at personal identity when researching sport fandom is because their fandom is part of their overall individual identity and their sense of self (Hirt & Clarkson: 2011

in Kahle & Close: 2011). Hunt et al (1999) even postulated that a fan's memories of his or her sports team fuels a fans passion for the team and interlinks those memories with the sports institution, personal relationships and personal experiences. Being a fan of a sports team provide individuals with a collective identity through common symbols, such as the team jersey and fan communities, which leads to higher active engagement (Vale & Fernandes: 2018; Riketta: 2008).

In a study from 2014 on tolerance in sport fans, Meyer postulated sport fans as individuals cultivate two core identities – a personal and a social. The personal identity and self encompasses distinctive, individual information about the individual, whereas the social identity incorporates information about the group in which the individual belong (Meyer: 2014). Meyer also found that individual sport fan possessed several social identities to understand various stakeholders within the sport industry.

According to Branscombe & Wann (1991), sport fandom provides an individual with ties and a sense of belonging to society and something grander than themselves without requiring any special skills, knowledge or institutional values and sport team offers a sense of community. Vale & Fernandes (2018) argue:

> "Sport clubs provide 'an increasingly rare sense of community in today's rapidly disconnecting society' and are 'a unique group experience characterized by a sense of belonging' felt by supporters (Abosag et al.: 2012 pp.1236). These supporters develop tribal behaviours (Cova & Pace: 2006), through a sense of affiliation, social recognition, symbolism and socialization (Dionisio et al.: 2008; Popp et al.: 2016)." (47)

Additionally, Collins et al. (2016) posit sport plays a crucial role in socialization of an individual into a new group, as the subject offers a topic of conversation that is unlikely to offend others. Social identification has also been found to affect an individual's media choices. Phua (2010) concludes individuals watch shows that will reinforce their chosen social groupings and will express their love of the team with public displays of fandom on "personal web sites, fan forums, and blogs" (End: 2001 in Phua: 2010: 192) and nowadays, social media (Phua: 2010; Schellenberg et al.: 2013). Knowledge of a sport fan's media choices and motivations and allegiance to a specific sport team can be beneficial to the marketing strategies employed by professional sport teams (Hirt & Clarkson: 2011 in Kahle & Close: 2011; Riketta:

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2008; Watkins: 2013).

1.2.2. Social Media and Fans

The social media angle in the academic literature on sport fandom and sport marketing is growing. Mostly is has been with a focus from either sports organisations or professional athletes (Meng, Stavros & Westberg: 2015; Wallace et al.: 2011; Williams & Chinn: 2010 in Vale & Fernandes: 2018).

The Internet has become an integrated part of everyday life, and in particular social media (Georgiou: 2006; Collins et al.: 2016; Watkins: 2013), as it gives access to "a diverse array of material and resources available to its users and utilizes a variety of formats" (Crawford: 2004: 141); meaning the communication between users and companies – in this study, fans and sports teams – have changed significantly; especially with the expanded use of social media (Nisar & Whitehead: 2016). Social media is "an umbrella term that encapsulates all different types on online activity that occurs on *social network sites"* (Watkins: 2013: 24), such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter etc. Social media is a virtual platform where people can interact with any given individual or group through the Internet, search, receive and give information, discuss and collaborate with other people and just share their life experiences in general (Watkins: 2013), which is a two-way communication platform, as people react to what they do and see on social media. Additionally, the use of the Internet and social media allows for the geographical boundaries and physical spheres of individuals to be rendered inconsequential (Collins et al.: 2016; Georgiou: 2006).

This is also evident in the sport fan culture. Sport fandom is no longer bound in only proximity (Watkins: 2013; MacIntosh et al.: 2017), as online communities, such as fan communities surrounding a particular sport team, allows fans to connect with other fans and give a sense of belonging within that particular community.

Clavio & Walsh's 2014 study on social media use amongst college sports fans concluded that a digitalized relationship marketing strategy is necessary to capture the attention of the younger segment of sports fans. Furthermore, social media is becoming an intrinsically part of being a fan (Clavio & Walsh: 2014), and according to Phua (2010) fan with a high level of team identification use media as a tool to manage their self-worth, which makes it reasonable to expect the use of media, including social media, is influential on a fan's identity. Furthermore, extant sports

marketing literature suggests sport fans have unique relationships with their favourite teams (Vale & Fernandes: 2018). An emotional attachment to a sports team gives an individual a sense of belonging, which is essential to a service-sector brand such as professional sports teams (Watkins: 2013; Riketta: 2008; Clavio & Walsh: 2014).

Eagleman (2013) further hypothesised interacting with other fans of one's sport team or the sports team itself through social media increases a fan's identification with the sports team. Meaning this new feature on the Internet – social media - in sport fan's everyday lives has significantly expanded the potential marketing platforms for professional sport teams (Kerr & Emery: 2011), especially considering the increasing competition of audiences' attention (Georgiou: 2006; MacIntosh et al.: 2017) and sport teams, big or small, need to constantly attract new audiences to continue to succeed (Crawford: 2004; MacIntosh et al.: 2017).

Social media is a way to establish official fan communities (Stavros et al.: 2014), as consumers tend to favour brands with a high presence online (Nisar & Whitehead: 2016), which argues for the importance of social media in a relationship marketing strategy for professional hockey teams. Additionally, an IBM study revealed that one of the main reasons for the use of social media was to interact with brands (Nisar & Whitehead: 2016) and experiences a brand in real-time through online interaction (Eagleman: 2013).

Although, the existing body of academic literature on sports marketing on social media and fan engagement is scarce. According to Vale & Fernandes (2018), research in sport marketing has primarily had the sports teams and organisations or professional athletes in foci and what little attention has been paid to fan behaviours and social media engagement has been scattered across a variation of platforms and perspectives (Vale & Fernandes: 2018; Goldman: 2014).

1.2.3. Sport, Social Media and Marketing

Professional team sports are highly marketable products (Kerr & Emery: 2011; Eagleman: 2013), and as the business of professional sport evolves, there is a need for research on sport fandom, consumption of sport products and sport services (Greenwood et al.: 2006). The academic literature on social media's role in professional sports team's organisations has been identified as valuable relationship marketing toll, as it builds meaningful relationships between fan and

organisation/team through communication (Williams & Chinn: 2010 in Eagleman: 2013), but as sport is self-expressive in its nature, thus a high degree of emotional attachment and involvement, and it is often consumed in an illogical manner (Abosag et al.: 2012 in Vale & Fernandes: 2018), there is a need to know the users behind a sports teams social media to truly benefit from the marketing and communication between sports team and fans.

Furthermore, Nisar & Whitehead (2016) posit companies, sport organisations as well as retail companies, need to develop and maintain a user or customer relationship management strategy through the social media, as this feature of the Internet not only presents branding opportunities (Watkins: 2013), but also enable organisations, such as professional sports teams, to foster attachment to a brand and developing appropriate messages to targeted audiences by listening and engaging with fans (Hunt et al.: 1999; Watkins: 2013; Nisar & Whitehead: 2016). As mentioned earlier, this communication on social media is a two-way street, which Vale & Fernandes (2018) explained as follows:

"offers fans new landscapes of fandom and an additional mean to engage with their favourite teams and clubs, while at the same time allows sport organizations to strengthen fan relationships" (Vale & Fernandes: 2018: 39)

O'Shea & Duarte Alonso (2011 in Eagleman: 2013) categorised social media as *the* new marketing communication tools for sport organisations to utilize as a way to cultivate and maintain a relationship with fans; which is further strengthened by the low cost of social media (Eagleman: 2013; MacIntoch et al.: 2017), which make the use of social media as a marketing tool perfect to smaller sport organisations with limited monetary funds (MacIntosh et al.: 2017). Additionally, according to Redden & Steiner (2000) fans are "ripe for relationship marketing, for loyalty programs, for enhanced consumption experiences" (322) as they are already building loyalty with the brand. Loyalty and commitment are the key words when it comes to relationship marketing (MacIntoch et al: 2017; Nisar & Whitehead: 2016), as identification with a team is highly integrated with an individual's identity (Underwood et al.: 2001 in Watkins: 2013), thus establishing an emotional connection for the fan to the team is vital to a sports team's social media marketing strategy (Watkins: 2013; MacIntoch et al.: 2017). The use of social media in a sport fan context cannot be underrated (Phua: 2010).

As social media emerges as part of sports teams it allows fan to follows their favourite team(s) throughout a season and connect with other fan without leaving one's home, it is predicted fans using social media is only going to grow (Collins et al.: 2016; Phua: 2010). This is a revenue the sport marketer needs to take, as only has social media already changed the way fans interact with sports teams and other fans (Ioakimidis: 2010 in Vale & Fernandes: 2018), the Internet has handed the control of information flow over to the fan (Jacobson: 2003), as fans now can share their views and experiences with the sports team on an interactive social platform (Nisar & Whitehead: 2016). This can be both an upside and a downside at the same time, if a sports brand is not managed successfully. On the upside, since most fans are engaged and attached to their favourite team(s), their fandom has become a part of everyday life (Vale & Fernandes: 2018); meaning sports organisation can benefit from the use of social media as en engagement platform to collect information acquiring feedback from a team's fans (Nisar & Whitehead: 2016; Doyle et al.: 2016).

Many brands have already taken to using social media, such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, as a way to connect with consumers. According to Nisar & Whitehead (2016), a careful adoption of social media marketing strategy help increase brand awareness, as consumers' use of social media is on the increase (Clavio & Walsh: 2014). As social media is a two-way communication tool, it can help humanize the brand by interacting with fans (Ellison et al.: 2007 in Nisar & Whitehead: 2016; Watkins: 2013) by empowering fans to express themselves through the brand's social media (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick: 2012 in Nisar & Whitehead: 2016). However, this is based on the notion of subtle consumer engagement by providing information and listening to the consumers, instead of direct advertisement (Ryan & Jones: 2012 in Nisar & Whitehead: 2016).

1.3. Study rationale

Bale (1989) stated sport is exceptionally powerful in stimulating local, regional and national pride, and "apart of war, sport is one of the few things that binds people to place simply through ascription" (Bale: 1989: 14 in Crawford: 2004: 67).

As people see their favourite sports team(s) as en extension of themselves () and act as a form of community for the fans (Vale & Fernandes: 2018), whatever the

sports team do impact the fans and their identities, social and personal (). This is especially the case when it comes to social media (MacIntoch et al.: 2017), not only because social media provide fans with an interactive communication with their sports team (Vale & Fernandes: 2018), but this also provide the sports organisations with information directly from the fans (Nisar & Whitehead: 2016), thus researching the fans use of social media in context of their favourite sports team can have implications, good as bad, for the sports organisations around professional sports teams (Nisar & Whitehead: 2016; Doyle et al.: 2017). The financial stability of any professional sports team is rooted in the fans, as they provide revenue through ticket sales, purchasing merchandise and television viewing (Watkins: 2013); hence the importance of understanding one's fans (Stavros et al.: 2014; Krier: 2017). Crawford (2004) argues that people consume media in various way, so a better understanding on one's fans increases the sport organisation's ability to successfully sell and market merchandise and services (Meyer: 2014; Krier: 2017). A survey done by IBM concluded that 'interacting with brands' was one of the main reasons for people using social media (Baird & Paranis: 2011 in Nisar & Whitehead: 2016); meaning social media is now a crucial element in brand identity (Nisar & Whitehead: 2016; Doyle et al.: 2017).

Social media not only allows fans to interact and communicate with their favourite team, it allows fans that live far away the same possibility as the local fans (MacIntosh et al.: 2017; Georgiou: 2006). Fandom is with the emergence of social media no longer a local endeavor and an increasing number of fans reside far away from the team's physical location (MacIntosh et al.: 2017). Fan communities can now be experienced at any time through online media and are not restricted by physical territories, such as nationality (Georgiou: 2006; Krier: 2017; Vale & Fernandes: 2018).

1.4. Research scope

As show above, professional sports team and their fans are intrinsically linked to social media in 2018, which is why the lack of social media interaction from Aalborg Pirates surprised me. The ice hockey team currently holds two championships from 2018 and I assumed there would be a fair amount of activity on their social media

accounts. It got me thinking; do the fans miss the social media interaction from Aalborg Pirates? And how do they compare it to another professional hockey team with a heavily engaging social media presence they follow?

The scope for this research will be to look at local fans of Aalborg Pirates, who also follow another professional hockey team and their use of social media with both teams. There will be a focus on how individual sport fans maintain identities as sport fan of two separate teams (local and non-local) within the same sport through social media and attending 'live' games. Furthermore, I want to investigate whether fans feel a sense of connection to their team through social media, and if they feel the sports team(s) has embraced social media as part of their brand.

1.4.1. Local vs. Non-local

There does not seem to be a consensus of what constitutes a non-local or a displaced fan and the two terms have been used with overlap and inconsistently in the academic literature. Most of the research done on displaced fans have been in the context of looking at the displaced fan and whether the use the sports team as a way to form of connection to the area, either by communicating and connecting with family or as a way to have a connection to one's former home.

The word 'displacing'[1] means to expel or force to flee from home or homeland, which makes it a apt term for research done on fan identify and the concept of home. Although, the intend of this study is to look at fans and how their two fan identities is maintained through social media, where there will be an element of home in their identities, it is not the main goal for this research. Therefore, I will be using the term non-local, as it constitutes that there have not necessarily been any prior emotional attachment to that location, sports team is this study.

The focus of this research is not on displacement, but on being fan of a non-local sports team, where there is no prior emotional attachment to that particular area. As the main focus of this study is on how the fans use social media differently with their two teams.

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[1] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/displace

1.4.2. Contribution to existing literature

The current study contributes to the extant literature by combining social identity theories, both personal and group-based and how this helps the relationship marketing strategies of professional sport teams. Where this study stands out is the look on double fandom within an individual sport fan and how this can be utilise to compare two professional sports teams' use of social media and give an insight into what the fan wants. Additionally, the interviewees are 'opinion-leaders', which is a key feature in the concept of relationship marketing (Dahlén et al.: 2010), which brings in another new perspective to how knowledge of fans can be utilise for marketing purposes.

Additionally, it can also assist the managerial and marketing department of professional sports teams (Aalborg Pirates) to indicate where they can strengthen their bond with their fans and where they may need to produce enticing content to their fans.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This literature review will give investigate the existing research on sports fan in the context of social identity theory complexity, social media and what marketing strategies has already been suggested to professional sports teams by the existing academic literature on sports fandom and social media.

2.1. Sport Fandom, Identity and Social Media

2.1.1. A Sport Fan?

A definitive definition of a 'fan' does not exist in academic literature, as the complexity of fandom to a large extend is subjective, as it is often bound in the concept of 'authenticity' (Crawford: 2004). However, to avoid any ambiguity within this research, I conceptualize a definition of a 'sport fan' from Spinad (1981 in Jacobson: 2003); a fan is a "person who thinks, talks about and is oriented towards sports even when (the fan) is not actually observing, or reading, or listening to an account of a specific sport event (354)", as my point of departure for this research. Which Doyle et al. (2017) defined as individuals with a psychological connection to a sport team.

The whole concept of sport fandom revolves around the notion of perceived interest and the importance of sport to the individual (Shank & Beasley: 1998 in Jacobson: 2003: 19). According to Hill (2002 in Crawford: 2004) fandom is not just a 'thing', it not just a category or a label, it is an identity fans perform. Crawford (2004) conceptualized that fandom is a part of everyday life. However, de Groot & Robinson (2008 in Goldman: 2014) posit fandom comes in varying levels; from mere spectator to fanatical fan. For the purpose of this research, the focus will be on the 'devoted' fan, a term coined by Hunt et al. (1999), as it assumed that a devoted sport fan already has the motivation to engage in sport related behavior and already has an emotional attachment to one or more particular sports team (MacIntoch et al.: 2017), thus making them a good target for my study, as it is likely they follow their hockey teams on social media, as being a fan is part of everyday life (Crawford: 2004; De Groot & Robinson: 2008; MacIntoch et al.: 2017; Schellenberg et al.: 2013; Goldman: 2014). Hunt et al. (1999) found that sport fans reveal their degree of attachment to sports teams through their sport-related behavior. The level of emotional attachment a devoted fan has for his or her team is often intense, long lasting and value-driven

(Jacobson: 2003), even to the extent that the fan feels like a team member (Kahle & Riley: 2004 in Goldman: 2014). However, that attachment is highly individualized as the object of attachment, in this study professional hockey teams, requires meaning and significance to the individual sport fan.

According to Crawford (2004) being a fan can even be identified as a social career, because the relationship a fan has with his or her team is often bound in a complex variety of reasons. Fans tend to identify with sports teams as a way to meet some form of personal needs (MacIntoch et al.: 2017), which is why sport fans tend to be passionate about their team(s) (Schellenberg et al.: 2013).

The definition of devoted sport fan, and more specifically a devoted fan of Aalborg Pirates and another international hockey team, or specific players on either team, for this study is an individual with emotional attachment to his or her two professional hockey team, and whom is engaged in sport related behavior and follows his or hers teams on social media.

2.2. Identity – Who am I?

Identity is defined as "a set of meanings applied to the self in a social role or situation defining what it means to be who one is" (Burke: 1991: 837 in Jacobson: 2003: 13). According to identity theorists, social identity is how individual or collectives distinguishes their social relations with others, whether it is individual or collective (Jenkins: 1964 in Jacobson: 2003). In the most basic terms, social identity is understanding "who you are" in the social world. Social identities are constructed and categorized by an individual's self-appointed descriptions, categories and values (Jacobson: 2003).

Personal identities are "self descriptions referring to unique and high specific details of an individual's biography" (Thois & Virshup: 1997: 107 in Jacobson: 2003: 13). McCall & Simmons (1966) classified personal identities as pegs upon which social identities can be hung (McCall & Simmons: 1966 in Jacobson: 2003), which is why both social identity theory and personal identity theory cannot be excluded in a study on the individual and his or her fandom.

2.2.1. Social Identity & Sport Fans

As this research is on sport fandom, the literary reviews will reflect this by concentrating on the already existing academic literature on social identities in the context of sports fandom. Social identity theory has been utilised in numerous research on sports fandom; attitudes and behaviours of fans and fans maintaining a connection with sports teams, (Doyle et al.: 2017), but as mentioned earlier, the primary foci has been on group settings, and not the individual fan.

Identity theories have a long history, and the general consensus is that everybody has social identities, such as one's gender, race, ethnicity, language, religious affiliation, nationality, sexual orientation or sports teams followed. (Meyer: 2014; Jacobson: 2003; Rocca & Brewer: 2002). An important aspect of identity construction is self-categorisation, which according to Tajfel (1981), is a system of direction individuals utilise to define their place in society. Essentially, categorisation is how we identify and relate ourselves to others (Jacobson: 2003).

According to Smith & Steward (2010 in Meyer: 2014), sport allows fans to express their social identity in a specific area of their social world, and sport have shown the ability to cultivate passionate fans (Meyer: 2014) and create strong communities (MacIntoch et al.: 2017; Collins et al.: 2016). Boyle & Magnusson (2007) argue fans shape loyalty based on social identities, which Underwood et al. (2001) designates social identities four characteristics in a sport fandom context as group experience, history and tradition, the role of the physical facility and the ritual (Underwood et al.: 2001 in Meyer: 2014).

Fandom offers social benefits, as sport fans like everybody else, create meaning in their lives through interacting in their social networks (Andrijiw & Hyatt: 2009), such a fan communities, as it brings a feeling of belonging through the social interaction with other sports fan, online as well as face-to-face (MacIntosh et al.: 2017).

Strong team identification is founded upon both an emotional attachment to the sports team itself and the interaction with other fans within the fan community (Collins et al.: 2016), which is ascertained through certain community behaviours, such as chanting at a live match or wearing the sport team's jersey (MacIntosh et al.: 2017), by building one's social identity (fan identity) around the community in which one's social identity is allocated. It goal is to maintain a positive social identity

through identification to one's favourite team (Wann et al.: 2000 in Phua: 2010). According to MacIntosh et al. (2017), being active in online fan communities facilitate a deeper commitment and identification with a sport fan's favourite team. This social identity facilitated by interacting with other fans and the sports organisation (MacIntosh et al.: 2017; Kerr & Emery: 2011) is in direct correlation to the emotional attachment to one's favourite sports team,

H1:   sports fans' social identities are based on group relations within the fan community

Studies concerning social identities and sports fan are plentiful, but as mentioned previously, there is a distinct lack of literature on personal identity and sports fandom, which will become evident as I move onto the next part of this literary review.

2.2.2. Personal Identity & Sports Fans

First off, personal identity is according to Matsouka (2001) rooted in social identity theory, which suggests that sports fans need to cultivate and confirm his or hers personal identity is why they engage in fandom and form emotional attachment to a sports team (Jacobson: 2003). Antaki & Widdicombe (1998 in Miller & Benkwitz: 2016) posits personal identity as how an individual display their membership to social categories, which can change depending on the situational context. Research done of group membership demonstrates being a member of a social group has a series of psychological benefits to an individual, such as reduced uncertainty, enhancement of self-esteem, a sense of meaning in life, feelings of positive distinctiveness and a sense of belonging (Reysen et al.: 2016). Additionally, sport in general evoke a high level of emotional attachment, which if you take the concepts of personal identity from Matsouka and Antaki & Widdicombe, fans choosing to identify with a sports team that leads to positive social identity and self-enhancement (Watkins: 2013; Stavros et al.: 2014), thus indicating an individual identify with their team to the extend that they see themselves as a player and the team as an extension of themselves (Meyer: 2014). A high level of team identification leads to the role of fan being a vital component to

the individual's personal identity and self-concept (Kerr & Emery: 2011; Miller & Benkwitz: 2016; Watkins: 2013).

This indicates that an individual's sport fandom is rooted in the need for togetherness. It is this need for social belonging and togetherness that drives a fan's identification with and loyalty to a sports team, as it helps maintain a positive sense of self (Stavros et al.: 2014; Jacobson: 2003).

H2:   fans deem their fandom as an important part of their identity and it has
        positive reinforcements to their personal selves

Social identity theory, and social identity complexity are theoretical constructs that explain how individuals manage their self-concepts and social identities within and between groups. Individuals has a number of social identities, some are more salient in certain social contexts. Social identity complexity refers to an individual's subjective representation of multiple group identities (Rocca & Brewer: 2002), whereas social identity theory by Tajfel & Turner (1986) explain social identity as the sum total of all his or her social identities within a group context, because the social identity is defined by the individual's emotional attachment to a group, thus their social identity is based on the group's success or failure.

I use both of these identity theories, because a sport fan identity is generated through group membership and the individual's social relations. The different approaches of the two theory paradigms offer each a different perspective on identity, which I argue is beneficial when working on a different approach to the individual sport fan's identity, as identity theory focus on the individual's identity as it relates to their social relations, whereas social identity theory's approach is orientated towards the structure and function of identities as they relate to group membership. Jacobson (2003) argues, "while a sport fan identity is generated through group membership, it is also generated through an individual's social relationships." (165).

2.2.3. Media, Everyday life and Identity
Everyday life is where identity, social action, interaction find their expressions through means of consumption, including media related consumption.

Communications technology have evolved and integrated into everyday life, private and public, thus meaning the study of everyday life and media tells a great deal of people's identities (Georgiou: 2006). Everyday life is increasingly dominated by mediated spaces, as it has become part of the process of representation and communicating identity and community for the postmodern human (Georgiou: 2006; Crawford: 2004). Media has taken on the role of mediator for belonging, choosing and exclusion.

Georgiou (2006) posits media is part of people's life debates on what it means to belong, social identification and community boundaries; especially as a growing mediascape diversity allow for further fragmentation and niches of communities. The growing mediascape has moved communication beyond a fixed geographical sphere, and now allows communication to transcend local, regional, national and transnational borders; social interaction and relations are no longer dependent on simultaneous spatial copresence (Georgiou: 2006). However, local media is still important as it mediates as a new kind of gossip moving beyond the word-to-mouth, thus maintaining a certain degree of importance to the local community (Georgiou: 2006), or for the context of this study, local fans.

While the stadium experience is traditionally though of as critical to a fan's sense of community, the Internet has transcended the concept of community (Crawford: 2004; Collins et al.: 2016) as media migrates the public, the private, the local and transnational and create relations of continuity and co-dependency. Spatial codependence is no longer a necessity. Furthermore, media, social media in particular, is a system of representation for an individual as well as a group, as it allows the individual or group through consumption to construct identities and/or performances (Crawford: 2004; Georgiou: 2006).

H3:   social media allows fans, local and non-local, to express their fan identity

Additionally, social media has become a part of the everyday routine for people, both when relating to communicating with friends and family and to brands, such as sports teams (Watkins: 2013). A study done in 2013 by Grieve et al. found that the use of social media is distinct, yet related to the same social connectedness as face-to-face. Identities, personal, as well as social, are shaped by the interaction between the physical and virtual experiences (Jordan: 2009; MacIntosh et al.: 2017; Crawford:

2004). According to Georgiou (2006) everyday mediated communications are shaped around representation, as people use media as symbolic spaces. Barker (1999 in Crawford: 2004) claims that how media is consumed is dependent upon the social context; meaning that a sports fan may consume sport differently depending on it he or she is alone, attending a live match, watching a game on TV/online etc.

Although, identities *are* shaped by interactions between the physical and the virtual, even to the extend media choices are influenced by an individual's identification with social groups (Phua: 2010; Crawford: 2004); hence why social media and fandom go hand in hand, as sport fandom is often both an experiences in the physical and virtual realities (MacIntosh et al.: 2017; Collins et al.: 2016).

Media is used to construct, achieve and maintain a positive social identity bu sports fans (Phua: 2010), as it reinforces the fan experience with the team and the interaction with other fans (Watkins: 2013).

H4:   social media shape the fan's social identities – both local and non-local

Watkins (2013) argues this emotional attachment can be influenced by brand managers to benefit the sports organisation. Underwood et al. (2001) found that a stronger social identity directs greater customer-based brand equity, which is why it is so vital for a service provider, in this context a professional ice hockey team, to create and maintain strong fan identification (Meyer: 2014; Jacobson: 2003). Watkins (2013) agrees and argues that this is one of the many reasons why fans must be on the forefront of a professional sports team's marketing strategy.

However, MacIntosh et al. (2017)'s study on fan identity and social media also found that even if a fan has a strong emotional attachment to a team and a high identification, the use of social media in relation to a sports team did not lead to an enhancement of the individual's fan identity.

H5:   building on MacIntosh et al.'s work, the use of social media to follow one's favourite sports teams does not lead to stronger fan identity

2.2.4. Sport fans, identification and loyalty

Research has shown that there are several ways for a fan to identify with a particular sports team; family, peers, community, geography, school attendance, specific players, nationality, accessibility, (Hirt & Clarkson: 2011: 62). In 1996, Wann, Tucker & Schrader identified more than 40 categories for becoming a fan of a sports team (Hirt & Clarkson: 2011: 63). Fandom evolves into team identification, which is defined as the manifestation of the psychological and emotional attachment and connection the fan has with his or her sports team (Watkins: 2013). Wann (2006) found had three general causes: psychological, environmental and team-related (Meyer: 2014).

There already exist numerous researches on team identification, which edict positive association with sports fandom (Greenwood et al.: 2006), which is why this study is not about the level of identification with the team for the fan, as it is assumed for the purpose of this research that the fans already has a high level of identification with their teams.

Sports fans commit to a sports team without regard to other available sports teams (Hunt et al.: 1999; Bee & Kahle: 2006 in Watkins: 2013), but fans also expect the same degree of loyalty from the team as they show the team (Jacobson: 2003), because their team identification is part of their self-concept and they will endeavor to maintain a membership of their favourite sports team and the social network around it (Hunt et al.: 1999; Foster & Hyatt: 2008 in MacIntosh et al.: 2017). As loyalty evolves, fans are more likely to perform active and public display of their fandom of their team (Wann & Branscombe: 1993; Watkins: 2013) as part of their social identity (MacIntosh et al.: 2017) and the team becomes increasing important to the individual and an extension of themselves (Wann et al.: 2001), which is displayed through the fan's team supportive behavior (Watkins: 2013). Fandom is usually developed in childhood, and develops along side with their venture into adulthood, where the team and the fan community around the team becomes part of the fan's identity (Collins et al.: 2016).

H6:   high level of team identification means the team is an extension of the fan's identity

2.3. Sport Fans and Social Media

Sport and mass media has a long, strong and proud history together and sport constitutes a key component of the 21st century media space, as professional athletes have become stars in their own right (Crawford: 2004), but as the Internet has become part of everyday life (Crawford: 2004), the traditional forms of media has taken a step back in the mind of the sports fans, as social media gives a direct link to the sports teams for the fans, whether it is through the official social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook or Instagram from the sports teams, or through fan blogs (Krier: 2017; Clavio & Walsh: 2014; Stavros et al.: 2014). Social media is now the main channel where fans engage and interact with their chosen sports teams (Vale & Fernandes: 2018; Krier: 2017; Clavio & Walsh: 2014; Stavros et al.: 2014). Largely due to the fact that sports teams of all sizes can now actively engage with their fans through social media (MacIntosh et al.: 2017; Watkins: 2013; Krier: 2017) and circumvent the traditional means of media, and the comfort of doing it on the couch in one's own home (Crawford: 2004). Furthermore, studies have shown that the online element of sports fandom has a degree of social connectedness (Grieve et al.: 2013 in Collins et al.: 2016) and even an antecedent to team identification (Hambrick et al.: 2010 in Watkins: 2013), as the access to information about the teams and its players is the online sphere, and this access to information is often given by the organisation around the sports team (Pegorar: 2010 in Watkins: 2013).

H7:   fans make use of social media to search information about their teams

Nevertheless, social media, especially as it has moved onto mobile apps, have provided higher levels of interaction between fans and team, which has facilitated shared experiences (Kaplan: 2012 in Watkins: 2013), this creating higher levels of identifications (Watkins: 2013; Greenwood et al.: 2006; Collins et al.: 2016), which leads to an increase in activity on preparatory activities, such as seeking out more information about the team and communicating with other fans (Phua: 2010; Stavros et al.: 2014), as social media has not only provided teams with the opportunity to engage actively and directly with it's fans, it has also opened up for fan-to-fan communication beyond the traditional notion of geographical co-presence (MacIntosh et al.: 2017; Watkins: 2013; Krier: 2017).

H8: fans seek out others fans on social media

However, it has not been definitively answered how sport fans use social media. Modern technologies has widen the scope of fandom, and according to Crawford (2004), fandom is increasingly becoming a personal matter and choice, because of this digitalisation, as it relegates the distance between fan and team. Although research suggest that mostly casual fans use social media, whereas the devoted fans, who are local to their favourite teams, use more traditional sense of media (Collins et al.: 2016; Stavros et al.: 2014).

H9:   local, devoted fans use social media to a limited degree, but non-local fans will use social media to a higher degree

2.3.1. The local vs. non-local fan and media

There are various researches on local and non-local/displaced sports fandom, and the classifications are somewhat meddled and at times indistinguishable, which is problematic. I navigate these terms and classifications by adapting the parameters of the definitions of the categorisations for the utilisation of this research.

When talking about sports fans, there is no way to circumvent the home field venue of his or hers sports team; especially as geography is important to the notion of fan identity and fan identity maintenance (Jacobson: 2003; Watkins: 2013), because research indicates geography and loyalty is linked (Phua: 2010; Watkins: 2013), as a sports team is often a symbolic representation of the social identification of community life (Heere & James: 2007 in Watkins: 2013; Jacobson: 2003). What has not been researched is how social media differentiate for a sport fan with their local and non-local team. As seen above, research suggests that non-local fan will have a higher level of social media consumption, but what does research done on local and non-local fans further tell us?

In Jacobson (2003) study on sport fan identity formation and maintenance, she found that several of the fans cited geographical proximity or geographical identity as the main reasons for following a specific team. The local fan's fan identity is bound in

geography/location, because they identify with the geographical location of the sports team, rather than the sports team itself (Hunt et al.: 1999). In a study by Jones (1997 in Hunt et al.: 1999; Greenwood et al.: 2006) fans told their support of the local team was because they lived locally themselves or they were born in the area. Kraszewaki (2008) argue this is rooted in the fact that sport offers a regional identity to the fan. Additionally, a sports team is an important part of the local community, thus tying the fan to the local community (Collins et al.: 2016; Jacobson: 2003; Andrijiw & Hyatt: 2009).

H10:   local fan's identity as fan is rooted in the geography

Bale (2000) explained this as a topophilic relationship between fan and team, in particular the physical venue of the sports team (Crawford: 2004) or the local media outlets (Jacobson: 2003). Whereas the non-local fan is reliant upon the Internet. However, the non-local fans used more time on the Internet looking for information on their team (Jacobson: 2003). What is important to remember here is this is a study from 2003, and the media sphere has changed considerably since. Nonetheless, the outcome of Jacobson's study is not to be discounted as it still indicates that the non-local fan invest a fair amount of time on their team's media outlets.

However, Jacobson's (2003) work highlighted that the geographical loyalty was identified whether the fan was local or displaced. Kraszewski (2008) established that for most displaced fans in his study, sports is not a just a substitution for community, but is metonymy for home, as they constitute a small, and disproportionate number in their immediate social network (Andrijiw & Hyatt: 2008), but team identification is still often linked to social agents in the individual's life (Collins et al.: 2016).

H11:   non-local fans' identity is not rooted in their social network, but one or more
         social agents in their life

According to Danielson (1997 in Jacobson: 2003) rooting for one's home team is both an individual and collective experience, as the individual uses the experiences as a social integration into the community. A high level of identification with a local team provides an individual with a sense of community and a sense of camaraderie,

because it is rooted in the identification with one's local area (Andrijiw & Hyatt: 2009; Collins et al.: 2016).

However, individual may choose to align themselves as fans with a non-local sports team in an attempt to create a different social identity within the local community (Collins et al.: 2016; Andrijiw & Hyatt: 2009). Andrijiw & Hyatt (2009) concluded in their study that non-local hockey fans felt their fandom gave them a sense of uniqueness as well as a sense of belonging. Such individuals lose the 'traditional' form of community bound in geographical, family or social backgrounds, but find those communities to enhance their self-concept available on the Internet (Crawford: 2004). Kraszewski (2008) argue sports fandom is used to revive social ties and a community. This is the case for both electronic communities and traditional communities. Even fans with a 'traditional' and local community, the Internet and the expansion of social media has meant they can now communicate and interact with other likeminded fans anywhere in the world and at any time (MacIntosh et al.: 2017). Krier (2017) used the example of sports bars, where fans meet up and connect through their shared love for a specific sport or team; this is the physical equivalent of online fan communities. Communities are no longer tied to the notion of 'traditional' communities, but expanded to just "create social groups that are derived out of a common purpose, protocol and procedure for the exchange of information and opinions" (MacIntosh et al.: 2017: 317). Jacobson (2003) determined in her study that fans living non-locally were 50% more likely to have higher levels of intensity than fans living in their team's home area, meaning living non-locally, fans have to work harder to maintain their fan identity with their team, hence the higher levels of intensity

H12:   local fans have traditional sense of community, based on their immediate social network, whereas the non-local relies on the online fan community, based on notion of shared interest/team.

As seen above, the academic literature on sports fandom is numerous, and as mentioned previously, various studies has been with a focus on a marketing perspective. As the study rationale for this project is also related to this niche of the academic literature on sport and fandom, I will take a look at what recommendations research has already suggested to the marketing departments of professional sports

team. As this study has a focus on social media, the marketing recommendation will also be related to media, and in particular social media.

2.4. Marketing recommendations for professional sports teams

As discussed above, sports is more than just people attending matches; it is an identity, and Couvelaere & Richelieu (2005 in Watkins: 2013) argues a strong sports brand is embedded into the fan's everyday life. A brand-consumer relationship must be considered like a relationship between two people, as it requires for both parties to understand the behavior and attitudes towards one another (Blackston: 1992 in Watkins: 2013). The business incentive here is to produce profit through a better understanding of the consumers (Meyer: 2014); in this instance, the sports fan.

Professional sports teams have become very marketable products and the industry is worth billions worldwide (Meyer: 2014; Tsiotsou: 2013). The money at stake in the sports industry makes it even more vital to survival for the individual sports teams to understand the fan-team relationship and dynamic (Tsiotsou: 2013). Especially, as the use of social media is providing sports fans with "unprecedented access to sport organizations regardless of geographic location" (Watkins: 2013: 3). This dynamic has transformed the marketing in the sports industry, as facilitates real-time communication between fans and team (Vale & Fernandes: 2018; Clavio & Walsh: 2014; Watkins: 2013).

Even prior to the invention of social media, sports fan hungered information about their favourite sports team and players on those teams (Jacobson: 2003).

Professional sports teams must personalise their communication with their fans to ensure loyalty (MacIntosh et al.: 2016), even if it up to the individual fan to stay committed and loyal to a sports team, the sports team is as much responsible to continue that loyalty (Nisar & Whitehead: 2016; Eagleman: 2013). Sports fans is seen in every social class, educational level and every nationality and ethnicity, which is why sports organisations need to understand their fans (Stavros et al.: 2014) to create meaningful associations with the team for the fans that share the same core values (Watkins: 2013). Additionally, to stay profitable professional sports teams also need to ensure their relationship with their fans are mutually beneficial (Stavros et al.: 2014). This also maintains a fan's already established loyalty to the team. In general,

the organisations surrounding a professional sports teams must always thrive to ensure a positive experience for the fan, as the more positive the fan perceive the experience to be, it increases the likelihood of the fan developing a stronger emotional attachment and a higher level of team identification (Hunt et al.: 1999). An experience unique for the sports team is also a way to generate positivity (Watkins: 2013), and it enhances brand identity, as a distinct and unique brand identity can be fruitfully cultivated by fan emotionally attach to the sports team (Meyer: 2014). Another way to heighten the fan experience is to provide more incentives, such as promotions, giveaways, exclusive meet and greets with players and coaches, which will encourage more interaction between fan and team (Clavio & Walsh: 2014) and an online fan community providing with interaction between fans and the sports team (Phua: 2010). Tsiotsou (2013) argue that relationship marketing would be the best use for professional sports teams as this marketing strategy helps the consumers to "find self-expressive value in the team, trust it and feel attached to it" (Tsiotsou: 2013: 466).

Meyer (2014) states that professional sports teams benefit from having a better understanding of the team's fans' social identities, as it gives them the opportunity to better market the fans and provide better services as well (Meyer: 2014); thus creating more revenue (Meyer: 2014; Tsiotsou: 2013), but also establish a better fan community around the sports team (Phua: 2010; MacIntosh et al.: 2017; Crawford: 2004). Having knowledge of a team's fan's social identities can be a predictor of fan behaviour and help track consumption habits (Meyer: 2014), thus helping stakeholders target the fans at a more emotional level and help enhance loyalty by marketing more than one social identity (Meyer: 2014; Stavros et al.: 2014). Meyer (2014) recommends that stakeholders adapt their marketing campaigns and the management of the official fan pages to compliment the social identities dominant in their fan base. Meyer uses the example of a female fan, whom is also a mother and has a career. By knowing this about a fan or several fans, it gives the opportunity to personalize the advertisement campaigns.

H13:   fans like personalised advertisement

Hunt et al. (1999) used categorisation of the types of fans as a way to establish a template for marketing to different types of fans. The marketing to the local fan must

remain somewhat broad to ensure appeal to a large audience segment, as the largest segment of audience member attending live matches is local. This can best be achieved by concentrating on how the team is part of the local community and the benefits of having the team in the community and the fan has a stake in the local team (Hunt et al.: 1999). Marketing to the devoted fan should have a bigger concentration on information about the team itself, players and the league(s) in which the team plays. The devoted fan will use the Internet to seek out information (Watkins: 2013; Stavros et al.: 2014; Nisar & Whitehead; 2017: Crawford: 2004; Eagleman: 2013), thus the marketing must also be online. A dedicated fan page will be a way to ensure fans get the information they seek from the sports organization itself and not from outside sources. The local aspect still plays in, as most of the devoted fan will also have local residents. The team must cultivate a working relationship with the local media, such as newspapers and TV stations. This segment of the audience is the part that tides with the team through good and bad, where the local fan might leave the team in bad times. To ensure a deeper team identification and emotional attachment to the team, the merchandise becomes an important element, as it give the fan a physical manifestation of their fandom to a specific team (Hunt et al.: 1999).

H14:　the marketing to a local, devoted fan should be community- and information-based, and merchandise should be readily available.

Targeting a fan base is not just about personalising the marketing communication, but also about creating stronger team identification. Richelieu & Pons (2006) posit a strong sports brand can turn fans into paying costumers by creating strong team identification and have the fans publically show their affiliation with the team by purchasing team merchandise. Highly identified fans are the fans a professional sports team should thrive for, as they are the best paying costumers (Kerr & Emery: 2011; Heere & James: 2007). Watkins (2013) argue that to increase team identification the goal must be to enhance the fan experience; physical and electronically, and emphasise on the team's history in the area, which creates a deeper bond with the fan base, especially the younger segment. Previous research on sport fans team identification levels indicate that the higher the level of identification the higher number of game attendance (Pease & Zhang, 1996; Wakefield, 1995; Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Wann et al., 1999 in Greenwood et al.: 2006), the more money the

fans tend to spend (Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Wann et al., 1999 in Greenwood et al.: 2006), the more optimistic the fans tend to be with the team's future successes (Wann & Branscombe, 1993 in Greenwood: 2006) and the more enjoyable to the fans find the live games (Madrigal, 1995; Wann & Schrader, 1997 in Greenwood et al.: 2006) and emotional attachment to a team or a player on a team leads to team identification (Watkins: 2013); which is why the marketing departments of professional sports team need to strive for high levels of identification with the team in the team's fans. Research suggests that a solid branding effort helps a sports organisation to gain financial stability, especially in the smaller markets (Couvelaere & Richelieu: 2005 in Tsiotsou: 2013; Watkins: 2013; Eagleman: 2013). This can be accomplished by building a stronger loyalty, which should be approached like brand loyalty (Underwood et al.: 2001; Watkins: 2013). Tsiotsou (2013) argue this can be accomplished through public appearances and public services that bring together the team (players and coaches) with the fans.

H15:   fans like to interact with the team and it enhances their fan identity, thus
        benefitting the team with an increase in revenue

Social media is the best way to reach an increasing number of sports fans (Phua: 2010: Watkins: 2013) and it gives a new opportunity for professional sports teams to establish and nurture relationships with their fans (Watkins: 2013; Stavros et al.: 2014). Research has also suggested that fans trust the information from official media channels from sports teams more than information provided by family and friends (Nisar & Whitehead: 2016; Stavros et al.: 2014). The interaction between fan and team can be classified as an extension of the traditional word-of-mouth communication (Mangold & Faulds: 2009 in Stavros et al.: 2014), thus enabling a more direct form of communication between fan and team, as well as fan-to-fan communication to foster a fan community, which can be nurtured on the individual's terms (Stavros et al.: 2014).

H16:   fans have a trust in official channels of social media outlets and they use them
        to communicate within the fan community

        Social media is also valid marketing tool to target both the younger segment

and the highly identified fans (Abeza et al.: 2015), as fans have a profound sense of ownership for their favourite team(s) and want to be heard and seen, which is possible through the two-way communication of social media (Meyer: 2014; MacIntosh et al.: 2017). A high level of identification with one's team also increases the likelihood of using the team's social media outlets (Watkins: 2013; MacIntosh et al.: 2017: Watkins: 2013). The use of social media also enriches fan identity (MacIntosh et al.: 2017), which should be the goal to create a stronger bond between fan and team. Tsiotsou (2013) recommends relationship marketing to facilitate team loyalty, because it is a suitable marketing tool to develop loyalty on a longitudinal level. Fan loyalty on a longitudinal level is important to brand management on a professional sports team, as those long loyal fans are less likely to jump ship when the team performs poorly and trade the team with a more successful team (Stavros et al.: 2014). The invested, or devoted, fans are also more invested in an actual relationship with the team and the organisation and they will engage in another avenue as social media and communicate actively with the organisation and other fans (Stavros et al.: 2014; Watkins: 2013; Crawford: 2004). Additionally, social media outlets from the team creates fan community outside the sport team's home venue, where a relationship marketing tool is beneficial, especially if constituted through opinion leaders within the fan community (Stavros et al.: 2014; Dahlén: 2010) through micro-dialogues (Fieseler, Fleck & Meckel: 2010 in Stavros et al.: 2014). Opinion leaders can be identified through their number of friends or followers on the various social media platforms in which the sports team also engage (Stavros et al.: 2014; Dahlén: 2010). Gwinner & Swanson (2003 in Stavros et al.: 2014) argue that to utilize social media it is vital the organisation around a professional sports team use the platforms to more than just advertising. There needs to be interaction between the fans, the team and the organisation (Watkins: 2013). The suggestions range from video clips or live chats as contend for social media to generate positive responses from fans (Stavros et al.: 2014; Watkins: 2013) to mobile apps, which make chat during games possible (Watkins: 2013) and Twitter handlers (MacIntosh et al.: 2017). No matter the applicable recommendations, Clavio & Walsh (2014) advocates the strategy should vary depending on which social media platform is utilized and uploaded contend must be relevant for social media to be an effective marketing tool (Stavros et al.: 2014). Online campaigns depend on being active, relatable and truthful to facilitate a community and environment where fan and organisation/team coexist effortlessly

(Armstrong et al.: 2016 in MacIntosh et al.: 2017).

H17:   fans want to communicate with their sports team and not just receive
        advertisements

Social media offers the benefit of connecting with non-local fans and strengthening relationships with the non-local fans, both emotionally and economically (Stavros et al.: 2014; Watkins: 2013; Andrijiw & Hyatt: 2009). If a team uses social media, it establishes a connection and identification with the local fans and non-locals fans (Watkins: 2013).

Lastly, Eagleman (2013) advocates social media as a marketing tool for smaller professional sports teams and leagues in the sports industry, as the bigger leagues, such as football and handball, already has well-established and longitudinal relationship with the media industry, making it problematic for smaller sports to ensure enough screen time. Another benefit of social media for the smaller sports is the economical aspect. Social media is cheaper than traditional media, thus more efficient cost to a small marketing budget (Ryan & Jones: 2012 in Nisar & Whitehead: 2016).

Chapter 3: Research Objectives

The goal for this study is to widen the scope on fan identity maintenance through social media in sport fans, and to investigate how knowledge of this can benefit the sports organisations and their social media strategies.

The focus for this research will be on the individual fan and how he or her maintains and utilise a double fandom identity through the use of social media. The goal is to get an insight to how social media can help establish a deeper connection to an individual's favourite sports teams.

As seen in the previous chapter, I have complied a series of hypotheses based on the literary review to fit the research scope of this study. The hypotheses are divided into two research objectives. The hypotheses are used to steer the exploration and analysis of the study.

3.1. Research objective 1 is to investigate how individual sport fans identify as a sport fan of two separate teams (local and non-local) within the same sport through social media and attending 'live' games.

Hypotheses:

H1:   sports fans' social identities are based on group relations within the fan community

H2:   fans deem their fandom as an important part of their identity and it has positive reinforcements to their personal selves

H3:   social media allows fan, local and non-local, to express their fan identity

H4:   social media shape the fan's social identities – both local and non-local

H5:   building on MacIntosh et al.'s work, the use of social media to follow one's favourite sports teams does not lead to stronger fan identity

H6:   high level of team identification means the team is an extension of the fan's identity

H9:   local, devoted fans use social media to a limited degree, but non-local fans will use social media to a higher degree

H10:   local fan's identity as fan is rooted in the geography

H11:   non-local fans' identity is not rooted in their social network, but one or more social agents in their life

H12:   local fans have traditional sense of community, based on their immediate
        social network, whereas the non-local relies on the online fan community,
        based on notion of shared interest/team.

3.2. Research objective 2 is to investigate whether knowledge of fan identity can be useful for a sport organisation's social media marketing strategy and what the fans themselves seek from their sports teams' social media.

Hypotheses:

H7:   fans make use of social media to search information about their teams

H8:   fans seek out others fans on social media

H13:   fans like personalised advertisement

H14:   the marketing to a local, devoted fan should be community- and information-
        based, and merchandise should be readily available.

H15:   fans like to interact with the team and it enhances their fan identity, thus
        benefitting the team with an increase in revenue

H16:   fans have a trust in official channels of social media outlets and they use them
        to communicate within the fan community

H17:   fans want to communicate with their sports team and not just receive
        advertisements

3.3. Theoretical framework

As mentioned previously, social identity theory has been dominant in the research on sport fandom, which is expectant as sport is seen as a social endeavour (Riketta: 2008; Meyer: 2014), thus evoking thoughts of social identities. When researching sport fandom, I see no way to exclude social identity theory, even if I argue the importance of the sociological theory of personal identity as a new perspective of sport fandom on the individual level. However, personal identity is bound in the tradition of social identity theory; and so is the concept of identification (Tajfel & Turner: 1986).

Additionally, according to Jacobson (2013), individuals use social group memberships to maintain and support their personal and collective identities, which is

why I advocate social identity complexity theory as the theoretical foundation for this study.

3.3.1 Social Identity Complexity

The basis principle of social identity theory is that personal identity is defined and formed by group memberships. Tajfel and Turner (1986) pioneered social identity theory as a way to explain intergroup behaviour bound in the premise of an individual's knowledge of his or hers emotional attachment to social groupings; meaning an individual's self-perception is grounded in how an individual classify themselves and others in assorted categories to make sense of the social world and their own place in it (Phua: 2010; MacIntosh et al.: 2017; Doyle et al.: 2017). Tajfel (1978) posited that social identity is:

> "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership'' (p. 63 in Doyle et al.: 2017: 185)

It is postulated individuals cultivate two core identities – a personal and a social. The personal identity and self encompasses distinctive, individual information about the individual, whereas the social identity incorporates information about the group in which the individual belong (Meyer: 2014). In 1991, Brewer presented social identity as the culmination of an individual's social identities as circles surrounding the personal identity (Meyer: 2014), which according to Stets & Burke (2000 in Andrijiw & Hyatt: 2009) is developed through the process of self-categorisation. Brewer (1991) argues categories are necessary as a tool to establish a system of order and awareness of one's social world, because both the personal and social identities are founded upon the basis of a social context (Andrijiw & Hyatt: 2009). According to Brewer, personal identity is the individual self, where those personal characteristics distinguishes one person from others in social context (Andrijiw & Hyatt: 2009), and social identity is how individuals define and categorise themselves by their group membership (Phua: 2010; Heere & James: 2007). According to Meyer (2014), social identity is a representation of the multiple group identities of an individual. Andrijiw and Hyatt (2009) classify this as an interpersonal-intergroup continuum, which reflects on 'acting in terms of self' versus 'acting in terms of group'. MacIntosh et al. (2017) explains this as an individual's definition of self-identity by those with whom

they socialise and how self-identity is only given validity if it is recognised and confirmed by others; and how an individual gains satisfaction in participating in activities congruent to the group identity, which is forged from the feelings of symbolic attachment to the collective identity (MacIntosh et al.: 2017).

Jacobson (2003) asserts that this attachment to a collective identity is the result of a sense of belonging for the individual to a group, but importantly, to maintain a group membership there has to be behavioural engagement from the individual (Heere & James: 2007; Collins et al.: 2016). Jacobson also claims individuals are member of various groups, and has a social identity to each of this groups. Meyer (2014) agrees with Jacobson that social identities are multiple, and he argues that social identities can in given social contexts merge together. An example of this can be a Caucasian, female, hockey fan. That individual has self-categorised three identities – Caucasian, female and hockey fan. Some identities are obligatory, such as race and gender, in this example female and Caucasian, whole others are optional; hockey fan in this example. Meyer argues this example's identities would, given the right social context, merge together. This is the theory of social identity complexity (Roccas & Brewer: 2002).

As explained earlier, social identity theory by Tajfel & Turner (1986) is basis on the objective of intergroup behaviour and social identities are rooted in the value of an individual's group membership and emotional attachement (Heere & James: 2007), where social identity complexity is concerned with how individuals manage their multiple social group identities (Roccas & Brewer: 2002). Meyer (2014) defines social identity complexity as "a theory on the subjective representation of an individual's multiple in-groups." (p. 7).

According to Roccas & Brewer's (2002) social identity complexity, individuals have multiple in-groups memberships simultaneously, which they manage on multiple cross-cutting dimensions, like shown in the example above. They argue social identities may stand on its own, but merging social identities in specific social situations is a given, because these overlapping social identities is a reflection of an individual's social environment. Essentially, the theory explains:

> "how an individual who has many in-group identities identifies with not only the individual identities independently, but how the different identities are subjectively combined to provide an inclusive representation of the individual's in-group memberships." (Meyer: 2014: 14)

There are three factors – experiential, personal and situational – that determine an individual's representation of multiple group identities (Roccas & Brewer: 2002). Experiential factors relate to societal structures and common attributes between in-groups. Personal factors are motivational and determined by an individual's intellect, beliefs and values (Miller et al.: 2009 in Meyer: 2014). Situational factors, such as mood, distinctiveness and in-group threat, are also important to the representation of multiple group identities (Meyer: 2014). Not only are these factors necessary in considering group identity, but according to Tajfel (1981) the determination of level of identification with any group requires three components: a cognitive component (awareness of membership), an evaluative component (membership has significance) and en emotional component (investment and emotional significance of group membership) (MacIntosh et al.: 2017). Furthermore, Licket et al. (2000) postulate there are types of groups – intimacy groups, task groups, social categories and loose association (Meyer: 2014), which together with the two previous group assessments form a more holistic approach to group identity in social identity complexity, as social identity complexity is founded upon the notion of habitual "awareness of cross categorisation of one's own social group memberships." (Meyer: 2014: 16).

As mentioned earlier, self-categorisation is the foundation for social identity complexity, which Ashmore, Beaux & McLaughlin-Volpe (2004 in Meyer: 2014) explain as the precondition for all collective identities. Tuner & Oakes (1986) appoint three levels of self-categorisation: abstract (ex. being human), in/out-group differentiation (the self as a social category) and personal.

According to Jacobson (2003), sport fan identity is generated through group membership, but it is also generated through a person's social relationship.

3.3.2. Personal Identity

Personal identity can be seen a "the set of meanings that are tied to the self and help maintain it, and these self-meanings carry across role and situation" (Jacobson: 2003: 14) and is defined by Brewer (1991 in Meyer: 2014) as the individuated self. According to Brewer, social identity is categorisations of the self in social settings. Brewer also argue social identity is the link between the psychology of the individual and the structure and function of social groups (Brewer, 2001). Hogg et al. (1995 in Jacobson: 2003) argue the self is multifaceted and dynamic, and mediates the

connection between individual behaviours and social structures. How an individual communicate details about themselves highlights a range of "contextual, social and cultural" (Miller & Benkwitz: 2016: 41) self-expression, thereby their social identities, as social identity (fan identity for this study) is rooted in an individual's self-concept from social memberships, which the individual has an emotional attachment to (Tajfel: 1978 in MacIntosh et al.: 2017). As Hogg et al., Roccas & Brewer (2002) postulate an individual has multiple social identities and assumes diverse styles of identity representation depending on the situational context.

Jacobson (2003) hypothesise personal identities carry into social identities and social settings in which an individual finds him or herself. It is this acknowledgement of group memberships that becomes a defining characteristic of their personal identity (Watkins: 2013), as the individual define him or herself in terms of his or hers social relationships (Jacobson: 2003). Barker (1999 in Crawford: 2004) explains that personal identity is how the social resources of the self are managed. Crawford states:

> "while we are all subject to the 'impress of history', the particular form that we take, the specific arrangements of discursive elements, is unique to each individual for we have all had unique patterns of genered relations, class structures, ethnic cultures, friends and family as discursive resources" (Crawford: 2004: 140).

However, according to Jacobson (2003) individuals must actively desire to stimulate identities, such as sport fan identity. Roccas & Brewer's (2002) social identity complexity theory explains that in a given social situation where an individual identify with the group the social identity may be the dominant identity.

4. Research Methodology & Design

This chapter will demonstrate the philosophical foundation of this study, which is explained in relation to the research objectives investigating how ice hockey fans following two different professional ice hockey teams maintain their fan identity through social media and how this can benefit the marketers of professional sports teams.

The choice of methods will be included, as it allows the reader to get a better grasp of the structure of the project and an argumentation for the choices made in regard to the project. Firstly, an explanation for the paradigm chosen and the ontological and epistemological approaches for the project will be given, which will be followed by a justification of the choices of qualitative methods. Next, I state how I conducted the sampling and how the analysis of the collected data was conducted. Lastly, I will give an insight into the challenges and limitations of this research.

4.1. Research Philosophy

Firstly, a paradigm for the research has to be established, as it sets the parameters of the study. Guba & Lincoln (1994) explains a paradigm as the social construction in which a person relates to the world; meaning a paradigm is basically "a cluster of beliefs and dictates which scientists in a particularly discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done, and how results should be interpreted." (Bryman: 2012: 630).

The paradigm will be *constructivist* (Bryman: 2012: Guba & Lincoln: 2013), because the inquiry of this research is to establish how Aalborg Pirates fans maintain a double fandom identity with the use of social media, and not to outline a truth. The purpose is to uncover how the participants' social realities form their subjective narratives (Ritchie & Lewis: 2003) through the interviews conducted.

The ontological stance will be *relativistic* as it accompanies the constructivist paradigm. Relativists believe realities are socially and experientially constructed in a local and specific setting, which is seen through the multiple mental constructions of an individual or group (Guba & Lincoln: 1994 & 2013). Additionally, these constructions of realities are also interchangeable.

With a constructivist paradigm and a relativist ontological precision, the epistemological position will be *subjectivism*. The use of an epistemological stance of

subjectivism was chosen, as the goal of the project is to look at the individual's narrative. With *subjectivism* usually comes a hermeneutical position on methodology, which means the reality of the participants can only be achieved through interaction between the researcher and the participant (Guba & Lincoln: 1994: Crouch & McKenzie: 2006).

4.2. Research design

This study has two primary goals; to investigate the social identities of ice hockey fans following Aalborg Pirates and another professional ice hockey team and their use of social media, and also look at how this knowledge can benefit Aalborg Pirates' social media practices. This study's focus is on the individual's fan identity and their use of social media with the two teams they consider theirs.

I am not trying to create a typology of sport fans through this research, as it is exploratory and the idea is not to generalise the findings. The goal is to look at individual fans that are 'opinion-leader' in the fan community around Aalborg Pirates and how knowledge of their social identities and double fandom can benefit in a social media marketing perspective.

The literature review has reflected this, as the focus have been on sports fandom, social identity and social media and ended with a look on academic marketing recommendations to professional sports team.

I will be using the literature from the literary review to compare the findings of this study to either confirm or negate the hypotheses composed in the previous chapter, along with the theoretical framework.

The theoretical strategy of this project is developed from the theories *social identity theory, social identity complexity,* and *personal identity.* Combining the theories and put them in a sport fan perspective has developed the theoretical conceptual framework used for this study.

4.3. Data collection

The primary aim with the data collection was to obtain data, which would help me to answer my research objectives through the help of analysis. I have made use of both primary and secondary data. My primary data is interviews. Interviews are classified

as primary data, because they were specifically conducted to answer my research questions. My secondary data consists of papers and studies from peer-to-peer academic journals in the area of sports fandom. The use of secondary data is primarily seen in the literary review.

Additionally, the data collection was about finding hockey fans of both a local and non-local team. My primary point was the Aalborg area, where the Aalborg Pirates ice hockey team reside.

As mentioned previously, constructivism has no truth (Guba: 1990; Bryman: 2012; Hiles: 1999), which affects the research design, because the purpose is to *understand* the realties in which the participants live as hockey fan of both a local and a non-local team. According to Crouch & McKenzie (2006) "data collection from interviews is in principle both distinct and independent from analysis and interpretation." (488).

4.4. Qualitative method

Qualitative research provides an interpreted understanding of the social world the interviewees live in, thus enabling me to learn about their narratives on their fan experiences on social media with their two favourite ice hockey teams (Ritchie and Lewis: 2003) and not the 'objective facts' (Crouch & McKenzie: 2006).

I made use of purposive sampling, as I did not want a random sample, as the data collected must be relevant to my research objectives. The purpose of purposive sampling is to strategically collect sampled relevant to the research question (Bryman: 2012). I implemented criterion sampling to the purposive sampling. The criteria through which the purposive sampling is done are the following:

1. Fan of Aalborg Pirates and an international hockey team
2. Uses social media
3. Above 18
4. 'opinion-leader' in the Aalborg Pirates fan community

As a criterion sampling of purposive sampling is applied to the interviews, it becomes a fixed purposive sampling strategy as the outset of the research and the data collection strategy is established and does not evolve throughout the research process (Bryman: 2012).

4.4.1. Interviews

The methodological stance of *relativism* considers the researcher to be interlinked with the findings as they are created throughout the investigative process. *Subjectivism* believe the reality of the participants can only be required through the interaction between researcher and participants (Guba & Lincoln: 1994 & 2013: Crouch & McKenzie: 2006), which is why interviews were chosen as the primary data collection tool. Furthermore, interviewing is about generating data that give an authentic insight into the participants' experiences (Guba & Lincoln: 1994 & 2013; Crouch & McKenzie: 2006). Also, to fully understand the realities of the interviewees, there is a need to take the social context into account, speaking from a constructivist point of view (Crouch & McKenzie: 2006).

  The choice of exploratory, semi-structured interviews was grounded in the research's goal to illustrate and understand the participants' narrative in the context of their lives and realities (Galetta: 2013). Qualitative interviews provides the participants realities through their own words, which allows me, as the researcher, to discover issues that would not have been revealed by the use of a survey or even a qualitative structured interview (Bryman: 2012). Furthermore, the semi-structured interview allows me to ask for the interviewee to deepen their answers or to a put up an auxiliary question or to explore issues brought up by the interviewee (Bryman: 2012; Galetta: 2013). In fact, respondents are encouraged to tell their story freely, without the direct input of the interview, but through light prompts (Crouch & McKenzie: 2006). This objective is not achievable through other qualitative methods, such as surveys, questionnaires, participant observations, literature review or unstructured interviews (McIntosh & Morse: 2015). Furthermore, the methodological tool of interview permits me to acquire the subjective narratives of the interviewee's through their answers and statements (Kvale & Brinkmann: 2009), which according to Galetta (2013) is because it opens up for the opportunity for yield more complete answers without varying from the structure of the overall interview (Galetta: 2013).

  Additionally, the semi-structured interview allows me to address a specific topic, but without restricting the interviewee's own narrative (Galetta, 2013). Meaning I can clarify any question not understood by the interviewee or any question with ambiguity (Guba: 1990, Galetta: 2013) and ask the interviewee to elaborate on

an answer (Galetta: 2013; Bryman: 2012, Jacobsson & Åkerström, 2012), and allow for the use of open-end questions and follow-up questions.

Lastly, semi-structured interviewing is closer to everyday conversations, than structured interviews, thus creating a more natural flow of dialogue (Kvale & Brinkmann: 2009), because the structure is flexible and variations are allowed (Galetta: 2013).

I complied an interview guide for the interviews, but I changed the chronological order of the questions slightly depending on the interviewee and the flow of the interviews. The follow-up questions were also altered to fit the individual interviewee, depending upon their own engagement in the interview. This is known as reflexivity (Galetta: 2013; Bryman: 2012; McIntoch & Morse: 2015). In addition to this, McIntosh & Morse (2015) and Guest *et al.* (2014) argue the context of the interview and meaning of the interview questions are more essential than the correct phrasing or order, which is why I allowed for the wording of question and the chronological structure of the questions at times to be varied.

4.4.2. Interview sampling

All interviewee's were chosen from the same set of specific parameters (see above).

Crouch & McKenzie (2006) argue a small number of participants is justifiable to a research study as qualitative empirical data is labour-intensive, especially when the investigation of the research is based of personal experience in a subjectivist framework. Bryman (2012) argue a purposive sampling is also justifiable with a smaller size sample, as the emphasis of the objective for the research is on the experiences of the individual.

I chose to make use of so-called dedicated fans, as their fandom is a big part of their everyday life, and therefore could generate a deeper insight into how their identities interact and overlap (Crawford: 2004: 47; Hunt et al.: 1999: 443; Miller & Benkwitz: 2016), especially with concerns to their use of social media (references).

As with evident from the literary review, sport fans with high team identification levels are clearly the target consumers for spectator sport teams, which is why I have used devoted fans as my primary data collection. Furthermore, as stated previously, a criterion for the interviewee's were for them to be 'opinion-leaders' in the fan community around Aalborg Pirates. This was made a criterion as the goal for

the research is to investigate how knowledge of fan identity with a team can be utilised for relationship marketing. According to Dahlén et al. (2010) opinion-leaders influence and shape the opinion of the community in which they are engaging and are generally seen by their peers to have a higher social standing within the community. The two interviewees are:

B., female, season ticket for 8 consecutive years, volunteering for the Aalborg Pirates for 8 years, interview length: 58.56 minutes

J., male, season tickets for 22 consecutive years, has a blog about the Aalborg Pirates, serves on the executive committee since this summer, interview length: 37.47 minutes

All interviews were conducted face-to-face, as it allows the communication to be both verbal and non-verbal (McIntoch & Morse: 2015; Galetta: 2013). The interviews were conducted in the public domain. Each participant was asked for permission to digitally record the interview prior to the interview itself. Furthermore, the frame of the interview is limited to the topic of the research objectives (McIntoch & Morse: 2015), which is why qualitative researchers stress the importance of the context of the interview (Jacobsson & Åkerström: 2012), which follows the constructivist paradigm; meaning the interviews will not have a correct or wrong outcome, but rather a multilevel facet of discourses (Kvale: 1994). This is an important point as the objective of this project is not to analyse the participants' words, but their *meanings* as well (Miles et al.: 1994 mentioned in Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The scope of the sample does not qualify for a wider generalisation of the results, because the sample is purposive and small (Bryman: 2012). Thus, the findings of this project can only be seen as small contribution to the already existing studies on sports fans.

4.4. Analytical method

My choice of analytical method was thematic analysis, because it is an analytical tool unbound by paradigm and theoretical framework and, thus making it ideal to "reflect reality, and to unpick or unravel the surface of reality." (Braun & Clarke: 2006: 84).

Thus, making thematic analysis applicable to a study with the constructivist paradigm.

I selected theoretical thematic analysis as my analytical tool as "it offers an accessible and theoretically-flexible approach to analysing qualitative data" (Braun & Clarke: 2006: 77), because it helps themes relevant to the study emerge and form into categories (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane: 2006). A degree of theoretical flexibility is also associated with thematic analysis, which is desirable for my study, as it allows for the categorisation of themes to be qualitatively determined, rather than quantifiable focused (Braun & Clarke: 2006). Furthermore, the objective of the analysis of the interviews was not to categories it quantitatively, but rather to analyse the thematic elements of the interviews qualitatively (Crouch & McKenzie: 2006)

Thematic analysis can be applied in a number of ways. I choose theoretical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke: 2006) as the method to interpret my empirical data, reading and comparing my data, letting findings appear gradually as the interpretation of the data evolved throughout the data collection and the analysis, driven by the theoretical framework of the study.

Smaller projects, such as this one, where the objective is to identify a limited set of themes it is not necessary to implement an explicit segmentation strategy, such as transcription (Guest *et al.*: 2014). However, the segmentation process of categorising themes and maintaining a general overview of the analysis is still a needed practice, which is why my interviews have not been transcribed, but the segmentation strategy has still been applied. I have only included relevant quotes into the written body of the project.

Moreover, given the new Danish personal data protections laws (GDPR) implemented by May 2018, there arouse an issue concerning personal sensitive information of the interviewees. I asked the interviewee's whether they would allow for me to record the interviews, which they allowed, but the interviewees explicitly requested I leave out any personal information, such as names, in my body of work and not to publish the audio of the interviews.

First step of the analysis is the segmentation process, where the recognition of patterns in the individual interviews relevant to the research questions (Miles & Huberman: 1994 and Tuckett: 2005 in Braun and Clarke: 2006). This first step is critical to the initial analysis (Patton: 2002 in in Braun & Clark: 2006), as it is the first

step the analysis of the interviews (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane: 2006).

Since no transcription was made, I listening rigorously to all the interviews and wrote down notes throughout. I then used the notes to highlight emerging patterns relevant to the research questions within the individual interviews, which moves the analysis into the next level. According to Cutcliffe & Mckenna (2002) this level of the analysis is where the researcher applies intellectual, creative, interpretive and analytical aptitudes to generate something with from the data and to a specific purpose.

Next step is to identify similar coded patterns across the individual interviews, subsequently categorizing them into collective themes, which was ensured by a repetitive process of going back and forth between the interviews (Cutcliffe & McKenna: 2002; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane: 2006).

A theme is by Boyatzis defined as "a pattern in the information that at minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon" (p. 161)." (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane: 2014: 83). Braun and Clarke (2006) endorse Boyatzis's definition, as they categorize thematic analysis as searching across the data set "to find repeated patterns meanings" (92), which is why the definition of a themes is a helpful tool to ensure continuity. I employed a definition of theme in my analysis to ascertain rigor.

First and second step will not be documented in the written body of this research, since neither transcriptions exist nor is it relevant to the conclusion of the study, as it is the themes emerging from those two first steps I am interested in analysing. Although, I invariably bring my own interpretation of the data in the analysis, I remain as true as possible to the narrative and voice of the interviewee (Stern: 1999 in Banister and Booth: 2005).

From a constructivist point of view, the analysis does not treat each participant as a unique case, independent from the social world, because as common themes appear in the interviews, there is an implicit assumption that the interviewees inhabit a common social world (Crouch & McKenzie: 2006).

Third step of the analysis is the interpretation of the themes in the framework of the accompanying theory, which is given in a template of discussion, where I will first discuss and illuminate on how the participants' social identities reveal themselves through their ruse of social media and the fan communities to how this can reveal how

to better create team identification and make use of relationship marketing in social media by comparing the findings of this research to the literary review and the theoretical framework.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

The research objectives for this study was to investigate how individual sport fans maintain identities as sport fan of two separate teams (local and non-local) within the same sport through social media and attending 'live' games and to investigate whether knowledge of fan identity can be useful for a sport organisation's social media marketing strategy and what the fans themselves seek from their sports team's social media. As explained previously, the focus is on local fans of Aalborg Pirates, who also identifies as fan of another professional ice hockey team. The following discussion will be set in this context and at the end of this chapter there will be suggested some recommendation made to Aalborg Pirates' marketing strategy adapted from the findings of this study and the literature review.

5.1. Sport Fan Identity and Community

It was evident from the start that ice hockey is a pretty significant part of B's and J's lives and their identity, personal as well as social, which is not surprising as it has already been established by prior research that sports fandom offers social (Andrijiw & Hyatt: 2009; MacIntosh et al.: 2017; Collins et al.: 2016) and personal benefits to the individual through fan community (Reysen et al.: 2016; Watkins: 2013; Stavros et al.: 2014). Both B and J emphasized the importance of the fan community around the hockey teams. They both stressed how their relations with other fans, both while attending matches and through social media, impacted their own connection to their hockey teams. This connection B and J has to their favourite sports team and the interaction with other fans of their teams is what Collins et al. (2016), MacIntosh et al. (2017) and Kerr & Emery (2011) would qualify as a strong team identification.

To B the fan community was the crux of her fandom. She stated that when she came to her first games at Aalborg Pirates' arena, it was not the team or the sport that made her a fan, but the other fans and the way other fans embraced newcomers. Today, she qualifies the fan community around Aalborg Pirates just as important as the sports team itself and the games. This type interaction and connection with the fan community around a sports team is one of the main components of a strong team identification (Collins et al.: 2016; MacIntosh et al.: 2017; Kerr & Emery: 2011). However, with her international team, The Pittsburgh Penguins the fan community

aspect to her fandom differs. B does not actively engage with other fans of the Pittsburgh Penguins socially, as she does with other fans of Aalborg Pirates, but she maintains a membership of several Pittsburgh Penguins online fan communities and official online platforms and engages in discussions on these forums, she has never sought out further relations with others fans of the Pittsburgh Penguins, though. Although, this differentiate form her engagement with her local team, Eagleman (2013) argues that interaction with one favourite sports team through online platforms is enough to build an emotional attachment to the team. Arguably, B also qualifies her Pittsburgh Penguins fandom as a personal preference, whereas her connection to Aalborg Pirates is rooted in geography, social community and family relations, as she is born and raised in Aalborg and several members of her family, as well as friends, are also Aalborg Pirates fans; meaning B's fan identity to Aalborg Pirates is generated through both her commitment to the fan community and her other social networks (Jacobsson: 2003; Meyer: 2014).

J's connection to Aalborg Pirates is rooted in geography, and like B he is born and raised locally, but different from B, J's social networks, such as work, family and local residential community, outside the fan community surrounding Aalborg Pirates are not engaged in the sport of hockey. J's fan identity seems to be more personally based than socially based, which indicates J's fandom is rooted in a need for togetherness (Stavros et al.: 2014; Jacobson: 2003). J also argue the good fan community around Aalborg Pirates is one of the reasons why he continues to be a fan and season ticket holder, and he has established deep friendships with other Aalborg Pirates fans. This is further confirmed by his international team, Krefeld Pinguine (German team). J's explained that one of the reasons why he became a fan of this particular hockey team was because of the other fans of the team.

As seen above, both B's and J's local fandom is heavily linked to geography, and research indicate geography and loyalty is linked (Phua: 2010; Watkins: 2013), as a sports team is often a symbolic representation of the social identification of community life (Heere & James: 2007 in Watkins: 2013; Jacobson: 2003). J stresses the point of the location of his local team and the emotional attachment associated with the team, because of the location. He argues he would never become a fan of another Danish hockey team if he moved to another city with a hockey team, which according to Kraszewaki (2008) is because that the team gives him a regional identity and ties him to the local community through the team (Collins et al.: 2016; Jacobson:

2003; Andrijiw & Hyatt: 2009). The same can be said for B. She expresses the same sentiment as J with regards to her connection and emotional attachment to the locality of Aalborg Pirates. Their attachment to Aalborg Pirates is bounded in a topophilic love for Aalborg (Bale: 2000), thus the physical venue of Aalborg Pirates (Crawford: 2004). Even as both of them qualify their love for their hometown of Aalborg as one of the main reason to follow Aalborg Pirates, along with the fan community, they have different reasons along with those two.

As discussed earlier, B's close social networks are also integrated into the fandom of hockey, and in particular Aalborg Pirates, which is an example of the traditional sense of community already found in existing research on local sport fans (Andrijiw & Hyatt: 2009; Collins et al.: 2016; Kraszewski: 2008), and she uses her fandom for her local home team as a type of social integration (Jacobson: 2003) as it provides her with a deeper sense of community and relations with other locals through their collective and continued support of Aalborg Pirates (Andrijiw & Hyatt: 2009; Collins et al.: 2016; Kraszewski: 2008) and by participating in collective activities associated with Aalborg Pirates, such as attending physical games, she gains a personal satisfaction (MacIntosh et al.: 2017; Jacobson: 2003; Rocca & Brewer: 2002). B clarified that attending games made her feel more connected to the fan community. With her non-local team, Pittsburgh Penguins, her connection to the team relies upon online fan communities, which substitute the traditional sense of community seen with her local team (Eagleman 2013; MacIntosh et al.: 2017; Krier: 2017). She said that her participation on the online fan communities, both official and non-official sites and platforms, was more about a shared interest in the sport and the team (eg. Pittsburgh Penguins) and players on the team than about connecting with other fans (MacIntosh et al.: 2017; Krier: 2017).

J deviates from the notion of local fandom linked to social networks, as his hockey fan community is separated from his other social networks, even if arguably, his commitment to Aalborg Pirates and its fan community is a major social network in his everyday life, as he is on the executive committee for the Aalborg Pirates fan club. J was introduced to the world of hockey fandom by a friend 22 years ago; thus a single social agent in his life and not a social network, which is the tendency seen with non-local fans in the existing academic literature (Krier; 2017; Jacobson: 2003; MacIntosh et al.: 2016; Collins et al.: 2016).

With J's non-local hockey team, Krefeld Pinguine, it is again the social agents

and not a social network that drives his continued support. J stated that it is his relationships with other fans of the team (eg. Krefeld Pinguine), and former Aalborg Pirates players traded to Krefeld that encourages his continued attention and fandom. J gives an example of why it is in particular individual players that makes him such a fan. He tells a story of a trip to Krefeld to watch a game in person, where he wrote to one of the former Aalborg Pirates player on the team and asked if he wanted to meet up for a cup of coffee and a chat at a local cafe, to which the player said yes and they met up.

As with J, B followed an individual player to her non-local team. It was a player, who was born and raised in Aalborg, although never played for the Aalborg Pirates, which is why another argument is that this connection J and B feels with former Aalborg Pirate players, or Danish hockey players in general in leagues in other countries, is seeded in regional and national identity they feel they share with the individual players they are fan of (Karszewski: 2008; Greenwood et al.: 2006). Both of them state that their choice of non-local professional hockey team was more or less accidental; as it was an individual player with Danish nationality they followed to the team, which then lead to team identification with their non-local teams (Watkins: 2013; Jacobson: 2003).

5.2. Sport Fan Identity – Social and Personal

When I asked J about how big a part his hockey fandom is of his overall identity, he answered very little. He explained he kept his hockey fandom separated from most of his other social networks, such as work and family, even if his seat on the executive committee counters this statement and he also stated that he breathes hockey 24/7 and the three months summer break was long; indicating hockey takes up a lot of his time and has become an important part of his everyday life, personal identity and self-concept (Kerr & Emery: 2011; Miller & Benkwitz: 2016; Watkins: 2013) as it gives J a sense of belonging (Reysen et al.: 2016) and togetherness (Jacobson: 2003) through his various endeavours with hockey. Furthermore, J was adamant that his life would not be the same without hockey, and he could not imagine giving it up, when I asked him if he could imagine his life without hockey; hence why J's hockey fandom arguably is a part of his personal identity, as well as social identity (Kerr & Emery: 2011; Miller & Benkwitz: 2016; Watkins: 2013; Meyer: 2014; Wann et al.: 2001). Watkins (2013) postulates that a sports team can be seen as an extension of the fan's

identity through the fan's continued supportive behaviour of the sports team and public displays of fandom, in this case Aalborg Pirates and Krefeld Pinguine with J, and Aalborg Pirates and Pittsburgh Penguins with B. Contrary to J, B gave high credence to her hockey fandom as part of her identity, both personal and social. She made no qualm that both her teams were important to her, and in particular her local team (eg. Aalborg Pirates) as several features of her identity and social networks is linked to it – her hometown, her family. This leaves little doubt B's support of Aalborg Pirates are vital parts of her identity (Watkins: 2013; MacIntosh et al.: 2017; Wann & Branscombe: 1993; Wann et al.: 2001).

With the evidence of a high level of team identification and deep fan identity to Aalborg Pirates in both B and J above, I was surprised by their lack of attachment to the team jersey, as prior research indicates otherwise (Baker: 2017). Both of them own several Aalborg Pirates jerseys, and stated they wore a jersey to most games, but neither one of them attributed wearing the jersey leading to a deeper connection with the team or other Aalborg Pirates fans. They both expressed their fandom as internal, which argues for how integrated their hockey fandom has become to their identity (Brewer: 2001; Miller & Benkwitz: 2016; Jacobson: 2003).

As explained in the research objectives, the goal of this study is also to investigate how a sport fan identifies with two different teams – a local and non-local team - through social media. This is being investigated as part of this study, because media allows for individuals and groups to express and construct identities through media consumption (Crawford: 2004; Georgiou: 2006) and social media is seen as an increasingly important part of professional sports (Watkins: 2013; Meyer: 2014; Riketta: 2008; Eagleman: 2013) and sports fandom (Phua: 2010; Schellenberg et al.: 2013; Clavio & Walsh: 2014).

5.3. Social Media and Sports Fandom

One of the criteria for the interviewees for this study was that they used social media, and both of them are avid users of social media, and in particular when it comes to their two favourite professional hockey teams. Both of them categorically follow both of their teams on all the social media platforms the teams utilise. Both of them expressed that their fandoms, and in particular their non-local hockey teams, were

established by their use of social media, whether it was on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube or official fan pages. They also both noted that their non-local team were more active on social media than Aalborg Pirates, which they appreciated, as it allows them to follow their non-local teams as intensively as they do their local team. Obviously, the Internet and social media allows for B and J to watch games of respectively Pittsburgh Penguins and Krefeld Pinguine online to the same extend that they attend Aalborg Pirates games physically, which according to Stavros et al. (2014) and Collins et al. (2016) means their use of social media with regard to their non-local team is higher than with their local team. However, when asked, both B and J answered they felt they used social media equally, when it came to searching for information about the teams and/or players, even if their non-local teams were more active on social media. B explained that there might be more contend on the Pittsburgh Penguins official social media platforms than Aalborg Pirates, but she sought out more information about Aalborg Pirates online than with the Pittsburgh Penguins, which counteracted the more active social media platforms of her non-local team. She estimated that on a daily basis it was about an equal amount of time she used on both teams. B was a fan of the little snippets into the players' everyday life social media provided, and made her feel closer to the team and the players, which in turn made her seek out more information and continue to interact with the team and players through social media, and made her excitement bigger when attending Aalborg Pirates games (Kerr & Emery: 2011; Heere & James: 2007; Watkins: 2013). J was similar, but different from B, he used Twitter as his primary social media platform, as he felt it allowed him to interact more directly with both his favourite teams and favourite players. This is an example of Crawford's (2004) argument that the Internet has rendered the distance irrelevant to the sports fans, and with the example of J's story of contacting a player directly through social media, it proves that social media leads to a higher degree of interaction between fans and teams and/or players (Greenwood et al.: 2006; Collins et al.: 2016; MacIntosh et al.: 2017; Watkins: 2013; Krier: 2017), that then leads to a higher team identification (Greenwood et al.: 2006; MacIntosh et al.: 2017; Collins et al.: 2016), which is the goal of any sports organisation (Tsiotsou: 2013; Eagleman: 2013; Kerr & Emery: 2011; Heere & James: 2007).

     As mentioned previously, B participate with several online Pittsburgh Penguins fan communities, and prior research has found that actively engaging on

online fan communities facilitate a deeper commitment and identification with a sport fan's favourite team (MacIntosh et al.: 2017). B stated she actively engage and comment on the social media platforms of both her teams, which is a way for her to display her fan identities (MacIntosh et al.: 2017; Krier: 2017; Clavio & Walsh: 2014; Stavros et al.: 2014), as it is public displays of fandom (Wann & Branscombe: 1993; Watkins: 2013).

J said he did not comment much on either Aalborg Pirates or Krefeld Pinguine's social media, but his way of displaying his fandom for both teams were done through his Facebook blog, which is a highly public display of fandom and fan identity. Arguably, dedicating a blog to his fandom is both a way for J to distinguish himself from the rest of the fan community around both teams (Andrijiw & Hyatt: 2009), but it is also a demonstration of his social identity as a fan (MacIntosh et al.: 2017; Watkins: 2013; Meyer: 2014).

Social media has provided teams with the opportunity to engage actively and directly with sports fans, and for fan-to-fan communication beyond the traditional notion of geographical co-presence (MacIntosh et al.: 2017; Watkins: 2013; Krier: 2017). Eagleman (2013) hypothesised interacting with other fans of one's sport team or the sports team itself through social media increases a fan's identification with the sports team. As discussed earlier in this chapter, both of the interviewees claim the fan communities play a significant part in their overall fandom of both teams, and in particular their local team (eg. Aalborg Pirates), because their love for the sports and their teams, as well as individual hockey players are best enjoyed in a collective setting, both in the physical and virtual world. B subscribed to both official and unofficial fan sites on the Internet and official and unofficial social media platforms for both teams, as both provided her with the interaction. She used the official sites and platforms to communicate and interact with both the local and non-local the sports teams and the players, which prior research on sports fandom has shown that the fans trust (Nisar & Whitehead: 2016; Stavros et al.: 2014). B used the unofficial sites and platforms she mostly used as fan-to-fan communication, which created a stronger identification to the team through the discussion of the teams and the players on the teams with other fans (Watkins: 2013; Greenwood et al.: 2006; Collins et al.: 2016). J's facebook blog is a prime example of an unofficial online platform that provides a fan community with fan-to-fan communication and without geographical restraints.

5.4. Marketing Recommendation for Aalborg Pirates

As mentioned in the start of this chapter, both B and J have strong team identification with their two favourite professional hockey team; this is what previous studies, such as Collins et al. (2011), Stavros et al. (2014) have argued should be the goal for a sports organisation to stimulate in their fans, and I do not dispute that, as I assume for this study that the participants already has a strong team identification. Such stimuli can be utilised through social media as it provides sports fans with direct contact to their favourite sports teams and players (Watkins: 2013) as the devoted fans (eg. fan with strong team identification) is more invested in an actual relationship with the team and they will engage and communicate actively with the organisation and other fans (Stavros et al.: 2014; Watkins: 2013; Crawford: 2004).

A way for Aalborg Pirates to promote and achieve higher team identification amongst the fan base is through an official fan page, as it can be an online platform for fans to "express their specialist knowledge, frustration and expectations in relation to team management and tactics" (Stavros et al.: 2016: 466) and from a managerial perspective an official fan page is a way to ensure the information the fan base receive is coming directly from the organisations or the team itself (Hunt et al.: 1999; Watkins: 2013; Stavros et al.: 2014; Nisar & Whitehead; 2017: Crawford: 2004; Eagleman: 2013), thus encouraging further interaction between fans and team, players, training staff and management (Phua: 2010). Both B and J expressed their grievance that Aalborg Pirates does not have an official fan page for which fans can connect and for fans to contact either the team, the players or the management.

Another important point is the loyalty a fan shows his or her favourite team, because fans expect the same level of loyalty from their sports team (Jacobson: 2003), as team identification is part of a fans self-concept and a fan will endeavour to maintain a membership of their favourite sports team and its fan community (Hunt et al.: 1999; Foster & Hyatt: 2008 in MacIntosh et al.: 2017). J made a point to criticising Aalborg Pirates for not returning the loyalty to the fans that was showed the team. He pointed to the lack of events, contests, the minimal use of social media and lack of information on the team and its players on the webpage. He feels Aalborg Pirates are forgetting the fan base. It is also the responsibility of the sports organisation around a professional hockey team such as Aalborg Pirates to ensure that continued fan loyalty (Nisar & Whitehead: 2016; Eagleman: 2013). Clavio & Walsh

(2014) and Tsiotsou (2013) recommend providing incentives, such as promotions, giveaways, exclusive meet and greets with players and coaches; thus showing an investment in the fans. B and J both emphasized on the accessibility of the Aalborg Pirates player and they both really liked how players were always ready to chat or meet fans after each home game, but simultaneously, they also both expressed a wish for more formal meet and greet between fans and training staff to ask question to the team as a whole and in particular to the training staff. Furthermore, they wanted events or even just promotion exclusively offered to season ticket holders, as they felt their loyalty was not being rewarded and appreciated.

As mentioned above, an official fan page is a recommended way to ensure loyalty, and a way to further both fan interaction is through social media, which a two-way communication tool, especially with the younger segment of the fan community in mind (Abeza et al.: 2015; Meyer: 2014; MacIntosh et al.: 2017), and because it creates a deeper connection to the team for the fans (Watkins: 2013; Greenwood et al.: 2006; Collins et al.: 2016), especially as it also offers the opportunity for fan-to-fan interaction, which both J and B uses to create stronger bonds within the fan community and to express their fandom in a online social setting.

However, the social media platforms need to be actively utilised by the management, the team itself and the staff surrounding the team for it to be successful (Nisar & Whitehead: 2016; Stavros et al.: 2014; Watkins: 2013; Krier: 2017). Both B and J argued that they would like to see better communication between the management and the fans. B argued that even though the management answers most questions asked on social media, the management is not taking any fan suggestions to heart about new incentives, which she thinks diminishes the overall fan experience. Even though B's fandom is dominantly centred around the fan community, she volunteers for the sports organisation at home games, and her critique of the Aalborg Pirates organisation can be seen as problematic, as her status as opinion-leader makes her a valuable asset to the organisation from a marketing perspective.

Additionally, there needs to be relevant content in the forms of video clips, games still, player information to live chats as contend for social media to generate positive responses from fans (Stavros et al.: 2014; Watkins: 2013) to mobile apps, which make chat during games possible (Watkins: 2013) and Twitter handlers (MacIntosh et al.: 2017).

J's pointed to the lack of activity on Aalborg Pirates' social media outlets, and

so did B, but she also pointed to several features she liked on Aalborg Pirates' social media. She liked the Snapchat feature where a player had the official Aalborg Pirates' Snapchat for the day. This is a feature the abovementioned referenced research point to as a way to encourage further fan-to-player interaction and to create higher team identification, and it is also a way to personalise and humanise the communication from the team to the fans (MacIntosh et al.: 2017). A further use of individual players from Aalborg Pirates for the team's social media content is recommended as it both can attract new fans (Watkins: 2013), but also generate more highly identified fans, as team fandom can start off with a single player and lead to team identification (Watkins: 2013), which both B and J are proof of with their non-local teams.

Additionally, the use of social media outlets from the team creates fan community outside the sport team's home venue, where a relationship marketing tool is beneficial, especially if constituted through opinion leaders within the fan community (Stavros et al.: 2014; Dahlén: 2010) through micro-dialogues (Fieseler, Fleck & Meckel: 2010 in Stavros et al.: 2014). The two interviewee's status as opinion-leader makes them a prime target for any kind of marketing strategies, but especially for social media marketing strategies, as they are *influencer* in the fan community (Dahlén et al.: 2010) and can work as positive reinforcements for Aalborg Pirates marketing to already established fans, if done right (Dahlén et al.: 2010; Stavros et al.: 2014). Tsiotsou (2013) argue that relationship marketing would be the best use for professional sports teams as this marketing strategy helps the consumers to "find self-expressive value in the team, trust it and feel attached to it" (Tsiotsou: 2013: 466). Additionally, Tsiotsou (2013) also recommends relationship marketing to facilitate team loyalty, because it is a suitable marketing tool to develop loyalty on a longitudinal level, which can be utilised in a social media aspect.

In continuation of B's love of the Aalborg Pirates Snapchat featuring individual players, J suggested he would love for players to post a little about themselves on any of the social media outlets for the team, so that fans would feel closer to the players and feel like they know the players a little, in addition to their hockey statistics. Generally speaking, both of the interviewee's expressed a wish for more content on all Aalborg Pirates' social media outlets. J argued for Aalborg Pirates, and the Danish hockey league in general, to get inspiration from other European hockey teams' use of social media and general public relations. B also argued that some of the uses of social media she sees with the Pittsburgh Penguins,

such as player information and games pictures, could be transferable to an Aalborg context and utilised to generate more contend on Aalborg Pirate's social media outlets.

Another point it the favour of social media is the relative low cost of making relevant content, as a mobile phone can be utilised to produce most of the content (Ryan & Jones: 2012 in Nisar & Whitehead: 2016), making it ideal for the smaller and less financial secure sports, leagues and teams (Eagleman: 2013), such as Aalborg Pirates.

Moreover, B argued for a more community-based approach to the team's self-promotion and marketing, which according to Hunt et al. (1999) is the ideal way to target the local, devoted fan. Hunt et al. (1999) posited that showing the investment a sports team has in the local community would enable fans to create and/or maintain team identification. Again, B argues for Aalborg Pirates to take a look to the NHL (National Hockey League) in America. An example could be to have the Aalborg Pirates players go to the public skating rink and interact with the locals there.

Lastly, neither B nor J made use of the official Aalborg Pirates webpage, because it is often not updated, as J said. As discussed earlier, to secure higher levels of team identification it is beneficial for a sports organisation to establish a higher level of security in the information flow (Hunt et al.: 1999; Watkins: 2013; Stavros et al.: 2014; Nisar & Whitehead; 2017: Crawford: 2004; Eagleman: 2013), which according to B and J the sports organisation around Aalborg Pirates fails to do or more than one level.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate how knowledge of a sports team's fans' social identity from two teams, local and non-local, could be transferred into applicable marketing recommendations for Aalborg Pirates.

6.1. Research objective 1:

B's and J's sport fans identities prove Jacobson's (2003) hypothesis of a sport fan identity being generated through group membership, and an individual's social relationships. Both the fan community around both their local and non-local sports team and their individual distinctiveness heavily influenced their social identities. It was also evident that they had different social identity with the two teams, and they thought of their teams as different; hence the shift in social identity. Their engagement on their non-local teams' social media also varied from their local teams, which was expected, but surprisingly both of them stated that they used about the same amount of time on the teams' social media outlet, if one discount game streaming.

Non-surprisingly, both of them emphasized on the importance of the fan community and attending games with the local team, where the emotional attachment was rooted in the geographical locality, whereas their loyalty non-local teams were generated through either a former Aalborg Pirates player being traded to a new team, or a ice hockey player born and raised in the local area going to a foreign league.

6.2. Research objective 2:

By identifying specific brand-related consequences of using social media, the current project makes an important contribution to the literature on social media, branding, and relationship marketing strategies. Practically, this study provides sport brand managers at Aalborg Pirates with insights into how they can increase social identification of fans with the team and what to expect in terms of fans' use of social media.

Generally speaking, more activity on Aalborg Pirates' social media outlets was wished from B and J, and from an academic perspective, prior research establish the need and use of social media as a criterion for success in creating a higher level of team identification, thus generating more revenue for a professional sports team.

Another important aspect of social media is the fan-to-player and player-to-fan interaction, which B and J found to be their favourite aspect of following their two teams on social media, which indicates that this feature should be a primary content on Aalbogr Pirates' social media platforms to produce team identification in fans.

6.3. Limitations and Challenges

Every research encounters some form of limitations and challenges. This study is limited by having only 2 Aalborg Pirates fans, and subsequent opinion-leaders. Ideally, there would have been a higher number of participants as a way to ensure a higher level of credibility to the findings and given a wider, or at least deeper perspective to the findings and discussion.

6.4. Future Research

The scope and extend of this study was small, thus the findings should not be considered conclusive, but merely an indication of how interconnected fan identity is with both the use of social media and attending live matches and how that interacts with a fan's connection to a professional sports team. Future research should delve deeper into this aspect.

Further research should also be on opinion-leaders and relationship marketing within the context of sports fandom on social media platforms, as it to a large extend remains unexplored. Additionally, it could prove beneficial to a sports organisation to have knowledge of how the general populating of a fan base make use of opinion-leaders as their source of information about a professional sports team.

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Appendix 1

Questions for interview

Why are you a fan? Different from being a mere spectator?

When did you become a fan of the two teams? And why?

    Local – born locally?

    International – why that team?

    Is Aalborg based on being easy access or?

Is the reason for you following the two teams personal or familial or other?

The importance and meaning of venue?

    Local vs. non-local team

Is the local team more 'home'? why?

    How does the two teams differentiate to you? Are they both 'home'?

How to you categorize yourself with the two teams?

    Why the different categorisation?

    Assimilation vs. differentiation?

Do you see yourself as part of the collective of the two teams?

    Aalborg Pirates vs international team

    Does it change if you wear a jersey or not?

Do you categorize 'fan' as being part of your identity?

How is your fan identity different from the two teams?

    How does the local and non-local element play in?

Do you have a particular identity with your fandom?

Do you think of your fandom as a performance in social settings?

How much does your fandom play in your life? Personal and social?

How do you maintain your fan identity? Both teams?

Is your fan identity as/more important as your other identities?
    Such as work, gender, etc

Could you conceive not being a fan of your teams? Why/why not?

Which team is the most important to you? Why?

Do you see yourself as part of the team? Or 'only' a part of the fan group?
    Do you think you belong with the fan group? Local and non-local
        How do you feel you belong?
        How to you maintain your sense of belonging?

Do you feel like you're being 'cared' for by the team as a fan?

How do you see the fan base as a community for your two teams?
    Are your teams a community to you?

Who do you think categorize as a fan?
    Does your criteria differ for local vs. non-local

Is your social network interconnected with your hockey fandom? Friends and families?
    Local vs. non-local? How to do they differ?

How often would you say you attend games? Local and non-local

Do you identify more with a team as your engagement with the team evolves?
    If you didn't participate, would you feel like a fraud?

Live games vs. TV?

Do you feel displaced from your international team? Why /Why not?

Are you a more devoted fan to your international team, than your local team?
Why/why not?

What do you get out of being a fan?

How do you see your loyalty to the teams?
Is the loyalty different with the two teams?
Would social media strengthen your loyalty?

Are there other labels/identities that you would label together with your fan identity?
Gender, familial ties (mum, dad, sister…)

Is your fandom influenced from external factors? Which? SM?

Do you connect best with the team in general or a specific player?

Is the history with your team important to you?

Social media

Which Social Media outlet do you use?
Which social media do you follow your teams on?

How often do you use social media to connect with your team? Daily/weekly?

Is social media more important with the local or non-local?
Why?

How are the two teams different on social media?

How do you use social media in connection with your sport teams?

How does the use differentiate with the two teams?

What do you miss with social media? Both teams

Do you feel you get an emotional connection to the teams through social media?

Why/why not? What is missing?

Do you miss the lack of social media with Aalborg Pirates?

Local vs. non-local

Do you use social media as a way to connect with other fans from the two teams?

Is it more important for you to connect with local or non-local fans?

Why?

How do you talk to other fans (Aalborg & International) through social media?

Do you think social media helps you connect to your teams?

Do you feel you get the same experience at home on the TV as you do going to a game?

How is the experience different with the two teams?

Both on TV and attending games?

Do you see social media use from the team as a bonus? Or?

Would you like to see more on social media from the teams?

And what?

Do you participate in your teams' social media?

Do you comment? Other?

How do you see social media as a way for fans and teams to connect?

With Aalborg: where do you seek out your information if not through social media?