A grounded theory of football fan community identity and co-production: Consumer roles in brand culture, meaning, and value co-creation in virtual communities

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This study attempts to theorize why and how consumers consume. Using a combined methodology, drawing upon Netnography and Grounded Theory, to study an online fan forum, a Virtual Community (VC) called RedAndWhiteKop, this thesis considers brand culture/meaning and value co-creation. The research site is a VC containing football fans who are viewed as stakeholders of the organisation Liverpool Football Club. Following emergent fit occurring with woven in literature streams found in managerial marketing as service-dominant logic (SDL) and the consumer research field known as consumer culture theory (CCT), analysis is conducted on fan consumer behaviour leading to the submission of a Typology of Seven Consumer Community Cultural Co-creative Roles. The author reflects on existing theoretical consumer responses to market offerings of *exit, voice, loyalty,* and *twist*, found in extant literature; adopting these as four co-creative roles. This study contributes three new consumer co-creative roles of *entry, re-entry,* and *non-entry*. This study's findings are intended to follow an interpretive cultural anthropological axiology, attempting to provide context and time bounded interpretations of this setting rather than immutable laws or truths. Managerial implications of the typology are discussed. A key challenge for managers and marketers is awareness of these roles. This is potentially achievable through listening to online VCs, seeking ways to enhance brand value and service provision. This study finds that fans are continuously co-creating/co-producing Liverpool FC brand community culture together on places like the VC RedAndWhiteKop (RAWK). This appears to be occurring largely in separation from the brand company itself and is referred to in this study as 'Coincidental Co-creation'. However, this study finds agreement with much CCT and SDL that encourages greater interaction and dialogical relations between suppliers and consumers. This is possible through better online engagement or virtual dialogue, with stakeholders such as consumers, pursuing the management-role of 'Collaborative Co-creation.'

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SUMMARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFC	=	Association Football Club
BBC	=	British Broadcasting Corporation
CAQDAS	=	Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CCT	=	Consumer Culture Theory
CR	=	Consumer Research
DCU	=	Dublin City University
ESPN	=	Entertainment Sports Programming Network
FA	=	The Football Association (England)
FC	=	Football Club
FIFA	=	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
FSA	=	Football Supporters Association (United Kingdom)
FSG	=	Fenway Sports Group
GT	=	Grounded Theory
LFC	=	Liverpool Football Club
MMC	=	Monopolies and Mergers Commission (United Kingdom)
Ooter	=	Liverpool Fan not from Liverpool city or area
PM	=	Personal/Private Message (facility on web-forums)
RAWK	=	http://www.redandwhitekop.com
SDL	=	Service-dominant logic
ShareLFC	=	Share Liverpool Football Club
SOS	=	Spirit of Shankly
UEFA	=	Union of European Football Associations
VC	=	Virtual Community

CHAPTER 1.   INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT & THESIS

1.1   BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

This chapter offers three lenses with which to view this study: theoretical; substantive; and methodological. These are introduced in this section and detailed throughout the chapter to give justification for this research and approach.

1.11   Theoretically

The Internet's explosive growth is leading to new relationship realities for businesses, their stakeholders, and consumer culture (Kozinets 2009). Branding research on virtual/online brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001) is required to clarify the *culture/meaning*- and *value- -co-creative roles* played by consumers as stakeholders.

The inseparability of culture and consumption is recognised (McCracken 1986; Slater 1997; Arnould & Thompson 2005; Schroeder & Salzer-Morling 2006; Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg 2006). It has led to growth of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) broadly addressing the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption contexts (Geertz 1973; Arnould & Thompson 2005). Traditional, utilitarian perspectives are questioned (Sherry 1991; Belk, 1995; Slater 1997; Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000). "People buy goods not only for what they can do, but also for what they mean" (Levy 1959 p. 118) (see also Veblen 1899; Barber & Lobel 1952; Holman 1981; Solomon 1983).

Following CCT, this thesis takes a distributed view of cultural meaning (Hannerz 1992; Arnould & Thompson 2005). Consumers' own meanings are central (McCracken 1990; Sherry 1991). The decision to research a group of football fans comes somewhat from other CCT research, which has shown how tribal aspects of consumption are quite pervasive (Maffesoli 1996; Arnould & Thompson 2005; Cova *et al.* 2007). In measuring fan culture and producing anthropological or interpretive CCT, this thesis' theory is seen as epistemologically context dependent and idiographic (Geertz 1973; Hudson & Ozanne 1988; Arnould & Thompson 2005). This context is located on a geographically unbounded online forum - a deterritorialized space (Clifford & Marcus 1986; Hannerz 2003; Bettany 2007).

Hence, what follows in this thesis is a provisional position, a theory, or cultural analysis, that is open to change, not any ultimate 'truth' or privileged findings (see also Geertz 1973; Jacoby 1985; Anderson, P. F. 1988; Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000). Hence, the grounded theory (GT) method is utilised, with empirical material used to formulate an emergent argument making a case for a particular, interpreted ontological position or understanding of social reality, in the context of a never-ending hermeneutic debate (Ricoeur 1976; 1981; Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy 1988; Hudson & Ozanne 1988; Arnold & Fischer 1994; Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000 p. 276; Charmaz 2005).

1.12 Substantively

Substantive cultural context is focal; football fandom of the English Premier League online, as displayed on the Liverpool Football Club (LFC) independent fan website RedAndWhiteKop (RAWK) [http://www.redandwhitekop.com]. See Chapter 3 for detail on RAWK. Football's vast cultural and economic global importance (Giulianotti 2005; Richardson & Turley 2006; 2007; Richardson 2007) coupled with the uniqueness of fandom as a consumption phenomenon (Hamil 1999; Brown 2007; also note, uniqueness of fandom is explored in Chapter 2) emphasises the requirement for CCT of this industry.

1.13   Methodologically

1.131   Naturalistic Study of Fan Culture

Following Geertz (1973 p. 5) and CCT (e.g. Sherry & Kozinets 2001 p. 172), "culture" is taken to refer to webs of significance that man is suspended in, that he himself has spun. This culture or everyday lifeworld on RAWK is to be explicated (Geertz 1973; Sherry & Kozinets 2001). To do this, this study utilises cultural anthropological inspiration from Geertz (1973), data analytic techniques and theory development guidelines of GT (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Glaser 1998), and the hermeneutic philosophical approach (Geertz 1974; Ricoeur 1981; Arnold & Fischer 1994; Thompson, Pollio & Locander 1994; Thompson 1997; Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000). These inform a combined method of participant observation and interviewing by which the researcher investigates, ethnographically, fan consumer culture in a 'naturalistic' online context (Belk, Sherry & Wallendorf 1988; Sherry & McGrath 1989).

This research is undertaken without the perspective that there is one best way to carry it out (Glaser 1978 p. 3; Jacoby 1985). The author notes diversity in consumer research (CR) philosophical perspectives, epistemological assumptions, methodological approaches, and substantive foci. Alternative approaches to the present study may produce strong findings too (Jacoby 1985). In this thesis, fans' consumption symbolism is analysed through interpreting fans' own narrative of their consumption, via RAWK, to derive their consumer cultural meaning(s) (Geertz 1973; Rabinow & Sullivan 1979; Sherry 1991; Hirschman & Holbrook 1992; Thompson 1997).

1.132   Ethnography

This ethnographic study involves "inscribing" social discourse, capturing the meaning, lived experience, and culture of LFC fandom on RAWK (Geertz 1973; Forsey 2010 p. 567). These meanings are contextually situated and embedded (Hudson & Ozanne 1988; Sherry & Kozinets 2001; Charmaz 2005). This study focuses on describing 'how' social life works, what fans are doing, why, and how, through deep contact and observation.

1.133   Grounded Theory

GT aims for "discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research" (Glaser & Strauss 1967 p. 2). GT tools may be used from any philosophical perspective (Charmaz 2005 p. 531). It is a systematic research approach that facilitates rigorous analysis of social data for the purpose of generating explanatory theory with transparent origin in the social context(s) under study (Chenitz & Swanson 1986; Coyne 1997). In this study, it has allowed for inductive discovery of a theory of football fan consumption experiences online, without prior hypotheses. The aim is for GT emergence rather than verification (Glaser & Strauss 1967), in an attempt to avoid highly abstract sociology that the 'hypothetico-deductive' approach encourages (Abercrombie *et al.* 2006). The 'classical', or 'orthodox', approach to GT (Andriopoulos & Lowe 2000; Giske & Artinian 2007) contained in Glaser & Strauss (1967), and followed by Glaser (1978; 1992; 1998) is the predominant 'variant' (Wasserman *et al.* 2009) used in this thesis. Alternative GT styles exist, following traditions such as feminism, constructionism, postmodernism, and postconstructivism (e.g. Strauss & Corbin 1990; Charmaz 2005; Clarke 2005). They are not closely adopted, but elements overlap, with particular secondary influences coming from Charmaz's (2005, 2006) constructivist revisions. As Glaser (1978 p. ix) says, GT has many

meanings and there are many possibilities for ordering GT research given its status as ever-opening and evolving.

1.134   Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is an important facet of much interpretive CCT. It is concerned with interpretation of understanding (Bleicher 1980; Bernstein 1983; Gadamer 1960; Arnold & Fischer 1994). Hermeneuticians take understanding itself as having an ontological status to be understood. Hermeneutics emphasises all understanding as linguistic and theorizes how one person may understand another utilising concepts such as preunderstanding/understanding, the hermeneutic circle, fusion of horizons, and self-understanding (Arnold & Fischer 1994).

Like GT, hermeneutics appears in various forms, including "objective" "hermeneutical theory" (Arnold & Fischer 1994 p. 56; Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000); critical theorist's "critical hermeneutics" (Arnold & Fischer 1994) or triple hermeneutics (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000); and "phenomenological hermeneutics" (Bleicher 1980; see also Ricoeur 1981). Here, the primary version sympathised with is "philosophical hermeneutics". It takes the position that interpretations are not decidable; understanding is not the objective re-cognition of an author's intended meaning (Gadamer 1960; Heidegger 1962; Connolly & Keutner 1988; Arnold & Fischer 1994 p. 56; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007 p. 12). It is a practical task whereby the interpreter is changed by becoming aware of new possibilities of what it is to be human (Arnold & Fischer 1994; see alethic hermeneutics in Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000). Avoiding modernist Cartesian subject-object dualisms, the focus is on the ontology of the interpreter and the continuous act of coming-into-understanding (Arnold & Fischer 1994; Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000).

1.135   No Absolute Epistemology

This research tends not to stick to one absolute philosophical or epistemological position. There are intended and unintended variations with other theorists' positions and multiple overlaps between philosophical, epistemological, and methodological standpoints (Miles & Huberman 1994 p. 4-5). This researcher attempts to detail how the methods and philosophical assumptions have been put in practice in actuality, while not claiming to have

perfected any one method or strictly adhered to any epistemology. The lines between epistemologies have become blurred (Miles & Huberman 1994 p. 5).

1.136   Qualitative

Sherry & Kozinets (2001) distinguish between quantitative and qualitative research while emphasising potential complementarity between them. Quantitative researchers tend to seek to remove, or reduce, the "merely subjective" in an attempt to get at what is "really real". Many qualitative researchers, meanwhile, chafe at the notion of "merely objective" research and findings, emphasising that subjectivity is central to interpretive understanding and interpersonal interaction (ibid). This study is qualitative.

Of Miles & Huberman's (1994) three streams of qualitative research, this researcher, like Kozinets (2009), straddles both the position of an *interpretive* researcher, utilising the teachings of hermeneutics, and the position of a *social anthropologist,* given how the methods used are ethnography and GT; *collaborative social research* is not the approach. *Interpretivists* view human activity as a "text", with various symbols expressing layers of meaning (Ricoeur 1976; 1981; Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy 1988; Miles & Huberman 1994). Interpretivists do not aim towards covering laws, but rather understanding of meaning and actions, from the point of view of an interactive, cooperative, "non-detached" researcher (Hudson & Ozanne 1988; Miles & Huberman 1994; Sherry & Kozinets 2001; see also Charmaz's 2005 constructivist GT). *Social anthropology* is "naturalist" research. Many interpretations of data are possible. Analysis is done mostly with words. A primary task is to explicate the ways people come to understand, account for, and take action in their day-to-day situational contexts (Miles & Huberman 1994; Katz 2002). It usually involves intense, prolonged contact with research participants in the "field" (Miles & Huberman 1994). The researcher, as the main instrument of measurement, attempts to attain an ontologically "holistic" overview of the context under study (Hudson & Ozanne 1988; Miles & Huberman 1994; Connell & Lowe 1997 p. 166; Sherry & Kozinets 2001).

Similarly, following Hudson & Ozanne's (1988) discussion of various types of interpretivism, this study finds most sympathy with Geertz (e.g. 1973). Geertz emphasises the importance of understanding meanings using idiographic knowledge drawn from a setting (Hudson & Ozanne 1988). Geertz sees scientific or interpretive depictions of reality

as largely determined by perceptions; there is not one reality to be captured in an unbiased neutral way, rather a multiplicity of interpretations. Also, Geertz's (e.g. 1973) focus on group culture in context is apposite as an approach for this RAWK study (see also Hudson & Ozanne 1988).

1.137   A Combined Method

The combination of these methods (GT and ethnography) and philosophical standpoints (cultural anthropology/ethnography of Geertz and hermeneutics) is recommended by Kozinets (2009) and others in CR:

- See Pettigrew (2000), Hammersley & Atkinson (2007), and Goulding (2002) regarding ethnography and GT.
- Hirschman & Thompson (1997) combine Geertzian ethnography and GT.
- Geertz (1974) places Geertzian anthropology in the domain of hermeneutic approaches (see also Thompson 1997; Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000).
- Goulding (2002), Epp (2008), and Connell & Lowe (1997 p. 166) relate phenomenology/hermeneutics and GT.
- Hammersley & Atkinson (2007) link ethnography, GT, and hermeneutics.
- Sherry & Kozinets (2001) discuss qualitative research that utilises hermeneutic analysis that proceeds via a constant comparative method to produce a Geertzian ethnographic "thick description" that emerges from data using GT.
- Pongsakornrungsilp (2010) and Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder (2011) combine netnography and hermeneutics.
- Arnold & Fischer (1994) link hermeneutics to various methods.

Kozinets' (2009) Netnography is fundamental to this study's method. Collectively, these methods fit the worldview of the researcher and his personal preferences (Guba & Lincoln 1994; Knafl 1994; Annells 1996; Goulding 2002; Leavy 2011).

1.2   RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Philosophically, the aims and underpinning position of cultural anthropology and hermeneutics are core here (Geertz 1973; 1974; Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000). The culture of RAWK, its meaning, is to be understood and related to CCT. Football fandom is an ideal

site for formulating CCT (Richardson 2007; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010), given the complexity of its consumer culture. This complexity leaves it open to many interpretations. This thesis' interpreted theory answers the following research questions:

- **1.** How can we investigate football fan consumption experience(s) and culture/meaning online?
- **2.** Why do fans use RAWK to consume LFC?
- **3.** How do football fans on RAWK consume LFC?
- **4.** How do these roles and related culture, experience, and emotions have implications for management, marketing, and CR?

More detail is provided on these questions in Chapter 3. Following GT, no prior hypotheses are adopted to avoid forcing (Glaser 1978 p. 3; 1992). The author recognises the need for empirical foundation and compelling evidence when constructing theory, rather than a priori theory verification (Charmaz 2005 p. 512). This is further detailed in section 1.4, where the inductive methodology of this study is described. It follows the concurrently emergent objectives and justifications contained in section 1.3.

1.3   JUSTIFICATION FOR RESEARCH

1.31   The Gap to be Filled

Fandom is a peculiar form of 'consumption' (Hamil 1999; Kozinets 2001) and so warrants 'thick description' (Geertz 1973; Sherry & McGrath 1989; Sherry 1990) of its varying forms in varying contexts. A primary thesis aim is to respond to calls in prior literature for gap-filling 'macro consumer research' (Belk 1987a) that investigates 'the messy contextual details of consumer life' (Holt 1997) to contribute to CCT's conversational vernacular (Rorty 1979; Arnould & Thompson 2007) - the discourse surrounding consumption in all its forms, given the hermeneutic ideal of the dialogic community (Arnold & Fischer 1994). To do this, the author responds to prior literature calls for CR on fandom generally (see Belk 1987a; Kozinets 1997; 2001; Holt 1995; Brown 2007; Richardson 2007), using inductive GT (Glaser & Strauss 1967) insights from RAWK.

This thick description focuses on the study's participants', RAWK members, grounded main concern, which is found to be 'community membership and co-creation' of the 'brand

meaning' and culture of LFC (Bengtsson & Ostberg 2006). Why fans consume is further elaborated through discovery of abstract consumer goals. This thesis explains how fans attempt to resolve their grounded main concern through engagement with various co-creative roles contained in a *Typology of Consumer Roles* (the core category). This GT is thus the core theoretical contribution. This theory fills a gap largely because CR literature is intrinsically incomplete (Locke & Golden-Biddle 1997). This is because consumption contexts continually change and contextual interpretations are always inherently incomplete (Hudson & Ozanne 1988).

Specifically, theoretical links between co-creation of consumer/brand community, consumer/brand meaning/culture, consumer/brand identity, consumer/brand value, and brand success, represents an under-developed area within CCT. It is central to this thesis' contribution. So, the *typology of consumer co-creative roles* is submitted as a vehicle to assist understanding fan behaviour through relating this GT (Glaser & Strauss 1967) with extant theory (the gap to be filled), particularly that in CCT and service dominant logic (SDL) (Vargo & Lusch 2004) (as detailed in Chapter 2). SDL relates here given its focus on consumer centric understandings, firm-consumer relationships, and co-creation of value.

If calls for papers from prominent journals within business, marketing, and CR may be viewed as justification for carrying out research that reports findings that relate to said calls for papers, then this thesis can be seen to correspond with a 2010 *Journal of Business Research* (JBR) call for papers contained at **Appendix A**. A summary of this thesis has been accepted for publication in this issue of JBR (Healy & McDonagh forthcoming). See also, **Appendix B** for more similar calls.

1.32   Research Objectives

Research objectives changed and emerged (Glaser & Strauss 1967) to become [See Chapter 3 for further detail on study aims]:

- To investigate *why* fans consume by taking a holistic view of consumption on RAWK.
- To understand *how* fans consume.

- To investigate how CCT (Arnould & Thompson 2005) relates to this theory of football fan consumption culture.
- To outline the managerial implications of the findings of this thesis both academically (e.g. to SDL) and practically (e.g. to LFC management).

1.4   METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH & KEY ASSUMPTIONS: ONTOLOGY, AXIOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY

A primary contribution is the combination of methodological devices, Netnography, GT, email interviews, hermeneutic data-analysis, and Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software NVivo, all laid out in the *Grounded Theory Online Ethnographic Process*; a four-stage approach detailed in Chapter 3. This allows the present author to provide an answer to Research Question 1. It may be broken down as follows:

1.401   Qualitative Interpretive

This study is qualitative interpretive (Beckmann & Elliott 2000; Hirschman 1986a; Hudson & Ozanne 1988; Levy 2005; 2006). It investigates football fans in virtual communities (VCs) (Chan & Li 2010; Kozinets 2009). This involves netnographic participant observation and member checking interviews (Kozinets 2009; see also Sherry & McGrath 1989) on RAWK. This facilitates generating a GT of fan experiences (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Goulding 2002; Follett 2009).

1.402   Grounded Inductive Exploratory

An inductive exploratory GT perspective (Hart 1998; Jupp 2006 p. 110) allowed novel interpretive "theory building" (Colquitt & Zapata-Phelan 2007) of online fan concerns. Produced theory should be credible, trustworthy, and plausible (Jupp 2006 p. 110).

1.403   Ontology, Epistemology, and Axiology of the Theory

Simonson *et al.* (2001) call this "substantive phenomena driven research which leads to theory development." Related theory is used as more data for constant comparison (literature weaving - Glaser 1998). So, this GT is, in the process of its generation, compared to extant theory (theory application/testing; Simonson *et al.* 2001; Colquitt & Zapata-Phelan 2007). Epistemologically, relevant literature sources are treated as repositories of

'ideas' rather than objective ontological 'truths' (Glaser 1978; Anderson, P. F. 1988; Hudson & Ozanne 1988; Giske & Artinian 2007). The ethnographic theory produced reflects Geertzian cultural anthropological axiological objectives; it is "not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (Geertz 1973 p. 5) (see Hudson & Ozanne 1988 for predominant axiological objective of interpretivism as opposed to positivism). This study sympathises with a naturalistic philosophy, which sees the social world as socially constructed rather than objectively determined (Connell & Lowe 1997; Lowe & Kuusisto 1999 p. 173). Thus, this study relies on closeness to the phenomenon in question rather than detachment.

1.404   RAWK as a Text to be Interpreted Hermeneutically

Following Geertz (1972; 1974), who draws upon hermeneutics, ontologically, RAWK is seen as a text to be interpreted to determine its multiple meanings (Geertz 1973; Ricoeur 1976; 1981). As the researcher derives a sense of the text, his self-knowledge and self-understanding change - fusion of horizons (Arnold & Fischer 1994). Ricoeur says (1981 p. 143) "to understand is to *understand oneself in front of the text*". Hermeneutic understanding involves self-understanding, self-reflection and self-development (Arnold & Fischer 1994 p. 59). As a human, the researcher is in a continuous ontological state of coming into understanding (Gadamer 1989; Arnold & Fischer 1994). The researcher's horizon, thus, continually shifts to varying degrees (Arnold & Fischer 1994). Epistemologically, in seeking understanding of the other (football fans), and the text (football fan consumption represented on RAWK), the researcher is simultaneously an other who is understanding himself and being understood (Arnold & Fischer 1994).

1.405   Qualitative, Grounded, Hermeneutic Interpretation

Moving away from a focus on grand theorizing that attempts to discover a universalizable single theory of consumer behaviour, CCT researchers have made a vast serialized contribution to knowledge that encourages embracing a multiplicity/plurality of perspectives or theories of consumption to be shared under one disciplinary umbrella (Levy 1959; 2006; Holbrook 1987; Lutz 1989; Firat & Venkatesh 1995; Simonson *et al.* 2001; Arnould & Thompson 2005; Solomon *et al.* 2006). Their ontology, thus, sees the nature of reality as multiple and contextual. A major reason for this pluralism is the cultural context-specific nature of consumption recognised by postmodern/interpretive perspectives as a

central epistemological assumption, as opposed to positivism (Hudson & Ozanne 1988; McCracken 1990; Sherry 1991; Arnould & Thompson 2005).

Hence, there is not one over-arching grand theory of consumption, which would discount all others, sought in this thesis. The aim is to provide a grounded interpretation recognizing that other theories may be equally epistemologically valid, provided methods are rigorous (Beckmann & Elliott 2000). The ontological nature of reality cannot be comprehensively and flawlessly captured in any theory, no matter how strong (Hirschman 1986a; Anderson, P. F. 1988; Hudson & Ozanne 1988).

The researcher also recognises research reflexivity through the importance of his presence in theory construction; the subjectivity of the researcher is a particularly prominent aspect of ethnographic studies (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000 p. 168). However, GT is practiced as closely as possible to the Glaserian perspective (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978; 1992; 1998) to focus on limiting the potential for findings to become entirely forced into researcher-pre-ordained theoretical frameworks (see also local-emergent research in Deetz 1996; and emergent research design in Sherry 1990 & Sherry & Kozinets 2001). This prevents undue theoretical contamination (Connell & Lowe 1997).

This may be viewed as exemplary of attempts to suspend or "bracket" preconceptions about the topics under discussion (Miles & Huberman 1994 p. 6). However, following Heidegger's hermeneutics (1962; see also Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000), it is recognised that when the researcher approaches RAWK, he brings his own (pre-)understanding of the world, or worldview, regardless of attempts not to (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000 p. 168; see also Humanism - Hirschman 1986a). Epistemologically, all knowledge and science rests on interpretations (Gadamer 1960; Bernstein 1983; Hekman 1986; Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy 1988). It is impossible to be 'empty-headed' (Arnold & Fischer 1994; Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000). We have a lens, all the time, through which we view the world. So, rather than attempt to be empty-minded, we can attempt to be as open-minded as possible by at least trying not to privilege our own pre-understandings through being reflexive at the outset and recognising the potential to completely bias the study and its findings (Connell & Lowe 1997). So, two ways not to privilege his own pre-understanding applied in this study are:

1) through avoiding adopting prior hypotheses and, also;

2) refusal to focus on related theory and literature in early research, as recommended by Glaser & Strauss (1967 p. 37) (see also Connell & Lowe 1997 p. 166).

Instead, this study begins with an early inductive emphasis on the data, the voice of fans (Glaser & Strauss 1967). This approach is similar to existential phenomenology (Arnold & Fischer 1994 p. 57). This method may be loosely compared to empiricism (Bryman 1988 p. 119). GT starts by gathering thorough empirical materials (Charmaz 2005 p. 511). Importantly, however, the fan-voice does not speak for itself (Thompson 1997; Denzin 1998). Nor is it a flawless reflection of reality; it is in itself a version or interpretation of reality, while also being a part of that reality, which is to be interpreted (Geertz 1973). Data is produced, not given. Researchers choose their "data". It is not just "there" to be "found" (Marsh 1988). So, a better comparison would be that this approach sympathises with constructionism (Gergen 1999; Charmaz 2005 p. 509) and interpretivism including philosophical hermeneutics and humanistic CR (Gadamer 1960; Hirschman 1986a; Hudson & Ozanne 1988; Jupp 2006 pp. 93-4).

1.406 Grounded Theoretical Sensitivity and Hermeneutic Pre-understanding in Analysis

This method requires observing RAWK and subsequent conversational interviews with RAWK members. These fans interpret and construct reality through living it and commenting on it and this study, in turn, interprets their interpretations (Geertz 1973; Charmaz 2005). Philosophical hermeneutics takes the position that pre-understanding [the researcher's horizon (Arnold & Fischer 1994 p. 63)] is essential, whilst acknowledging the potential limitations of it. But, it can enable rather than constrain the interpreter, who aims towards a hermeneutic understanding of the consumer, when the philosophy is followed rigorously (Arnold & Fischer 1994 p. 57). Following interpretivism, in this study, epistemologically, the relationship between researcher and researched is interactive and cooperative with no separation or dualism, privileged points of observation, or Archimedean vantage point (Giddens 1976; Lincoln & Guba 1985; Hirschman 1986a; Hudson & Ozanne 1988; Lutz 1989; Arnold & Fischer 1994; Sherry & Kozinets 2001; Charmaz 2005). Similarly, Glaser (1978) recognises the role played by researcher theoretical sensitivity, when it comes to theorizing social settings in GT. In this study,

theoretical sensitivity is aligned with hermeneutic pre-understanding. As grounded theorist, Charmaz (2005 p. 511), points out, data alone are insufficient - they must be informed by our theoretical sensitivity (see also Glaser 1978).

1.407   Empathy, Insight, and Actor-Oriented Thick Description

Empathy and insight into the meaning and culture of RAWK are aimed towards. Through empathy, we fill and enrich with inner meaning the thin shells of outward behaviour; thus meaning for acting subjects becomes central (Collingwood 1946/1992; Geertz 1973; Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000 p. 75). The output thesis uses ethnographic "thick description" in conjunction with GT procedures; mutually beneficial research traditions (Pettigrew 2000). To achieve understanding of rich layers of meaning, empathy is aimed towards, but, complete empathy, "einfülen", or Verstehen is unachievable (Geertz 1974). Hermeneutic philosophers believe it impossible to penetrate the subjectivity of the other, but we must attempt to understand them given the ideal of the dialogic community (Arnold & Fischer 1994 p. 57). According to Geertz (1973), the aim of anthropology is the enlargement of human discourse. This requires this study's formulations of fans' symbol systems to be actor-oriented. Descriptions of a culture must be cast in terms of the constructions we interpret natives placing upon what they live through - the formulae fans use to define what happens to them (Geertz 1973 p. 15).

1.408   Relationship between this Theory and 'Reality'

This anthropological knowledge of RAWK culture is not that culture. It is anthropological knowledge. The object of study is one thing and the study of it another (Geertz 1973 p. 15; see also Anderson, P. F. 1988). All attempts at representation of consumption culture through empathy must be made with acceptance that they are interpretations (Geertz 1973). More broadly, in CR, some refer to such an approach as critical relativism (Anderson, P. F. 1988). However, it is important to note that, like pragmatism, this position does not lead to radical relativism, as may be the case with more extreme versions of postmodernism (Corbin & Strauss 2008). A radical relativist position may take the view that because no version or interpretation can be fully proven, then no certainty about any given one can be assumed. Instead, along with the pragmatists, the position here is that this thesis' findings are, through argumentation, what the researcher knows theoretically about RAWK - but eventually it may be judged partly or even wholly wrong (Corbin & Strauss 2008). This

requires hermeneutic argumentation, "dialectical tacking", or assessing the "better guesses" about what is happening (Geertz 1973; 1974; Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy 1988; Arnold & Fischer 1994 p. 63).

1.409   The Hermeneutic Circle

The data used here are primarily qualitative [i.e. RAWK forum threads and member checking email interviews (along with literature; see Glaser 1998 - *all is data*)]. Data must be interpreted and coded (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Kozinets 2009). The tradition of hermeneutics (Heidegger 1962; Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy 1988; Thompson 1997; see *alethic hermeneutics* in Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000) and especially the hermeneutic circle (Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy 1988) are useful philosophically here (Thompson, Pollio, & Locander 1994 p. 433):

> [The process is] an iterative one in which a 'part' of the qualitative data (or text) is interpreted and reinterpreted in relation to the developing sense of the 'whole'. These iterations are necessary because a holistic understanding must be developed over time. Furthermore, initial understandings of the text are informed and often modified as later readings provide a more developed sense of the text's meaning as a whole.

1.41   From Induction to Abduction

The combination of netnography, GT, and hermeneutics is beneficial (Kozinets 2009). Alvesson & Skoldberg (2000) make strong connections between Geertz-ian (1973) anthropology and hermeneutics given their treatments of interpreting data as a means to understanding cultural meanings (see also Geertz 1974; Thompson 1997). Cultural anthropology involves explicating meaning by explicating explications (Geertz 1973 p. 9); disclosure or revelation (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000). Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy (1988) align Peirce's logic of abduction to the interpretive hermeneutic approach in CR, by which the particular details of textual signs suggest inferences concerning the nature of the case. These abductive inferences are then tested and possible revisions made based on further close examination of the textual evidence. So, while this research began inductively, abduction then proceeded to take over.

1.411 Geertz, Hermeneutics, and Grounded Theory

Geertz (1974 p. 43) aligns his cultural anthropological perspective with hermeneutics. He discusses the continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure in such a way as to bring both into view simultaneously. This means relentless oscillation between the particular incidents of data under analysis and the totality of the data under analysis within the context of RAWK (ibid):

> Hopping back and forth between the whole conceived through the parts which actualize it and the parts conceived through the whole which motivates them, we seek to turn them, by a sort of intellectual perpetual motion, into explications of one another…. [This is] the hermeneutic circle and my [Geertz] argument here is merely that it is central to ethnographic interpretation, and thus to the penetration of other people's modes of thought.

Geertz also draws upon the notion of 'explication de texte', a method that involves textual analysis, of poetry for example, via a similar format (Geertz 1974 p. 45):

> Understanding the form [of]…natives' inner lives is more like grasping a proverb, catching an allusion, seeing a joke - or, as I have suggested, reading a poem - than it is like achieving communion.

So, complete empathy, or full representation, or "communion" is impossible, but is the target here. It is important to note that GT also has its theory developmental roots in 'explication de texte' (see Glaser 1998 p. 24) - underlining the compatibility of GT & ethnography. This tallies with philosophical hermeneutics too (Gadamer 1960). The gap between the interpreter and the author of a "text" is bridged by the fusion of horizons. However, this gap cannot ever be completely bridged. A final, complete, "correct" interpretation is impossible. So, all interpretations are tentative and open to revision in the hermeneutic circle (Gadamer 1960; Abercrombie *et al.* 2006). As with all interpretivism in CR (e.g. humanism & hermeneutics), no objective truth is sought (Hirschman 1986a; Hudson & Ozanne 1988).

Similarly, this author, like Epp (2008), sees strong similarities between the hermeneutic circle and the constant comparative method, GT (Glaser & Strauss 1967). The constant comparative method involves comparing like with like in search of similarities and differences, emerging patterns and themes across incidents (Spiggle 1994; Goulding 2002;

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Pettigrew 2002; Muniz & Schau 2005). When the analyst reads a piece of data, he considers other knowledge of the substantive area (other data; abstractions from other data), in conjunction with his own theoretical sensitivity, and thus his emerging theoretical understanding of RAWK. This facilitates insights into the main concerns of fans and how these are related given similarities and differences in varying scenarios (Sherry & Kozinets 2001). Constant comparison literally means that everything is compared with everything all of the time (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Wasserman *et al.* 2009). Netnographic data on RAWK is compared with emails and personal messages (interviews). 'Newer' data is compared with older data. Codes and conceptual categories are compared with other data and also with other codes and conceptual categories (Charmaz 2006; Wasserman *et al.* 2009). Empirical data and concepts are compared with literature too.

1.5   OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

After this introduction, Chapter two provides the literature review. It traces the development of CCT. Football research is related to CR on identity, branding, marketplace communities and culture, and the process whereby consumer culture is created and controlled through a complex interplay between many parties, including football fans, clubs, marketers and more. SDL in marketing management is relevant principally regarding the co-creation of consumption meaning and value. Pivotal to what drives fan co-creation is a desire for success, community identity, and control, so these are explored. Facets of social theory, anthropology, and media/communications studies are drawn upon to help explain fandom and fan-use of the Internet.

Chapter three details the methods and research design - the Grounded Theory Online Ethnographic Process. It introduces five coding and analysis phases that led to discovery of the fan main concern (why fans consume) - *community membership and co-creation*.

Chapter four furthers the discussion surrounding data analysis and findings adding greater detail to the fan main concern and its resolving through the core category of a *Typology of Consumer Community Cultural Co-creative Roles*; and how this relates to, and extends, our understanding of fandom and CCT. Three abstract fan goals are also outlined. Extant theory on SDL and CCT are combined to discuss how various stakeholders interact to co-create

LFC brand culture. Consumer-consumer co-creation is ongoing on RAWK as what this thesis calls 'Coincidental Co-creation'. However, the author, here, emphasises the potential for greater prominence of the management role of encouraging supplier-consumer 'Collaborative Co-creation' and the benefits of being a listening-led organization (Humphreys & Grayson 2008; Rappaport, 2010). The *consumer role typology* is central.

Chapter five summarises the thesis, and concludes that football fandom is a pivotally important element in 21st century consumer culture, providing many opportunities for future research. These include further discussion of how management may respond to opportunities for greater Collaborative Co-creation, with fans. Importantly, the specific goals of fans (main concerns), abstract goals of fans, and typology of consumer roles are highlighted as a contribution to knowledge relevant to various parties.

1.6   DEFINITIONS

1.61   What is CCT?

CCT recognises that consumption and culture are intertwined and inseparable (Slater 1997; Arnould & Thompson 2005; 2007). CCT is an interdisciplinary tradition aiming to explicate and understand contemporary ways of living and consuming through study in consumption contexts (Geertz 1973; Arnould & Thompson 2005). The movement goes beyond buying to more broadly cover how consumers are living their everyday life, consuming various products and services, and how this influences their self-understanding and culture as well as contributing to the creation of an image for others to observe (Belk 1995; Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000).

1.62   What is football fandom?

Football fans are taken to be any persons interested in football to the degree that they would, from time to time, refer to themselves as a fan or, talk about football, watch it on television, listen to it on the radio, read about it, attend matches, or join a dedicated online forum such as RAWK. Some fans also buy merchandise.

1.63   Football fandom, community, and co-creation

All fans of football make up a global fan-community. This community is broken up into many more communities, such as Irish-national-team fans, LFC fans, LFC fans from the USA, members of RAWK, and so on. They share some association, usually focussed around a central object of affection, a team/club. LFC fans may thus be referred to as a 'brand community' (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001) or a marketplace culture (Arnould & Thompson 2005). They are part of this community, interacting with other members in various tangible and intangible ways. Nowadays, often, fans use media such as the Internet as a tool for further social relations leading to greater interaction and co-creation of the community, and thus what it means; its culture. This is the concept upon which this GT rests, as interpreted from ethnography of RAWK.

1.7   DELIMITATIONS OF SCOPE

1.71   Substantive Context: LFC Fan Culture on RAWK

The focus of this study is on the nature, experience, and culture of football fan consumption online. This substantive phenomenon drives the project (Simonson *et al.* 2001) following GT to discover the meaning/main concerns (Glaser 1998) of the culture and interaction amongst football fans on RAWK. The time-frame was 2008-2012.

1.72   Literature: Weaving

Theoretical sampling and the constant comparative method leads to literature being woven into the study as it is deemed to relate to substantive and conceptual contextual issues because of "emergent fit" (Glaser & Strauss 1967 p. 37; Glaser 1978).

1.73   Relevance and Representation: Non-managerial not Anti-managerial

This thesis' research questions do not have a managerial focus. This is inspired by the shift away from the centrality of managerial relevance amongst some in CCT (Tucker 1974; Holbrook 1985, 1987; Belk 1986; Hunt 1991; Shimp 1994; Belk 1995). Shimp (1994) stipulates avoiding notions of *relevance* at the offset, in an effort to attain *representative* findings of consumer behaviour to explore the phenomenon in all its aspects (see also Holbrook 1987). This benefits *all* 'markets' interested in CR – academics, students, businesspeople, managers, public policy officials, consumers, and society at large.

Following GT, to prevent issues of relevance from skewing the study, not applying a "professional problem" (Glaser 1998 p. 132) (e.g. managers' needs), from the offset, allows greater emergence of fan main concerns and helps prevent forcing (Glaser 1992). This is consistent with a hermeneutic approach that seeks to be open to possibilities afforded by the text rather than projecting a predetermined system of meanings onto textual data (Gadamer 1960; Ricoeur 1981; Thompson 1997). It is about being what Pollay (1986) refers to as scholars of the marketplace rather than servants to marketing practitioners.

1.74 Nonobjectivist Argumentation and Interpretation of the Research Problem

As Geertz (1973) says, absolute objectivity is impossible in cultural anthropology, but this must not allow us to adopt a position consistent with extreme relativism (see also Arnold & Fischer 1994 p. 59). No interpretation can be considered final or correct (Madison 1989). But, this does not mean that all interpretations are equally persuasive. So, this thesis reflexively engages in argumentation and use of rhetoric regarding why its findings are the best this author can come up with at this time (Madison 1988; 1989; Arnold & Fischer 1994; Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000). This is attempted through discussion of how RAWK data are interpreted through grounded constant comparison of incidents, comparing 'parts' with 'whole' and other 'parts' following a hermeneutic circle [iterative spiral of understanding or specific-general-specific movement (Arnold & Fischer 1994 p. 63; Thompson 1997)] towards a fusion of horizons to produce an interpretive theory of fan community membership and co-creation (Geertz 1974; Arnold & Fischer 1994; Thompson 1997; Glaser 1998). The meaning of fan consumer experience is sought and interpreted as main concern (Glaser & Strauss 1967) through reflection and argumentation (Hudson & Ozanne 1988; Steedman 1991 p. 54; Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000; Jones *et al.* 2005 p. 71). There is subtle 'retrodictive' causality in this GT (Katz 2001 p. 448; see also Geertz 1972 for retrodictive explanation of cockfighting). This is not causal law, but relies on observing *how* fans behave and interpreting *why* - the voluntaristic reasons or meanings behind their behaviour (Jupp 2006 p. 24).

1.75 Interpreted Consumer Insights as Managerially Relevant

Aspects of this GT are ultimately managerially relevant as knowledge about why consumers consume (see Dichter 1964; Glaser 1985; Randazzo 1993; MacFarquhar 1994; Frank 1997; Osborne 2002; Arnould & Thompson 2005; Payne *et al.* 2009). It provides

detailed consumer-centric knowledge (Sawhney & Prandelli 2000) that may be considered feedback for 'organizational learning' (Wikström 1995; Payne *et al.* 2009) to football club management, for example. Management may benefit from embracing the role of Collaborative Co-creator; a notion that tallies with the goals of RAWK fans, and is championed in extant literature in both CCT (e.g. Thompson 1997) and SDL (e.g. Füller *et al.* 2007; Payne *et al.* 2009). The role of Collaborative Co-creator is also enabled by understanding substantive consumer main concerns, abstract consumer goals, and how consumers are consuming via observation of consumer engagement with any of seven co-creative roles. These contributions are elaborated throughout the thesis.

1.8   CHAPTER SUMMARY

This study is couched in the theoretical area of CCT and relevant to SDL. The substantive focus is on LFC fans on RAWK. The methods used are ethnography/netnography, GT, hermeneutics, and Geertzian analysis.

This GT of fan consumption online interprets RAWK members' driving goal or *main concern* (Glaser 2001; Giske & Artinian 2007) as *community membership and co-creation*. Three abstract fan goals are also theorized here. Then, the author interprets fan interaction within the online brand community as presenting patterns located on a typology of co-creative roles. Special emphasis is placed on thick description of emotions, consumption-experience, fan culture, and brand relationships. There are theoretical implications for CCT and SDL regarding collaborative consumer-firm co-creation (Füller *et al.* 2007; Payne *et al.* 2009).

Management/marketing practitioners can utilise this interpretive theory as marketing insights to be used in 'organizational learning' (Hirschman 1970; Thompson 1997; Payne *et al.* 2009) - knowledge of consumer behaviour [*how*] and sentiment [*why*]. Thus, the co-creative roles have implications for marketing managers and *their* role within the service- and brand-value generation and delivery process. This may help the firm develop and foster good relations with stakeholders, such as fans, through encouragement of greater understanding, dialogue, consultation, and collaboration (Fournier 1998; Fournier & Lee

2009). This thesis contains a variety of quoted fan viewpoints, the voice of the customer (Griffin & Hauser 1993; Thompson 1997), gathered empirically and presented verbatim.

Another major contribution is that academic and non-academic market and consumption researchers can benefit from detailed insight into the overall emergent research design and methods utilised here. This is located mainly in Chapter 3's discussion of the *Grounded Theory Online Ethnographic Process*

CHAPTER 2   CCT, FANDOM, ONLINE COMMUNITY IDENTITY, AND CO-PRODUCTION

2.01   INTRODUCTION

This chapter contributes to answering all 4 research questions listed in Chapter 1 and detailed in Chapter 3, through covering the literature with which forthcoming chapters will be in conversation through explanation of this thesis' GT. First, this chapter traces a chronological development of CR, now the intellectual centre of academic marketing, producing the largest number of PhD dissertations annually (Belk 1995 p. 60). This facilitates outlining the focal literature field, CCT.

As a literature review, this chapter's 'type' is aligned with what Tranfield *et al.* (2003) refer to as *meta-ethnography*; a method of meta-synthesis that uses a 'lines of argument synthesis' bringing together various theories of consumer behaviour, which have taken varying aspects of consumption as their object of analysis (e.g. this thesis looks at football fan culture as an aspect of consumption). The many areas of CR covered are chosen due to their relevance and fit to this study, which follows GT via literature weaving (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Glaser 1998 p. 67; Beckman & Elliott 2001; Colquitt & Zapata-Phelan 2007). So, for example, general football fan (2.03) and CR literature (2.02) were important given the substantive focus of this study being football fans, and the over-riding perspective being one from the position of CR. The centrality of one football club/brand is hugely important in most football fans' consumption habits, so branding literature is explored (2.04). Such brands often become fundamental to consumers' identity (2.05). Around these brands, fans can be seen to form marketplace communities, so brand community literature is delved into (2.06). Fans are also co-productive, active, engaged consumers. So, literature that theorizes consumer co-production is vital (2.07). This fan co-creation of LFC culture features various aspects of vying for control and roles fans play (2.08). Through all this, fans are evidently emotional, especially when it comes to brand success. So, this literature is investigated also (2.09).

Both managerial and cultural styles of branding theory are outlined to emphasise the cultural orientation of this study. How the Internet is changing CR and consumption generally is introduced showing how its exploding growth has implications for fan

interaction with one another and the LFC brand generally. CCT moves beyond a narrow managerial or utilitarian perspective on consumers to present a broader, culturally attuned approach to study consumption as an aspect of how we live and how this helps give symbolic meaning to our lives as collective social beings. The output GT has emergent relevance to more managerial marketing streams also, such as SDL, given the depth of consumer insight provided here, which may be used to design/alter products/services to fit consumer behaviour (how they consume) and consumer needs (why they consume).

Literature topics to be *omitted* are decided due to their not being apparent as relevant to the data (primary and secondary data/literature). Glaser (1978 p. 32) calls this a "skip and dip" approach to literature. GT stipulates focusing on the *main concerns* of the social actors rather than some prescribed professional problem (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978; 1992; 1998). This literature may converge or diverge with the findings of this thesis (Glaser & Strauss 1967 p. 37). Given this GT approach, literature was largely reviewed concurrent to, or after, participant observation, interviewing, and analysis of data. Its appearance at this stage of this thesis report is to be recognised as having been written after the majority of data analysis.

2.02   CONSUMER RESEARCH

This section summarizes, somewhat chronologically, the birth, growth, and development of the study of consumers and consumption. This history has seen major shifts ontologically, epistemologically, methodologically, and substantively (Belk 1995; Beckmann & Elliott 2000; Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000; Simonson *et al.* 2001; Vargo & Lusch 2004; Levy 2006). This is here simplified into three 'types' of CR: traditional CR; 'new' consumer behaviour/research (Belk 1995); and CCT (Arnold & Thompson 2005), with CCT falling under the heading of 'new' CR. Traditional CR is aligned with what Ostergaard & Jantzen (2000) call "Buyer Behaviour" & "Consumer Behaviour". These are part of a four-strong typology of their (ibid) history of CR. This also includes "Consumer Research" & "Consumption Studies"; here aligned with 'new' CR, including CCT.

2.021   Traditional Consumer Research

Following extant CR literature (e.g. Belk 1995; Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000), traditional CR, is deemed to be that which appears before about 1980. It tended, in the main, but not exclusively, to follow its historical roots in Economics and Psychology. It tended to concentrate on the individual as a rational economic actor and had a managerial focus, mainly preferring substantive discussions surrounding transactions and buying marketed goods and services. **Table 2.021**, on the next page, provides a more detailed summary.

TABLE 2.021: SUMMARY OF TRADITIONAL CONSUMER RESEARCH UP TO ABOUT 1980

18th, 19th, & early 20th centuries: Academic scholarship on consumers begins among economists and psychologists (Belk 1995; Simonson *et al.* 2001; Vargo & Lusch 2004) (e.g. Smith 1776; Say 1821). Marketing as valuable matter in motion.

1902: First marketing courses taught in US universities (Bartels 1976).

1930s: Creation of the American Marketing Association and *Journal of Marketing*. Predominant focus was on consumers as rational economic actors (Belk 1995). Growth in consumer survey market research techniques (e.g. Lazarsfeld's consumer surveys) (Fullerton 1990; Solomon *et al.* 2006). CR had an applied behavioural focus (Belk 1995).

1950s: Buyer Behaviour (Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000) (e.g. Drucker 1954) & Marketing Management (Vargo & Lusch 2004) (e.g. McCarthy 1960). An overriding aim tended to be improving mass marketing efficiency, along with training marketing managers; managerial relevance and a micro-bias (Holbrook 1985; Shimp 1994; Belk 1995).

1950s - 1960s: Psychological and psychoanalytic perspectives of the consumer largely analysing how buying takes place (Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000):

o Movement away from purely rational perspectives on consumption, bringing in Freudian notions such as latent emotional meaning through Motivation Research (e.g. Dichter 1964) (Belk 1995; Solomon *et al.* 2006). Extensive examinations of symbolic aspects of products (e.g. Levy 1959). Depth interviews and projective methods from psychoanalysis (Belk 1995).

o The metaphor of the consumer as animal (Bettman 1979 p. 270; Holbrook 1988). Trust in scientific methods taken from Classical Newtonian natural science (Dawson *et al.* 1982 p. 274; Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000 p. 13). Attempts to design "scientific" laboratory-type experiments where researchers seek to control all variables and provide universal explanations (grand theories) of consumer behaviour (Belk 1995; Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000; Simonson *et al.* 2001). Belief in stimulus-response processes where fundamental needs are like mechanisms or instincts driving and directing behaviour (Rescorla 1988 p. 152; Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000). The consumer is viewed as a physiological phenomenon in a behaviouristic way, drawing upon the classical example of Pavlov's dogs (Rescorla 1988 p. 152; Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000). But, the manipulative potential of attempting to tap consumers' subconscious desires was highlighted and this led to the decline of this style of research (Holbrook 1988; Belk 1995).

1960s - 1970s: Some 1) questioned growing materialistic consumption and its potentially damaging relationship with well-being (Tucker 1974; Fromm 1976), while others 2) embraced free-market led "solutions" (e.g. Friedman 1962). In the early 60s, the dominant perspective focused on 'Buyer Behaviour' (stage 1 in Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000) during buying transactions (e.g. Kotler 1965) (Belk 1995). Abandonment of focus on emotion in a re-rationalization of the consumer (Belk 1995). Later in the 1960s, an emerging perspective, called 'Consumer Behaviour' by Ostergaard & Jantzen (2000) (stage 2), allowed for consideration of consumer behaviour before and after purchases (Tucker 1974; Jacoby 1978; Holbrook 1987). The consumer is viewed as an information processor or a computer (Belk 1987b; Belk 1995; Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000 p. 15). It uses a 'black box' (Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000 p. 15) approach to develop theories of how consumers would react when they received various stimuli. These theories were often tested using survey techniques including questionnaires (Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000).

1969: Association for Consumer Research (ACR) founded (Belk 1995). At that time, most business schools did not have a dedicated consumer behaviour course, but this began to change during the 1970s (Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 23).

1974: *Journal of Consumer Research* created (Belk 1995). Concurrent broadening of marketing and CR (Kotler & Levy 1969; Tucker 1974).

2.022 The 'New' Consumer Behaviour Research

The various historic perspectives in CR represent shifting perspectives, but there is not one "right" with others "wrong"; they are all just largely co-existing perspectives rather than Kuhnian time-bounded paradigms that have superseded one another (Kuhn 1996; Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000). Currently, since about 1980, a major growth area has been as a result of the interpretive or postmodern turn (Sherry 1991; Thompson 1997). This has led to what Belk (1995) calls a 'new' form of consumer behaviour research. It is summarized on **Table 2.022** on the next two pages.

TABLE 2.022: SUMMARY OF 'NEW' CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR RESEARCH FROM ABOUT 1980 ONWARDS

1980s and 1990s:

- MOVEMENT AWAY FROM TRADITIONAL UTILITARIAN FOCUS: A growing number of scholars reject "narrow" traditional analyses of consumption, drawing instead on early heralds of a 'new' CR who pointed towards the complexity of consumption and difficulty of theorizing it in simple utilitarian models (see Veblen 1899; Levy 1959) (Belk 1995).

- BROADENING OF SCOPE AND RELEVANCE: There were movements away from CR that has managerial relevance as axiological objective, aiming instead for representative CR (Pollay 1986; Holbrook 1987; Shimp 1994 p. 4). Its findings may consequently be relevant to management or various other audiences (Belk 1986; Hunt 1991).

- INCLUSION OF NON-ECONOMIC FACTORS AS CENTRAL RATHER THAN PERIPHERAL: Non-economic facets of consumption become the focus of much CR (e.g. Holbrook & Hirschman 1982). Similarly, managerial marketing began focusing more on social factors alongside economic ones (Vargo & Lusch 2004) [e.g. market orientation (Kohli & Jaworski 1990); services marketing (Gronroos 1994); relationship marketing (Berry 1983)]. In CR, there is a focus on notions such as emotion and hedonic pleasure as a facet of experiential consumption (Hirschman & Holbrook 1982; Holbrook & Hirschman 1982). Influence from existential philosophy and phenomenology (Thompson *et al.* 1989) has encouraged viewing consumers as ontologically part of the world, not somehow separate (Jensen & Lindberg 2000). Consumers constitute meaning as members of the world, through ongoing being-in-the-world and participation (Jensen & Lindberg 2000 p. 215).

- GROWTH OF INTERPRETIVISM: 'Interpretive', 'postmodern', 'alternative perspectives' take hold in CR, largely questioning previous positivism (Stern 1989; Sherry 1991; Belk 1995; Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000 pp. 9-10).

- CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES BEGIN TO GROW: There is analysis of consumption as a social and cultural phenomenon with deep meaning for consumers and their identities, rather than something purely economic or rational (Holbrook 1987; Belk 1988; Sherry 1990).

- ALTERNATIVE METHODS AND EPISTEMOLOGIES: This led to growth in use of approaches such as ethnography (Sanders 1987; Sherry 1990), phenomenology (Thompson, Locander & Pollio 1989), literary criticism (Stern 1989; Scott 1990; 1994), GT (Goulding 1998; 2000), critical theory (Murray & Ozanne 1991; Bradshaw & Firat 2007), semiotics (Mick 1986), historical analysis (Belk & Pollay 1985; Firat 1987), naturalistic inquiry (Wallendorf & Belk 1989), projective methods (Rook 2006), visual ethnography (Holbrook & Grayson 1986; Heisley & Levy 1991), psychoanalytic methods (Holbrook 1988; Oswald 2010), hermeneutics (Arnold & Fischer 1994), interpretivism (Sherry 1991), and postmodernism (Hudson & Ozanne 1988; Sherry 1991; Belk 1995; Beckman & Elliott 2000), including various overlaps.

- GROWING PLURALISM: Both positivists and non-positivists exist in an environment of growing pluralism, albeit sometimes in conditions of oppositionality (e.g., Hunt 1984; Anderson, P. F. 1983; 1986; 1988; Calder & Tybout 1987; Cooper 1987; Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy 1988; Siegel 1988) (Lutz 1989; Belk 1995; Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000 p. 9).

- CULTURE AND CONSUMPTION AS OVERLAPPING: Many 'new' researchers further broadened CR's lens to view consumption as something that not only happens during tangible, observable, market transactions, and their immediate context, but also in far more intangible ways throughout human culture and experience (e.g. Holbrook & Hirschman 1982; Holbrook 1984 p. 178; see also Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000 p. 10). The intersection between culture, meaning, and consumption begins to come into focus as

research on consumers enters stage three of Ostergaard & Jantzen's (2000) typology - what they call Consumer Research - and Belk (1995) calls 'new' consumer behaviour research.

- RELATEDNESS OF CONSUMPTION, MEANING, AND IDENTITY: The relationship between consumption and how consumers are living their everyday life, consuming various products/services, and how this influences their self-understanding, life "meaning", and contributes to the creation of an image for others to observe (Kotler & Levy 1969; Zaltman & Sternthal 1975; Holbrook 1987; Belk 1988; Ostergaard 1991; Levy 2006) becomes central in the 'New Consumer Behaviour' (Belk 1987a; 1995).

- MICRO FOCUSSED CR IS AUGMENTED WITH GROWING MACRO RESEARCH: This leads to a "macro-marketing" or aggregate perspective aswell as a traditional 'micro' focus (Firat & Dholakia 1982; Firat 1985; Belk 1987a; 1995). The 'market', economy, and culture are seen as inseparable (Slater 1997 p. 132), and a great deal of consumption is deemed to involve no exchange relationships whatsoever. Consumption is much broader than buying.

- TRADITIONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL AND ECONOMICS PERSPECTIVES ARE SUPPLEMENTED WITH AN INFLUX OF SOCIOLOGISTS AND ANTHROPOLOGISTS: There is a growth in use of sociological and anthropological methods such as in-depth interviews that allow consumers to talk about experiences and emotions surrounding consumption in a natural way (Hirschman 1986a; McCracken 1988; Sherry 1991; Belk 1995; Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000; Levy 2006). Many of these alternative perspectives, paradigms, approaches, and methods have resulted from the shedding of the belief that there is *one best* scientific method that could provide *the* Archimedean position and thus a flawless route to immutable scientific "truths" (Olson 1982; Lutz 1989). Similarly, Sherry & Schouten (2002) question the widespread saturation of using the prose style journal article as a means of publishing findings proposing alternative vehicles such as poetry.

From about 2000 onwards:

- ESTABLISHED PLURALISM: Postmodern/interpretive approaches are now thriving alongside traditional positivism within pluralist CR (Sherry 1991; Brown 1999; Simonson *et al.* 2001; Solomon *et al.* 2006).

- GROWTH OF CONSUMER CENTRISM AND INTEREST IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS IN MANAGERIAL MARKETING AND CR: CR strengthens its focus on consumers and consumption, with less interest in managerial concerns, relatively. A concurrent shift in managerial marketing sees various streams take a deeper hold, many of which contribute to SDL, a perspective that fractures the previous concentration on management in marketing and emphasises a consumer orientation, given the recognition that consumers are a vital part of the marketing system and help co-produce it (Vargo & Lusch 2004). The major CR focus in what Ostergaard & Jantzen (2000) call Buyer Behaviour, Consumer Behaviour, and much recent Consumer Research, tended to be the individual consumer as decision maker, but there has been a shift to 'Consumption Studies' focusing on socially and culturally situated groups of consumers whose consumption is often critically important in sustaining identity (Beckmann & Elliott 2000 p. 2; Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000).

- GREATER ATTENTION TO THEORY EMERGENCE: There is growing theory emergence rather than testing a priori theory. Many substantive phenomena driven studies do not aim for grand theory, pursuing multiple interpretations instead (Meamber & Venkatesh 2000; Simonson *et al.* 2001).

The themes outlined in the above **Table 2.022** show emergence of cultural CR. These themes have led to the coining of the literature 'brand', CCT.

2.0221 Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)

Branded in 2005, CCT existed pre-2005 as the history of publications shows (Arnould & Thompson 2005). The most prominent early growth spurt occurred during the 1980s given its core roots in what Belk (1995) calls 'new' CR and what Ostergaard & Jantzen (2000) call Consumer Research and Consumption Studies (see also Slater 1997). This thesis places CCT under the overall umbrella of 'new' CR. Thus, the themes located in **section 2.022** are integral to the growth of CCT. Potentially, not all 'new' CR is CCT. However, this thesis places all CCT broadly in the domain of 'new' CR. It is summarised now on **Table 2.0221:**

TABLE 2.0221: SUMMARY OF CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY (MAIN SOURCE: ARNOULD & THOMPSON 2005; 2007)

- CULTURE AND CONSUMPTION ARE INSEPARABLE: Culture and consumption are integral to each other with culture subsuming economy (Slater 1997; Solomon *et al.* 2006 pp. 492, 497-500). Consumption is representative of, and shaped by, underlying culture and through consumer culture and material culture consumers partake in and shape sociocultural formations (McCracken 2005). CCT researchers study this relationship.

- BROAD SUBSTANTIVE AND THEORETICAL FOCUS: CCT is broad in its focus, covering the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption.

- LESS CONCERN WITH INDIVIDUAL CONSUMERS, MORE CONCERN WITH CONSUMER GROUPS AND CULTURE: With a collective focus, all consumers are seen as members of many groups or 'tribes' (Maffesoli 1996; Cova *et al.* 2007). These collectives have cultural norms, rituals and myths (Solomon *et al.* 2006). Culture itself may be viewed as collective memory; accumulation of shared meanings, rituals, norms & traditions (ibid). It largely defines a human community. Culture and consumption are predominantly seen as shaped by and shaping of human society through processes of cultural production, maintenance and change (McCracken 1990; 2005). Culture may be viewed as an interpretation system, which we use to understand all daily or extraordinary signifying practices around us, including consumption.

- GRADUAL MOVEMENTS AWAY FROM ECONOMICS AND PSYCHOLOGY AMONGST SOME CCT RESEARCHERS: The consumer is not atomised and rational, nor is s/he seen as driven by underlying psychological motivations, which are somehow genetically coded or separable from the rest of the everyday world, to consume in specific ways (Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000). There is movement beyond psychological existential aspects of previous CR. The consumer is not merely narcissistically nor emotionally based, nor is s/he simply in search of new experiences; the consuming individual is a member of collectives where products have symbolism, which creates a universe of meaning for the tribe in which they consume (Belk 1988; Cova *et al.* 2007).

- PROCESSUAL PERSPECTIVE ON CULTURE: Culture is not static. It is continually evolving.

- FOUR AREAS WITHIN CCT: Arnould & Thompson (2005) provide a framework of four areas within CCT; 1) marketplace cultures, 2) consumer identity projects, 3) mass mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies, and 4) sociohistoric patterning of consumption. Together, these explore "the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of overlapping cultural groupings that exist within the broader sociohistoric frame of globalization and market capitalism" (ibid p. 869). A CCT study tends to have aspects of all four streams (Arnould & Thompson 2007 p. 8; Follett 2009 p. 29) as is the case with this thesis. However, the least central component to this study is the area covering the sociohistoric patterning of consumption as the role of class, gender, and ethnicity are not primary issues in this thesis (Arnould & Thompson 2007 p. 8).

- LESS FOCUS ON SELLING AND MARKETING, MORE FOCUS ON UNDERSTANDING CONSUMPTION AS AN ELEMENT OF CULTURE: Traditionally, the axiology of much CR sought to predict and control consumer brand purchases (Fisher & Smith 2011), but those involved with the new CR and CCT tend to seek to understand consumption in a broad, literal and contextual sense (Belk 1995 p. 74).

- MULTI-DISCIPLINARY AND NATURALISTIC: It is a multidisciplinary area largely focusing on naturalistic CR at the expense of traditional laboratory methods, in favour of alternatives (Arnould & Thompson 2005). Exemplary studies are Holt (1995), Levy (1981), McCracken (1986), Schouten & McAlexander (1995), and Sherry (1983; 1990).

Following the themes outlined on **Table 2.0221**, this thesis inductively investigates RAWK culture to produce a hermeneutic thick description of its meaning, contributing to the knowledge of football research generally and CCT. CCT is not a unified grand theory but an umbrella term for a family of theoretical perspectives (Arnould & Thompson 2005 p. 868). A more detailed overview of the subject area is contained in Arnould & Thompson (2005; 2007), but specific areas most related to this thesis are covered through all chapters (e.g. philosophical perspective and method in Chapter 1 and 3, CCT identity theory and marketplaces cultures theory in this chapter and Chapter 4, and so forth).

2.03   FOOTBALL AND FANDOM RESEARCH

Football receives vast attention worldwide from various sources, including, popular literature (e.g. Hornby 1998), newspapers, television, radio, and magazines (Lewis 1992a). It has also received focus from academics in various disciplines (particularly social theory, media studies, anthropology, finance, and management research [see e.g. Lewis 1992a; Dunning 1994; Hamil *et al*. 1999; Michie & Oughton 1999; Michie & Ramalingam 1999; King 2002; Giullianotti 2005; Millward 2008]). But, more is required, particularly theorizing the nature of fandom as an aspect of consumer culture (Lewis 1992a; Holt 1995; Kozinets 1997; Brown 2007; Kozinets 2007; Richardson 2007; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010). A major reason for this is that fans are such a common phenomenon in contemporary society. There are things most of us have intense admiration for, thus in many ways we are all 'fans' of something (Grossberg 1992 p. 63; Lewis 1992a pp. iii, 1). We become fans of things that "matter" to us most (Grossberg 1992). Fans are one of the most visible and identifiable consumer-groups (Lewis 1992a). In football, for example, fans often display their identity through wearing the colours of their favourite team (ibid; Richardson 2007).

Hirschman (1986b) distinguishes between "utilitarian" or functional products and "cultural" products that have complex symbolic and intangible attributes, such as movies, plays, & music. Football is here aligned with the latter (see also Richardson 2007; Richardson & Turley 2007). It is an important cultural phenomenon, surpassing any one language, religion, or other social entity worldwide (King 2002; Goldblatt 2006 p. x). It is also a rapidly growing industry globally (King 2002; Healy & McDonagh 2007; Deloitte &

Touche 2008; Houlihan 2008; McNamara, Peck, & Sasson forthcoming). Thus, it serves as an ideal site for cultural analysis on consumption to contribute to CCT.

Fans are "odd" (Grossberg 1992). The unique nature of fans, as consumers, raises many issues warranting investigation (Lewis 1992a; Holt 1995; Kozinets 1997; Richardson 2007). For example, football fans are highly active consumers who utilize new media such as the Internet to augment the means through which they may 'consume' (broadly) their chosen club (see section 2.061 & 2.063). This has implications for our understanding of how fans use media to construct consumption experiences and culture (Lewis 1992a; Slater 1997). Another interesting facet of fan consumption is its deep meaning for many fans (Lewis 1992a), who are even compared to believers in a religion given the secular-sacred-character of their devotion (Belk *et al.* 1989; Kozinets 2001; Solomon *et al.* 2006; Richardson 2007). Football fandom has become particularly significant as a symbolic practice in which social and cultural relations are expressed and negotiated (King 2002; Richardson & O'Dwyer 2003; Giulianotti 2005; Jarvie 2006; Richardson & Turley 2006; 2007; Richardson 2007). So, football is a vast cultural phenomenon, but one that is also a massive global industry that has seen its level of commercialization explode since about 1990 (King 2002; Healy & McDonagh 2007; 2008; Houlihan 2008; Pongsakornrungsilp, Healy, Bradshaw, McDonagh, & Schroeder 2008). According to the Deloitte *Football Money League 2008* (Deloitte & Touche 2008), the top 20 global clubs' collective-revenues alone were worth in the region of €3.7 billion in 2006/07. So, football is bound together by a strong combination of cultural and market-imperatives, with special implications for fan-culture.

Hamil (1999) draws on Saloman Brothers (1997) and Gorman & Calhoun (1994) when he highlights the phenomenon of 'fan equity'. By this, in a nutshell, Hamil means that football fans are not 'regular' customers. Fans are irrationally loyal (Hamil 1999). Switching clubs/brands is not the norm regardless of issues such as pricing or product quality (Richardson & O'Dwyer 2003; Giulianotti & Robertson 2004 p. 556; Richardson 2007). Fans consider their chosen club to be a part of their identity, not something dispensable or changeable, especially not on simple product-utilitarian grounds (Sandvoss 2003; 2005; Horne 2006; Richardson 2007). A prevalent perspective in CCT is that much, if not all, consumption is to be seen as a fundamental part of how we live/are living and creating

meaning in our lives (Levy 1959; Holbrook & Hirschman 1982; Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000). Football is one such consumption phenomenon. Fans are loyal for life in the vast majority of cases (Richardson 2007).

Unfortunately, football fandom, like most areas of human life, has its darker side. Brown (1998a) presents a selection of essays on fan identity with a primary focus on violence and national identity (see also Hargreaves 2002; Giulianotti 2005). Giulianotti *et al.* (1994) provide a similar train of thought discussing how historical, political and social forces have shaped particular cultures of club or national fan identity. They (ibid) also cover issues of violence and hooliganism in football showing how such behaviour is often viewed by those who participate in it as a symbolic form of identity expression (see also Giulianotti 2005; Jarvie 2006). It is important to remember that such violence is only a marginal phenomenon. Most fans are non-violent. However, it is apparent that fandom has been stigmatized in certain segments of popular media and literature, journalism, and academia (Lewis 1992a). Particularly, during the latter decades of the twentieth century, in Britain, football fans were viewed broadly as merely animal-like hooligans by some (Taylor 1990). However, many others laud the positive majority of fans. Lewis (1992a) argues we are all fans, and in the context of popular culture, fans deserve credit for responding with energy, creativity, and optimism, even when social conditions are difficult and unjust. Football, as a sport, contains levels of physicality though - what may be termed "violence". Geertz (1972) says that every culture has and loves its own form of violence. This may help explain some of the popularity of football.

The Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research (2000; 2002) discusses why fans *are* fans, showing how fans come from all backgrounds. Their research points to a sense of ritual and belonging provided by the experience (see also Giulianotti 2005; Richardson 2007), as well as citing various other reasons given by fans in a survey on motivations behind supporting particular teams. These reasons are broad and varied with the main ones being: my local team; family influence; first team they saw playing live; first team they saw playing on television; the way they played; certain players that played there; the club's image; and influence of friends. It is apparent that football is an important element in the identity of many fans described in football literature. Giulianotti (1999) likens football to mass religion (see also Richardson 2007). Giulianotti (1999) & King (2000) describe

groups of fans of particular teams as being members of what Anderson, B. (1983/2006) terms *imagined communities*. Richardson (2007) argues that fans see themselves as much more than simply customers buying a product (see also Sandvoss 2003; 2005; Horne 2006). It is a deeply sacred activity among many supporters (Richardson & Turley 2006; Richardson 2007; see also Giulianotti 2005). Many sports fans interact with the club they support, other fans, and the surrounding context in a very ritualistic fashion (Voigt 1980; Birrell 1981; Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 513-4). It is viewed as a sacred form of consumption that is "set apart" from "normal" activities and treated with a degree of respect and awe (Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 513; Richardson 2007). "Normal" activities are of a profane nature (not profane in a vulgar or obscene sense) relating to ordinary consumption devoid of any sacred "specialness" (Belk *et al.* 1989; Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 513).

This ritualistic "sacred" consumption of football leads some fans to desire *their* particular ritualistic forms of fandom to be *the* form of fandom. King (2002) researches football fans who engage in various forms of resistance to increasing commercialism such as replica jerseys. These fans, the 'lads', refuse to wear jerseys to maintain a level of "sacredness" or "authenticity" (Grossberg 1992; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010). Mass commercialisation and marketisation of football is deemed to row against *their* ideal or "real" vision of football and football fandom. Richardson (2007) highlights similar consumer resistance of the "profane" market in order to protect *their* "authentic" "sacred" forms of fandom. This is exemplary of the complicated nature of how fans relate to football. Hence, the fan-club relationship cannot be reduced to an economic one of buyer & seller (Fournier 1998; Fournier *et al.* 1998). Fans' consumption of football is radically different from consumers of domestic goods (King 2002; Giulianotti 2005). It is a very evidently co-creative form of consumption (Lanier & Schau 2007; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010; Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder 2011). For example, the atmosphere of singing, noise, and colour at the match-day ground is created by the fans; they produce it (Holt 1995). But, they also consume it (King 2002 p. 141). This could be seen as the spectacle of sport support (Slater 1997; Tomlinson 2007). However, sports fans are more than mere receptors of this spectacle; they are at least somewhat agentic co-creators of it (Jenkins 1992a; 1992b; Kozinets, Sherry Jr., Storm, Duhachek, Nuttavuhisit, & DeBerry-Spence 2004; Richardson 2007; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010).

The Football Task Force report (1999 pp. 37-46), *Investing in the Community,* points out that football is different to other industries due to its being about community, not the individual (see also King 2000). It is about a shared sense of emotional ownership. This thesis theorizes that this shared sense of ownership over their chosen club is an interesting one that compels fans to be very attached to the club they support in a way that leads them to want to control it and do whatever they can to try to improve its lot. One reason for this extreme attachment is what Conn (1997) refers to as fans being a 'captive market.' Their demand for the product is inelastic (Conn 1999); a monopolistic scenario (Michie & Oughton 1999). Irrational loyalty (Hamil 1999) leads them to being a potentially vulnerable group (see also Baker, Gentry, & Rittenburg 2005; Hamilton 2007; Richardson 2007). Fans often feel they own the club they support due to the heavy emotional bond (Football Task Force 1999) they have with it, but in reality the actual owners are usually a small group of businessmen. So, fans are co-creative consumers (Lewis 1992a; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010). They participate in various ways taking on various *roles* (Goffman 1959) theorized in this thesis.

2.04   BRANDING: MANAGERIAL AND CULTURAL

Recent decades have seen mushrooming branding research (Folkes 2002). It is focal here, given how RAWK represents a brand community - a non-geographical community formed based on a set of structured relations between admirers of LFC (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; Elliott & Davies 2006). Members come together around a common reference point (LFC) to form an interpretive community, seldom, possibly never, meeting face to face, but bonded by similar interests (Jenkins 1992b). This requires discussion given how fans can be interpreted as co-creating LFC brand meaning (Hirschman 1986b; Bengtsson & Ostberg 2006; Fisher & Smith 2011). This has implications for the symbolic value of that brand and how it is experienced through consumption (Levy 1959; Mick *et al.* 2004; Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004; McCracken 2005; Balmer 2006; Payne, Storbacka, Frow, & Knox 2009; Fisher & Smith 2011).

In social and media theory, fans have been seen, by some, as uncritical, easily manipulated, distracted, passive, ignorant and juvenile in how they relate to the text(s) within popular culture that they are a fan of (Grossberg 1992). However, a "subcultural model" of fandom

portrays them as being much more active, productive, and critical of these texts, even engaging in various meaning-production activities that serve to alter the meanings of popular culture for themselves, through interpretation, and for others through alteration and manipulation of cultural resources (ibid). Similarly, traditional goods-dominant logic in marketing is being challenged by many leading business researchers who now emphasise a new SDL (Vargo & Lusch 2004; Payne *et al.* 2009). In CCT and SDL, brands are much more open to interpretation and multiplicity of meaning (Scott 1994; Elliott 1994a; Ritson & Elliott 1999; Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; Bengtsson & Ostberg 2006; Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling 2006; Merz *et al.* 2009). Examples include how brands may be symbolically associated with particular genders, or age groups (Elliott 1994a; Avery 2008). The brand becomes the experience (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004) and the meanings associated are continuously in transit through cultural negotiation (Elliott 1994a; Ritson *et al.* 1996; Kozinets 2001).

Traditionally, in some managerial business, marketing, and CR, brands have been understood as devices to be used by companies to achieve competitive advantages by offering added value to customers (e.g. de Chernatony & McDonald 2003). The American Marketing Association (AMA) (2011) defines a brand as:

> A name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers. The legal term for brand is trademark. A brand may identify one item, a family of items, or all items of that seller. If used for the firm as a whole, the preferred term is trade name.

Much research based on this type of brand-definition focuses on the strategies and tactics through which successful brands are built. This has led to a myriad of normative frameworks designed to provide *the* way to dominate markets using powerful brands (e.g. Aaker 1991; 1996; Kapferer 2004). These theories tend towards the point of view that brand owners exert considerable control over the brand (Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000; Keller 2003); the marketer as cultural authority model (Holt 2002; Fisher & Smith 2011). They present practical guides for brand managers interested in learning how to improve their corporate identity. However, they tend to take a "checklist" approach to branding that draws from almost solely American and managerially relevant influences (Schroeder & Salzer-Morling 2006 p. 3). Theorists should be careful not to make the assumption that

consumers understand the term brand in the same way as the AMA defines it above (Bengtsson & Ostberg 2006 p. 84). Brands are complex symbolic entities existing in people's minds (Levy 2006). So, an alternative perspective argues that the marketer-as-cultural-authority-model relies on an overly simplified or narrow view of the culture in which brands exist (Hirschman 1986b; Schroeder & Salzer-Morling 2006 p. 3-4; Fisher & Smith 2011). Brands have developed into something far more important to contemporary consumer culture than just marketing tools, particularly given the recognition that many stakeholders, not just managers, partake in the cultural production of brand meaning, including consumers (Holt 2002; Bengtsson & Ostberg 2006 p. 85).

A lack of total marketing manager control over associated product/brand meanings has been recognised (Hirschman 1986b; Schroeder & Salzer-Morling 2006), particularly amongst researchers substantively focussing less on products and managers, with greater interest in the customer (Scott 1994; Wikström 1995; Hirschman & Thompson 1997; Fournier 1998; Ritson & Elliott 1999; Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; Holt 2004; Schroeder & Salzer-Morling 2006; Fisher & Smith 2011). Consumers may use brands as symbols of identity (Ritson *et al.* 1996; Fisher & Smith 2011). This in turn plays a part in negotiating the meaning of that brand, by multiple brand authors, or stakeholders, and this is especially apparent in consumer communities, like RAWK (Kates 2006; Payne *et al.* 2009). These groups are a prime example of active carriers, and thus co-creators, of brand meaning (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig 2002; Csaba & Bengtsson 2006; Payne *et al.* 2009; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010; Fisher & Smith 2011).

Tucker (1974) observes that consumer interaction with, and use of, a product can lead to the consumer changing what the product "means" to them. Hirschman (1986b) applies a sociological model to show that consumers develop "idiosyncratic" personal meanings that they associate with consumption objects (see also Ritson *et al.* 1996; Fisher & Smith 2011). Also, shared consumer meanings are developed through interpersonal communication (e.g. word-of-mouth) particularly regarding intangible symbolic attributes. This leads to a decrease in the proportion of managerially-controlled symbolic meaning assigned to products, for example, and an increase in shared uncontrolled (by managers) symbolic meaning among consumers (Hirschman 1986b p. 329; Fisher & Smith 2011). These represent "informal" product meanings/attributes, while ones added by more traditional

institutional actors/personnel, such as advertising firms in the management-controlled communications subsystem, or reviewers/critics in the non-management-controlled communications subsystem, or managers themselves, represent "formal" product meanings/attributes (Hirschman 1986b p. 329).

Within CCT and SDL, brands are deemed to be constructed and interpreted iteratively by far more stakeholders or 'authors' than simply the conventional brand owner-author (Fournier 1998; Holt 2002; Bentsson & Ostberg 2006; Schroeder & Salzer-Morling 2006 pp. 4-5; Fisher & Smith 2011). Consumers play a role (Pongsakornrungsilp 2010; Fisher & Smith 2011). This often leads to the association of meanings with brands that are quite different and more complex than what brand-owners may have originally intended (Bengtsson, Ostberg, & Kjeldgaard 2005; Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; Fisher & Smith 2011). Group-members, viewed as being part of 'interpretive communities', interpret and understand brands, while simultaneously co-creating the brand as a complex bundle of personal and sociocultural meanings (Scott 1994). Much of this is associated with what is referred to as the *consumer society* (Lury 1996; Slater 1997). This concept describes how contemporary conceptions of identity are often no longer viewed as something quite so fixed as may have been traditional. Identity is now seen by many as something that is actively constructed, often through consumption (Belk 1988; Elliott 1997). Brands thus often function as symbols to be used in this identity negotiation process (Levy 1959; Bengtsson & Ostberg 2006). Through consumption, the particular nature and meaning of brands are open to continual social negotiation (Holt 2002; 2004). This social negotiation sees different groups of authors producing and interpreting stories about the brand. From this, brand-culture emerges (Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling 2006). This culture is not homogenous to all groups, nor even to members of each group. Brands can hereby be seen as multicultural entities whose peculiarities and polysemical meanings need to be examined from different perspectives (Bengtsson & Ostberg 2006; Kates 2006). The focus here is understanding brand-culture on RAWK. Fans' perspective on the brand, how they interpret it, and how they co-create its meaning is explicated (Kates 2006; Fisher & Smith 2011). This consumer-perspective will be linked to managerial brand theory to show how in-depth understanding of the brand through the eyes of the consumer can augment understanding of brand management theory and the co-creation of brand meaning and hence value [e.g. linking value (Cova 1997; Kates 2006)].

Here, utilising extant theory on supplier-and-customer collaborative brand and value co-creation drawing on SDL (e.g. Füller, Jawecki, & Muhlbacher 2007), and consumer-and-consumer brand and value co-creation from SDL (e.g. Chan & Li 2010; Fisher & Smith 2011) and CCT (e.g. Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder 2011) that present discussions about how various stakeholders interact, allows this thesis to make fans/consumers, the football club/supplier, and the fan community/VC of consumption, serve as the most prominent stakeholders in this study. The research design places fans as the main object of analysis.

As discussed in section 2.03, football fans tend to be very brand loyal (Solomon *et al.* 2006). As a participative audience (Lewis 1992a), within brand culture, they play a role in meaning negotiation (O'Donohoe 2000). This varies according to the multiplicity of meanings read or interpreted and given the variation in consumers' backgrounds, frames of reference, and interpretive strategies (Scott 1994; Hirschman & Thompson 1997; Arnould & Thompson 2005); the 'problem of polysemy' (Kates 2006 p. 94). Various CR and media researchers point towards the active, productive nature of consumer-media relationships (Fiske & Hartley 1978; Hall 1980; Fiske 1987; Turner 1992; McQuail 1994; Elliott 1997). Others mention that consumers' media use is particularly active in the age of 'new media' like the Internet (Kozinets 2002a; 2009), including RAWK. This contributes to the collapse of the conventional boundary between production and consumption, given how both are often perceived to be integral to one another, and this has been formational in the area of postmodern CR (Firat & Venkatesh 1995; Firat & Shultz 1997; Firat & Dholakia 1998; Kates 2006). In opposition to technological determinism, which sees culture as subservient to technology, many now promote the perspective that technology and culture are co-shaping in our emerging information society (Ito 1981; McQuail 1994; Kozinets 2009). Brand culture and consumer identity are implicated.

2.05   CONSUMING IDENTITY

Human identity is complex (Jenkins 1996). Individual, social, and cultural phenomena are continuously interplaying resulting in individual and group identities (Jenkins 2008). Fans on RAWK, through consumption, form social relations with other fans and thus identify themselves with a broader community identity - moving beyond the type of isolated individual demanded by many modern alienated workplaces and much modernist identity

theory (Jenkins 1992b; Goulding *et al.* 2002; Solomon *et al.* 2006). Holt (1995) refers to ways sports fans do this, including 'consuming as integration' whereby the fan integrates the self with what is consumed, and 'consuming as classification' that involves social display of consumption objects for group identification, such as the wearing of an LFC jersey (see also Hebdige 1979; Bourdieu 1984; McCracken 1990; Elliott 1994a; Redhead 1997; Slater 1997; Thompson & Haytko 1997; Goulding *et al*. 2002; Richardson & O'Dwyer 2003; Richardson 2007). A postmodern/CCT perspective tends not to view identity as static or pre-given. Postmodern consumer culture plays a part in identity construction (Belk 1988; 1995; Gergen 1991; Lury 1996; Firat & Schultz 1997; Slater 1997; Shankar *et al.* 2009). Consumption objects may be used as symbolic resources in identity performance (see Veblen's 1899 discussion of consumer goods as status symbols; see also Csikzentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton 1981; McCracken 1986; Belk 1995; Slater 1997; Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998; Elliott & Davies 2006). In postmodern consumer culture the co-existence of various truths mean consumers (and producers) are relatively free to combine elements from different styles, fashions, and symbolic domains to create their own personal desirable/undesirable expressions of meaning, identity, and lifestyle (Hirschman 1982; 1986b; Featherstone 1991; Simmel 1992 cited in Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000; Holbrook 1993; Solomon *et al.* 2006 pp. 560, 621). This may relate to various attributes like social status, social roles, ethnicity, personality, mood, lifestyle, gender or age (Csikzentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton 1981; Belk *et al.* 1982; Elliott 1994; Belk 1995; Jenkins 2008).

Much hermeneutic theory of consumer meaning draws from research on the narrative structuring of identity and self-understanding (see Bruner 1986; Crites 1986; Gergen & Gergen 1986; Polkinghorne 1988; Hermans 1996). This conception of meaning is organized in terms of culturally shared narrative forms, such as stories (Edwards & Potter 1992) and myths (Barthes 1957; Levi-Strauss 1963; Levy 1981; Kozinets 2001), according to researchers in linguistics, social psychology, anthropology, and sociology (Thompson 1997 pp. 439-40). This narratological view of meaning and self-concept refutes the computational models of the mind (Markus & Wurf 1986; Sarbin 1986; Lakoff 1987; Gergen 1991; Edwards & Potter 1992; Lifton 1993; Harre & Gillett 1994; Thompson 1997 pp. 439-40). Lifton (1993) theorizes that "the symbolizing self centres on its own narrative, a life story that is itself created and constantly recreated". By participating on RAWK, fans construct identities for themselves through participation in the interpretation and production

of their own fan narrative (Markus & Wurf 1986; Polkinghorne 1988; Gergen 1991; Giddens 1991; Grossberg 1992; Lewis 1992a p. 3; Hermans 1996; Thompson 1997).

Fans often see their club as an extension of the self (Belk 1988; Richardson 2007). Agentic aspects of narrative identity making through consumption are observed (Kellner 1992; Hermans 1996; Thompson 1997; Fisher & Smith 2011). However, as Shankar *et al.* (2009) point out, consumers are both enabled *and* constrained by the market and their culture when engaging in identity construction. Similarly Marx says, "men make their history but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past" (Marx & Engels 1962 p. 247).

Socialisation and acculturation of fans within their context(s) is thus inevitable to some degree (Thompson 1997); e.g. social class, influence of peers, RAWK, family, education, experience, work skills, consumption tastes, nationality (see also Bourdieu 1984; Holt 1997; Slater 1997). Continual existential tension thus exists between stability and change in a quest for self identity, to varying degrees (van der Berg 1970; Gergen 1991). Fan-consumption activities allow identity maintenance and change through engagement with a multiplicity of narratives or identity positions (Thompson 1997 p. 447-8). This means that consumers generally choose products, and subsequently use/consume them in ways that fit either their actual identity or their desired/valued ideal identities (McCracken 1990; Thompson 1997). The circumstances of this identity construction, according to a hermeneutic viewpoint, are the cultural context: "a living legacy of historically established meanings that provide the "conditions of intelligibility" (Gadamer [1960]) from which people make sense of their lives" (Thompson 1997 p. 449). Narratives convey cultural meanings (Ricoeur 1981) - current, historic, and potential. Symbolic interactionism similarly allows for identity to be viewed as processual and negotiated by active, productive consumers (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000 pp. 14-5; see also McCracken 1990). While existentialists, phenomenologists, and hermeneuticians take a similar perspective, they promote a greater concentration on group culture, than the individual (Jensen & Lindberg 2000; Küpers 2000). On RAWK, fans talk about their lifeworld, issues related to their fandom of LFC, becoming "self narrators", telling stories that impose a meaningful

historical order onto life events, facets, and main concerns (Glaser 1998) they selectively highlight (Thompson *et al.* 1994; Thompson 1997 p. 441) (e.g. the colour red).

Marketers often segment consumers up into groups according to various perspectives, such as those that use psychographic analysis and segmentation e.g AIOs (Attitudes/Interestes/Opinions), lifestyle segmentation and demographic segmentation, geographical influences, ethnicity and religion, and subculturally associated membership/identity (Solomon *et al.* 2006). Marketers study how such attributes affect behaviour. Subculturally oriented perspectives most closely relate to the perspective of this thesis. Every consumer belongs to many subcultures. They are multiphrenic (Gergen 1991; Sherry & Kozinets 2001). Examples are: football fans; LFC fans; LFC fans from England; LFC fans from Liverpool City; LFC fans who use RAWK. Each group has some uniqueness; a slightly/majorly different set of attributes, norms, vocabulary, habits, or product preferences (Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 587). They may be highly structured and organised, or more informal, even imagined (Jenkins 1996; Anderson, B. 2006). Some subcultures' memberships will have certain attributional tendencies, such as the majority of football fans are males. But, gender, age, lifestyle and other attributes are just part of the complex make-up of any subcultural group (Hebdige 1979; McRobbie 1989; Elliott 1994a). The focus of this thesis is on culture between fans, rather than their individual attributes. Consumers may utilise cultural meanings to find some desired stability/change in identity, image management, and self-monitoring (Douglas & Isherwood 1978; Belk 1988; Pettigrew 2002). For example, Richardson & O'Dwyer (2003) analyse image management amongst football fans. Group rituals, traditions, norms, and culture play a role in this (Richardson 2007). It helps explain why fans are so brand loyal – e.g. it is the norm for fans to be loyal, and brand switching goes against group cultural tradition. Fandom is sacred and ritualistic. These rituals may be viewed as 'possession rituals', 'exchange rituals', 'grooming rituals', and 'divestment rituals' (McCracken 1990; Solomon *et al.* 2006). Rituals allow for displacement of meanings to consumption objects, then access to bridges back to those meanings in a bricolage process, like if a fan wore a particular jersey as a child, that jersey may hold nostalgic memories (Sherry & McGrath 1989; McCracken 1990; Holbrook 1993). A possible reason for such ritualistic consumption is a fan belief that these rituals represent a means of access to an 'authentic' form of fandom - e.g. the wearing or *not* wearing of jerseys as discussed in section 2.03 (Arnould & Price 2000; King 2002;

Richardson 2007; Beverland & Farrelly 2010). In this way, fans 'perform' or act out their consumption ideals (Firat & Dholakia 1998).

The Internet is becoming more integral to how consumption is performed, society interacts and culture is shaped (Kozinets 2009). Fans have a new medium through which they engage in identity maintenance, further complicating and enriching the process with potential for 'cyborg identities', online identities, or 'digital selves' (Schau & Gilly 2003; Kozinets 2009). The Internet offers a site for play and identity creation for multiphrenic fans wishing to engage in meaning interpretation and negotiation to produce and consume culture through identity maintenance, often allowing for complex or even multiple identities to be performed or constructed (Turkle 1995; Sherry & Kozinets 2001). Thus, online, we see an example of Baudrillard's (1983) "hyperreality", or a blending or blurring of simulation and "reality", albeit maybe not in such a strictly pessimistic sense as Baudrillard's interpretation may be perceived (Sherry & Kozinets 2001).

Individualism may be argued as motivation (Strauss 1997), but alternative literature challenges that position saying that both individualistic and socially grounded goals may be at the root of such symbolically expressive behaviour (Goulding *et al.* 2002). Consumption performances are often filled with socially symbolic communication. Fans create, change, and maintain aspects of their identity in an "internal-external dialectic of identification" (Jenkins 1996). Self-identity is validated through social interaction. "The development of individual self identity is inseparable from the parallel development of collective social identity" (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998 p. 133). Communal goals are present, given the sociality of consumption, leading to desire for affiliation and fostering of harmonious relations with agreeable others (Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 216) (see also Cova 1997 - linking value). 'Group' consumption is central to section 2.06.

2.06   FAN COMMUNITY

Fandom is social (Jenkins 1992b; Lewis 1992a). Belk (1988 p. 153) points to sports teams as a prominent contemporary symbol of group identity. Fandom offers consumers a community not defined by traditional 'modern' terms of race, religion, gender, region, politics, or profession, but rather a community defined through sharing a relationship with a

common text (Jenkins 1992b), LFC. RAWK is a marketplace culture; a brand community. The Internet is fundamental to its existence (Cova *et al.* 2007). "You are the company you keep" (Bateson 1982 p. 3).

CCT's attention moves away from economics or individualism, towards concepts such as communal bonds (e.g. linking-value; Cova 1997) or love of a brand (LFC) that may lead fans to develop strong relationships, for example (Fournier 1998; Fournier *et al.* 1998; McAlexander *et al.* 2002; Smit, Bronner, & Tolboom 2007; Payne *et al.* 2009). Fans gather in cultural formations, not economic ones; interpretive communities (Jenkins 1992a; Kates 2006). These interpretive communities centre round shared cultural knowledge. This knowledge is learned by members and leads to intimate understanding of the community culture, which leads to feelings that the community is "ours", or belonging to the knowledgeable member, but also part of the self; it becomes subject rather than object (Beaglehole 1932; Belk 1988 p. 151).

2.061   Fan Community Online

As highlighted in section 2.05, the Internet is an increasingly important tool in contemporary social identity negotiation and communal social relations (Kozinets 2009). New media and the information/network society (McQuail 1994; Castells 1996; 1997; 2001) are said to be leading to increasing democratisation of society with Internet users more informed and empowered (Kozinets 2009). It allows for raising and discussion of many and varied issues in relation to football, sport, and society generally, by social actors themselves in an easy and direct interactive fashion, in a way not offered by traditional media such as television (Boyle & Haynes 2004; Millward 2008; Whannel 2009). However, this phenomenon is not universal nor without problems. The 'digital divide' concept refers to how not everybody has Internet access (Castells 1996; 2001).

Fan use of independent, fan created media is not new. For decades, they have been writing their own articles to be published by various outlets, such as fanzines. Fanzines are a fan-produced 'alternative paper', not the mainstream (Haynes 1995). In the 1980s, the fanzine movement mushroomed. It became an outlet for fans to have their say (Green 1999). It allowed for a much more democratised medium through which football could be reported on and discussed, compared to traditional media like newspapers (Taylor 1992; Green

1999; Barber & Williams 2002). Fanzines allowed for an argumentative and critical unofficial discourse of football and its problems (Green 1999). Fanzines have been called the 'fan voice' (Haynes 1995; Green 1999). It represents a 'do it yourself' philosophy whereby the traditional producer/consumer paradigm is inverted (Haynes 1995). This has continued with the Internet, on various forums and independent websites, e-zines (Millward 2008), like RAWK. 'Textually productive' fans augment their existing co-productive orientation to the game on the basis of atmosphere creation (King 2002) to give themselves an even stronger relationship that is more active and emphasises further the fans' sense of possession and ownership through participation (Haynes 1995; Coalter 2007). Auty (2002) sees it empowering fans. This is a technocultural view (Kozinets 2009 p. 22). Fan use of technology occurs in the real world. So, for example, even though it is common to refer to things online as being 'virtual', they are of course 'real' in that they are a part of our social world. Online communications and interactions are every bit as 'real' as a telephone conversation (Kozinets 2009 p. 130). They may be disembodied interactions and this has geographical and temporal implications (Solomon *et al.* 2006), but interactions and communications that make use of technological media are nothing new - just like newspapers, letters, or books. They somewhat transcend embodied boundaries of time and geography allowing for globally held 'conversations' and communications (McQuail 1994) that would not be possible in-person. So, they also encourage the growth of brand communities, given their definition as geographically unbounded interest groups (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001).

2.062 Fan Community & Consumption: Subcultures and Brand Community

Strands of social theory, cultural theory, and CCT focus on "sub-cultures" of society/consumption. Many locate their considerations of sub-cultural movements within a framework of social resistance against dominant hierarchies of control (Desmond *et al.* 2000; Goulding *et al.* 2002). This perspective has been used to explain the emergence of sub-cultures such as "Teddy Boys" (Fyvel 1963/1997), punk rockers (Frith 1980/1997), and drug cultures (Willis 1990; 1996). Similar oppositionality has been researched amongst football fans. King (2000; 2002) refers to 'post-national identity' among fans. King (ibid) types fans as 'the Lads', 'New Football Writing', and 'New Consumer Fans'.

'Lads' show very staunch support of the club and are mostly made up of fans who attend every match possible. They tend to be quite hardcore and often judge other fans as not being 'real' or as inauthentic, by *their* sense of fandom (King 2002; Pongsakornrungsilp *et al.* 2008). Richardson (2007) calls Lads' refusal to wear jerseys, consumer resistance. 'Lads' are often opposed to other fans wearing the jerseys too (King 2002) (see also Richardson & O'Dwyer 2003; Richardson & Turley 2006; Richardson 2007). Jersey wearers are termed 'New Consumer Fans' by King (2002). A major reason for this oppositionality is a, perceived, more commercialised, profit-driven approach where clubs would move 'upmarket' to attract wealthier fans, rather than repaying the loyalty of the traditional working class grass roots, now that football has become fashionable once again, following a turbulent 1980s (Conn 1999; King 2002; Williams & Neatrour 2002). Another somewhat oppositional subculture that has evolved in football is referred to by King (2002) as 'New Football Writing'. This (King 2002) covers those who are involved in the Football Supporters Association (FSA), fanzines, and others who portray a more 'self-conscious' form of fandom seeking to tackle football's problems in a dialogical or literary way (Holt, R. 1989; Taylor, R. 1992; Haynes 1995; Redhead 1997). All three of King's (2002) types of fans may be interpreted as engaging in cultural production. Jenkins (1992b p. 213) argues this is not strictly a vehicle for interpreting and commenting upon primary texts, but, may be a means of building and maintaining solidarity within the fan community. So, while a lot of theory surrounding sub-cultures tends to concentrate on oppositional and resistant aspects, there is also potential to view sub-cultures as engaging in a return to the notion of "community", but in ways that have been changed dramatically in the postmodern era, partially down to a lack of traditional community boundaries of space and time.

Time and space have become compressed (McQuail 1994; Abercrombie *et al.* 2006). Modern forms of transport and communication allow for contemporary communities to exist on a global scale, whilst also conforming to the concept of traditional focal reference points (Walvin 2000) - e.g. LFC fans on RAWK. This sub-cultural activity involves important aspects of construction and expression of identity, rather than merely being cells of resistance against dominant orders (see Goulding *et al.* 2002 for 'ravers' who simultaneously shed traditional identifiers whilst embracing new ones like music).

This thesis theorizes fans on RAWK similarly gathering communally around a consumption phenomenon; football. Following CCT, we may say LFC fans are a 'marketplace culture' (Arnould & Thompson 2005), subculture of consumption (Schouten & McAlexander 1995), consumption world (Holt 1995), culture of consumption (Kozinets 2001), consumer tribe (Cova, Kozinets, & Shankar 2007), co-consuming group (Arnould *et al.* 2006; Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder 2011), or brand community (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001). "Cyberspace groupings" are common around particular brands or activities, which have a linking value for members, like football, LFC, & RAWK (Cova 1997; Goulding *et al.* 2002; Kates 2006; Kozinets 2009). This implies tradition, collective knowledge, shared cultural meaning, understanding, rituals, symbolism, socialisation, status hierarchies, ideology, rules, mores, conventions, interaction routines, as well as notions such as conformity or deviance from cultural or fan-group norms (Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000; Solomon *et al.* 2006).

As consumers, football fans use consumption rituals to both attach meanings to, and access meanings from, consumption objects (McCracken 1990). Much of this meaning is made up of the mythology that surrounds football (Levy 1981). "A myth is a story containing symbolic elements that expresses the shared emotions and ideals of a culture" (Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 504). Richardson (2007 pp. 17-8) points towards one of the most prevalent myths amongst many football fans as relating to the role the game plays in their existence. Fans regularly claim that football is one of the most important things in their lives, even *the* most important. A famous quote regularly recited among LFC fans, is [Bill Shankly (Former LFC Manager [see also Official LFC Website 2010 for some information on Shankly] – 1981 (Goldblatt 2006 p. ix)]:

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

This is reflective of the depth of emotional valence that football has in fans' lives in many cases. Fans believe sometimes that nothing else matters (Richardson 2007). Fans often view particular characters associated with the club as magical (Arnould & Price 1993), or mythical beings, particularly those who they remember partaking in extraordinary events of the past (Richardson 2007), such as scoring a goal to win a trophy, or managing the team to various trophies, like Bill Shankly, elevating such people, images, and events to secular-

sacred or pseudo-religious status (Belk *et al.* 1989; Muniz & Schau 2005). Places may also take on a sacred status (Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 512), with the home stadium for football fans tending to be top of this list; Anfield for LFC. Such collective knowledge of historical mythology facilitates the role of LFC's culture as a marketplace mediator of social linkages (Arnould & Thompson 2007), one that is passed from generation to generation. In this way, fans could be viewed as kinds of brand missionaries who carry brand/club related messages to others (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; McAlexander *et al.* 2002; Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 358). They share stories, information, knowledge, opinion, normative perspectives, mythology and various other symbolic aspects of LFC's brand culture through word of mouth (Solomon *et al.* 2006), now augmented with RAWK. This sharing (Belk 2010) is an important element of what makes community, from the sharing of communal knowledge and culture through to ownership/possession. This sharing between consumers/fans (Jenkins 1992a) often creates or reinforces social bonds, such as the intimacy created through the sharing of the consumption/ownership of food or shared love of a brand (Farb & Armelagos 1980; Belk 1988; Cova *et al.* 2007). Shared cultural knowledge is shared amongst the members as an interpretive brand community (Scott 1994; Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; Kates 2006); like Star Trek enthusiasts (Kozinets 2001), Apple users (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001), or LFC fans on RAWK. Summarily, there are three properties of brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; Luedicke & Giesler 2007). *Consciousness of kind* (Gusfield 1975) describes intrinsic connections felt among members and an internal "collective sense of difference from others not in the community" (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001 p. 413). *Rituals and traditions* "perpetuate the community's shared history, culture, and consciousness" (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001 p. 413) through celebrations of brand history, sharing of stories, and symbolic behaviours (McCracken 1986). Third, a "sense of duty or obligation to the community as a whole, and to its individual members" (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001 p. 413) helps ensure community coherence and integration of new members (Luedicke & Giesler 2007). Such consumer groups are engaging in far more than simply destructive profane consumption (Firat & Dholakia 1998). This postmodern consumption helps create rather than destroy meaning and value; e.g. communal meanings attached to a brand (Cova *et al.* 2007; Belk 2010).

2.063   Fan Consumption Communities Online

Many contemporary brand communities owe much to the world wide web and Web 2.0 technologies such as online forums or other social media (Kozinets 1999; 2001; Brown 2007; Arvidsson 2011; Fisher & Smith 2011). "From the raw material of bits and icons, people construct meaningful social communities" (Sherry & Kozinets 2001 p. 176). These communities are called various things; VCs (Rheingold 1993; Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 354; Chan & Li 2010), "brand communities" (Muniz 1997), "communities of interest" (Armstrong & Hagel 1996), or "Internet cultures" (Jones 1995) to name but a few. VCs like RAWK are popular social environments in which people interact by exchanging resources such as information, ideas, and advice about their common interests (Chan & Li 2010). Reciprocal relations of give-and-take are said by some to be focal and the superior interactive capability of new media, coupled with the linking value (Cova 1997) of such products/brands/consumption phenomena as football, leads to these VCs thriving (Cova 1997; Kozinets 2009; Chan & Li 2010). The resources or benefits of VCs are generally broken down by Chan & Li (2010) into two forms: *structural benefits,* such as information, and *socio-emotional resources* or *experiential benefits*, such as social bonds, and individual enjoyment created and shared through community and consumption experience (see also Holbrook & Hirschman 1982). The reciprocity surrounding these communal resources is not even, neat, and zero-sum, where give-and-take are finely balanced. Some members are more active, participative, and creative, posting plenty of material to the VC, while others may be quieter and spend much more time observing or lurking (Füller *et al.* 2007; Kozinets 2009). RAWK members use it as a resource or tool to augment their LFC consumption and also to bond socially. They help create the community but also help co-create the brand; what it means to themselves and to others, given how brands are culturally created by multiple authors (Bengtsson & Ostberg 2006). This is in an environment of sharing (Belk 2010). This has implications for marketing, particularly the co-creation of meaning that occurs during fan interaction.

Exemplary of this is how, in the 1990s, the next level of UK football fans' long-term search for a more democratic voice within the game became the Internet (Barber & Williams 2002; Millward 2008). It provides a less hierarchical power structure than other media and allows fans globally easy access not only to read content, but also to produce it. It is a means by which fans may exchange ideas and information and as its usage grows its

facilities expand too (ibid). This immediacy allows strong online communities to develop with a wealth of issues covered and with a depth of analysis rarely matched elsewhere (Millward 2008). So, VCs are important data sources in modern football, social, and CCT research (Richardson 2007; Millward 2008; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010). Some theorists (e.g., Auty 2002; Fisher & Smith 2011) see the Internet as a source of fan empowerment. It could be a facility for fans to become involved in club-decision making (Barber & Williams 2002). It is a cheap and effective means of mobilizing support for particular issues in conjunction with traditional lobbying techniques (Haynes 1995; Auty 2002; Millward 2008). It has the potential to provide an easy place for fan consultation to take place and thus potentially allow for greater democratic decision making in football, which would further represent an elevation of the practice of co-creation. Auty (2002) refers to the example of Southampton FC who used the net to have a fan-vote on which colours the club-kit should have in a particular season. She also refers to how it may be used for and by fan organisations to work more effectively towards their aims of greater fan involvement within the game; greater co-creation.

2.07 CO-PRODUCTION & CO-CREATION: MEANING & VALUE

According to CCT theorist, Holbrook, "customer value is the fundamental basis for all marketing activity" (1994 p. 22). Marketing management literature on SDL, innovation, and co-creation of meaning and value outlines various ways that consumers may be viewed as more active participators in the creation/production of products, services, and brands than was traditional (Wikström 1995; Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004; Vargo & Lusch 2004; 2006a; Fuller *et al*. 2007; Payne *et al.* 2009; Grönroos 2011). This is partially down to a re-focusing of attention on the customer/consumer perspective (Vargo & Lusch 2004; Payne *et al.* 2009). There has been a growth since the 1980s with various orientations on marketing management leading to perspectives such as relationship marketing, market orientation, quality management, services marketing, and brand relationships, challenging tradition (Vargo & Lusch 2006b; Payne *et al.* 2009). A theme is that marketing thought is shifting from focus on exchange of tangible goods, towards exchange of intangibles such as skills, knowledge, and processes (Vargo & Lusch 2004).

SDL owes much of its heritage to services marketing (Arnould 2007). In SDL, like CCT, customers are seen as always being co-creators of value rather than passive (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2000; Vargo & Lusch 2004). The task of suppliers is to understand customer value-creating processes in order to learn how to support these activities (Vargo & Lusch 2004; Porter & Kramer 2011). Value is created by, and embedded in, personalised experience (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004). Emotion, cultural context, and symbolism of consumption/brands are important (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982; Zwick *et al.* 2008; Payne *et al.* 2009). The Internet is a potential source of an "interactive" new business logic emphasising consumers as co-producers with firms in areas such as product design and innovation (Wikström 1995; Fuller *et al.* 2007).

As outlined earlier in this chapter, CCT points out how 'meaning' is central to consumption. Some CCT researchers (Arnould & Thompson 2005; Arnould, Price, & Malshe 2006; Arnould 2007; Lanier & Schau 2007; Parmentier & Fischer 2007; Schau *et al.* 2009; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010; Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder 2011) wish to ally with SDL, with many parallelisms and overlaps [e.g. consumer co-production of meaning and value (Firat & Venkatesh 1993; Arnould *et al.* 2006; Bengtsson & Ostberg 2006; Kates 2006; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010; Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder 2011)]. Not all CCT or SDL researchers would wish to see this combination, but it is used here to stimulate a response from the readership (Healy & McDonagh forthcoming). CCT researchers provide a great deal of perspectives on how to gain a fuller understanding of consumer value co-creation processes; a primary task set out by SDL marketing researchers (Payne *et al.* 2009). The task is not to get inside the head of the consumer, but to get inside the lifeworld of the consumer to discover how, through the performance of consumption (Deighton 1992), consumers also become producers as products/brands/services are used as building blocks for a meaningful life and extensions of the self through the labours of the individual/group (Belk 1988; Ritson, Elliott, & Eccles 1996; Solomon *et al.* 2006; Arnould 2007). Such doing/working/production are central to existence and self-worth (Marx 1978). That which is created is incorporated into self-identity, whether material object or abstract thought, and these created meanings, identity, and culture may be used to ritualistically communicate identity as highlighted in sections 2.05 and 2.06 (see also Locke 1690; Veblen 1899; Levy 1959; Belk 1988; Sherry & McGrath 1989; McCracken 1990; Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000; Elliott & Davies 2006). In this creation, consumers participate in consumption rituals that

allow them to invest consumption objects with meaning, what Belk (1988) calls "cathexis" (psychic energy), and consumption rituals also allow bridges back to these meanings (McCracken 1990). They, particularly in sport, may be emotionally charged (Richardson 2007).

Wikström (1995 p. 10) defines co-production as buyer-seller social interaction and adaptability with a view to attaining further value. But, it seems apposite to expand this definition to cover *any* combination of stakeholders who co-produce, tangibly and intangibly, consumption phenomena and symbolism - e.g. consumers with other consumers (Hirschman 1986b; Kates 2006). This includes fans interacting on RAWK who create new songs to sing about favourite football players [see "productive" elements of fandom in contemporary culture generally (Fiske 1992; Lewis 1992a; Holt 1995), and in football fandom specifically (Richardson 2007)]. Jenkins says (1992b p. 214):

> What do fans produce? Fans produce meanings and interpretations; fans produce art-works; fans produce communities; fans produce alternative identities. In each case, fans are drawing on materials from the dominant media and employing them in ways that serve their own interests and facilitate their own pleasures.

Fans display desire for interactivity to create their culture in ways that go far beyond market transactions. This is representative of what Richardson & Turley (2006) observe as a widely held belief amongst supporters: being a supporter is something that you do, not something you can buy (Richardson 2007 p. 156). This "doing" fandom leads to cultural meanings being created that thus surround the brand and relate to value. Balmer (2006) quotes graphic designer Landor who said that brands are not made in the factory but in people's minds, thus these perceptions give a corporate brand a good deal of its value. When Philip Morriss bought Kraft for $12.6 billion, six times its book value (Newman 2001), this was directly attributable to the valuation placed on the 'brand' itself based on perceptions (Balmer 2006). This off-balance-sheet resource or value may be referred to as "brand equity" (Vargo & Lusch 2004 p. 12).

Dynamic flows of consumption performances leading to co-creation of meaning in ritualised service processes may be referred to as "prosumption" (Küpers 2000; Brown 2007; Kozinets 2007; Humphreys & Grayson 2008; Kozinets *et al.* 2008). Narrated

symbolic expression is central to this - such as the dialogical interaction or narrative occurring on RAWK. Stories, interpretation, and contextual understanding of group narratives and the co-created story of consumption practices see narration, a social process, bridge various meanings (Küpers 2000). In more specific terms, Tucker (1974) observes that complex after-purchase activities can lead to product meaning changing for consumers (see "idiosyncratic" meaning in Hirschman 1986b). Even more specifically, Kotler (1972) indicates that consumers may be viewed as partaking in marketing in various ways, not just by receiving marketing messages or goods, but also somewhat producing the marketing system through, for example, negotiating price or terms of a purchase/sale with a seller. Tucker (1974 p. 32) refers to how consumers may advise friends or ask for advice regarding a product, thus altering elements of product meaning "subtly" or "severely" (see "shared" product symbolism/meaning/attributes in Hirschman 1986b). These are just some of the ways the "meaning" of brands/products are co-produced. The sequential transaction model is no longer a driving force; an interactive arrangement is recommended (Wikström 1995). Consumers often buy products for their *meaning* - thus it is a valuable "attribute" (Levy 1959; Hirschman 1986b). If a consumer's community consistently warn them not to buy a particular brand, for whatever reason, then they *may* not value that brand very highly, in some cases, due to how it is not associated with "positive" meanings for their peers, via word of mouth (Lim & Chung 2011) (see idiosyncratic and interpersonally shared meaning in Hirschman 1986b). According to Schultz *et al.* (1989), if a consumer has highly "valued", "cherished", or "favourite" possessions, they will often speak highly of them, have positive emotions about them, and display them as a token of pride for others to see - like a football fan wearing their team's colours. A consumer's most cherished or valued possessions tend to be the ones with most "great and deep meaning" (ibid p. 359); the ones that "matter" most (Grossberg 1992). Meaning and value are intertwined (Levy 1959; Balmer 2006). These meanings and values will often vary for the same consumption object when considered by different consumers (Dittmar 1992; Elliott 1994a); even the same consumer - e.g. the value or 'meaning' a consumer may place on a gift they received from a loved one (Sherry 1983; Sherry & McGrath 1989; Belk & Coon 1993). Similarly, McCracken (1990) discusses antiques pointing to how, through use (consumption rituals), they become *more valuable* (the 'patina') rather than *less,* thus superseding the modernist delineation of producers creating value and consumers destroying it (Firat & Dholakia 1998).

Gift giving is a form of sharing. Belk (2010) details the importance of sharing to various consumption phenomena, and how it leads to meaning creation together between consumers. Such co-creation is especially apparent in consumer groups such as brand communities (Payne *et al.* 2009) like fans on RAWK (see also Pongsakornrungsilp 2010). Important facets of this are social and group knowledge coupled with consumption rituals (McCracken 1990). Football fans often consume communally through sharing the experience, whether it is getting together with friends to watch a game, attending a public bar, or watching a match live at the stadium with thousands of others and sharing in the creation of the atmosphere (King 2002). This is reflective of what Holt (1995) calls 'consuming as play'. Geertz (1972) also highlights cockfighting as a much more meaningful/important facet of Balinese culture than a simple game (although some people might see it as a particularly barbaric and cruel activity). Similarly, the meaning of football, generally, to fans, is much more than a game. It also goes well beyond simply 'profane' acts of value-destructive consumption (Belk 1989; Firat & Venkatesh 1995; Firat & Dholakia 1998). Just like the 'patina' of an antique 'adds value' to that item over time (McCracken 1990), from the perspective of the antique collector, consumption 'rituals' (Ritson & Elliott 1999; Muniz & O'Guinn 2001) similarly add value to 'football' (broadly) - e.g. fans using football clubs in identity construction (King 2000; Giulianotti 2005; Andrews & Ritzer 2007).

Holbrook says (1987 p. 128) "value is a type of experience that occurs for some living organism when a goal is achieved, a need is fulfilled, or a want is satisfied". These needs and goals are wide ranging, including traditional utilitarian needs, along with fuzzier notions such as emotions, feelings, fantasies, spirituality, pleasure, playfulness, social bonding, and a multiplicity of other potentially valuable/meaningful phenomena from the almost insignificant to the deeply meaningful (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982; Hirschman 1985; Holbrook 1987; O'Guinn & Belk 1989; Sherry 1990; Cova 1997). This involves fans displacing meanings (McCracken 1990) such as 'community' to football, as is a main concern in this GT, and then accessing bridges back to these meanings (see Chapters 3 & 4). Fans may be "prosumers" (Toffler 1980; Tapscott & Williams 2006) who display a willingness to partake in co-construction of their social reality and thus the brand culture they are consuming (Richardson 2007; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010). Fans generally engage in

various such practices, utilising any resources they can, to enshrine their identity (Grossberg 1992), practice, and experience as non-vicarious. Their heavy emotional bond with LFC (Football Task Force 1999) may lead to possessiveness and desire for *more* control or co-creation that goes beyond the traditional offline realm of fandom, such as on non-match-days, or on the part of fans who cannot attend matches for whatever reason (e.g. finance, geographical location), stimulating participation in online environments in order to add to their (offline) cultural production in various co-creative ways/roles online. According to some theorists, it is no longer a matter of marketers attempting to "create" value *for* customers. It is about creating value *with* customers and incorporating customers' existing value creation into the marketing system of the firm (Wikström 1995; see also Porter & Kramer 2011). A variation on this general philosophy is already being pursued by *GE, Google, IBM,* and *Intel* (Porter & Kramer 2011).

Managerial literature posits that this can be successfully done by a "learning" organization (Wikström 1995). Interactive learning (Lundvall 1993 p. 55) between consumer and producer may help create value for both in various ways, including fostering of better relations between them, improving organizational knowledge of the customer, and improving the level of creativity on both sides (Wikström 1995). A basic principle to this collaborative approach is the embracing of deeper interactions between buyers and sellers that go beyond transactional relations. Rather than utilising traditional marketing management approaches that stipulate a sequential approach of firms designing, producing, and then marketing goods and services to be consumed, the new approach allows for an overlapping of all business functions, and even their extension to bring, for example, consumer input into all processes from innovation, to delivery (ibid). In doing this, firms could learn from consumers in accordance with SDL (Vargo & Lusch 2004). This goes beyond merely gathering consumer information and requires that firms *use* this information - engaging with reflection, and subsequent action, stimulated by greater knowledge of consumers; real learning (Senge 1990 p. 13). Finding ways to foster consumer-firm interaction may prove difficult however. But, use of intermediaries (e.g. retailers) (Wikström 1995), or embracement of other measures can go some way towards opening the firm up to become truly co-productive, interactive, adaptive and proactive rather than conservative and reactive relying on small design and marketing teams to strike gold all the time, while ignoring the rich veins of consumer-knowledge just waiting to be tapped into.

Firms may take on more supportive roles, liaising more broadly with consumers, such as how Nestlé set up a free dietician helpline to engage with its consumer-base (ibid). This is one example of how technology may help to improve producer-consumer co-production and utilise more streams of consumer knowledge and information to become a learning organization. IT-based examples may allow the firm to keep costs down and make the work load and logic more viable (ibid). It is about creating broader interfaces and more opportunities for social exchange and learning; consumers are a valuable asset (ibid). The firm may also choose to reward staff or customers who communicate valuable ideas (ibid).

Another IT tool that may open up channels for feedback and learning is the Internet. The Internet may make spotting and selection of the various trends and changes in society, or the symbol pool, easier (Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 530). There are even trend-watching-services who claim to study consumption in order to sell this information to interested firms (Solomon *et al.* 2006). The idea is that those who are able to forecast consumer tastes will be consistently successful over time (ibid). However, importantly, the information gathered in organizational learning must be used in management decision making; reflection and action are essential (Fornell 1981; Senge 1990; Wikström 1995). This may require alterations to the organizational structure, decision-making structure, organizational culture, attitudes or norms. Wikström (1995) says that while customer-supplier co-production may be slightly more developed in industrial markets, it is a relatively new and more complex phenomenon in consumer markets. Whether one follows more traditional managerial approaches to consumer/producer relations or more recent interpretive/cultural/postmodern/interactive strains, both emphasise that an organization's success depends on it being sensitive to serving and satisfying its consumers (Kotler & Levy 1969; Wikström 1995; Holt 2002; Vargo & Lusch 2004). The marketing concept itself declares that organizations who use the marketing perspective as their guide will see the interests of the firm and its consumers align (Holt 2002). However, it appears that conflicts may still remain and these tensions may relate to control, authority, and power over brand cultural resources (Slater 1997; Holt 2002). One way such conflicts may be resolved is through innovative firms working in concert with consumers of all kinds, including the most unruly of bricoleurs who participate in resistance, such as football fans who refuse to wear jerseys in opposition to over-commercialization (King 2002; Richardson 2007). While consumers may outflank marketers, reinscribing consumption

objects with alternative co-created meanings, marketers may look to become more participative rather than authoritarian in approach, allowing for more dialogue and recognition of already existing aspects of the culture that are under consumer control. Consumers see consumption contexts as spaces in which they can rework and maintain their identities, thus marketers could be open to facilitating consumers' desires and motivations. This may prompt more favourable consumer responses to market offerings.

2.08 CONSUMER RESPONSES TO MARKET OFFERINGS AND CONSUMPTION CONTEXTS: POSITIONS, ROLES, AND CONTROLS

In contemporary conditions of postmodern fragmented consumption, consumers are said to be liberated to be autonomous, innovative, and creative (Firat, Dholakia, & Venkatesh 1995). However, they are only somewhat freed from conformity to control their world and liberation has consequences (Firat & Venkatesh 1995; Elliott 1997; Goulding *et al.* 2002). All action remains somewhat culturally shaped (Firat & Dholakia 1998). Still, symbolic consumption is a cultural resource allowing the assimilation of various roles for individuals within their social context or reference group (Hirschman 1982).

The previous chapter section outlines creative aspects of consumption. Such labour, production or creativity, in many societies, is traditionally seen as being related to selfhood, identity, and ownership entitlement; thus, control (Belk 1988). Anthropologists generally agree that the cultivator of a crop, the farmer of a piece of land, or the maker of an object, traditionally tended to be entitled to the fruits of their labour through their investment of self in the objects produced (Belk 1988). This is not always the case, however, in contemporary capitalism, especially given the complexity of production, particularly symbolic, intangible production, such as that involving fans on RAWK. There are implications when the link between intangible creativity/control and tangible/legal ownership/control is not clear, or not continuous, however. For example, Marx discusses worker alienation (1844), whereby the worker/producer makes/creates/produces something that is not theirs to own, but belongs to the capitalist; thus the capitalist may be seen to steal a part of the worker's extended self (Marx 1848; Belk 1988). Specifically on branding, Balmer (2006 p. 38) argues that while 'legal ownership' of a brand often resides with one or

more corporations, 'emotional ownership' [such as that discussed amongst football fans by the Football Task Force (1999) & King (2000)] resides with all the stakeholders who participate in forming and maintaining the perceptions/symbolism related to that brand in their own and other people's minds. This symbolism gives the brand a good deal of its value (Balmer 2006). As discussed in section 2.04, the meaning of brands and products is complexly negotiated and variously controlled by many more stakeholders than just brand managers (Solomon 1988b; Elliott 1994a). Psychological (Friedman 1986; Elliott 1994a), literary critical (Stern 1989; Scott 1994), ethnographic/anthropological (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; McAlexander *et al.* 2002; McCracken 2005), semiotic/structuralist (Mick & Oswald 2006), sociological (Holt 1998), and phenomenological perspectives (Mick & Buhl 1992), amongst others, are common in the study of this phenomenon. This thesis adopts an anthropological ethnographic (McCracken 2005; Kates 2006) approach that draws heavily on Geertz (1973) and thus hermeneutics (Geertz 1974) to gain a deep understanding or thick description of the cultural meaning of LFC to fans on RAWK who play a co-creative role in the marketing system.

In consumption generally, there are various formal cultural gatekeepers such as film reviewers, restaurant reviewers, car reviewers, interior designers, disc jockeys, retail buyers, magazine editors, and various other agents (Solomon *et al.* 2006). There are various informal cultural gatekeepers too, such as opinion leaders, friends, spouse, family members, and neighbours (ibid). Many parties play a role in the production of tangible and intangible attributes/meanings, which make up, or are attached to, products/services/brands and, ultimately, culture (Hirschman 1986b; Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 543). All are involved in processes of cultural stability and change and formation of cultural states and tastes (Akaka & Chandler 2011). Consumer tastes and product/brand preferences are not formed in a vacuum. They are driven by images and information published in mass media, consumer observations of other consumers, and sometimes consumer-desires to pursue particular lifestyles or fantasy worlds created by marketers (Solomon *et al.* 2006 pp. 530-1). The clothing-fashion industry is exemplary given how clothing can be used to communicate various meanings, such as gender or age (McCracken 1990; Elliott 1994a). Different authors push different meanings, but also, different perceivers/interpreters, such as consumers, will derive different meanings, depending on the context, their particular worldview, or any number of factors (Scott 1994; Solomon *et al.* 2006). Consumer goods

are collectively created and selected in overlapping ways reflecting "commonality of meaning" (Elliott 1994a p. S13). This collective creation is often referred to as innovation. According to Solomon *et al.* (2006 p. 538), an innovation is any product or service that is perceived to be new by consumers. Symbolic innovation involves communication of a different social meaning than it did previously (Hirschman 1982 p. 537). So, innovations can be more technological or tangible, such as car air bags, or of an intangible/symbolic or aesthetic kind, like a new haircut or an altered meaning for a product (such as when cigarettes gradually became viewed as unhealthy); either way, *all* such changes (tangible & intangible) are symbolic and meaningful (Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 539). The two dimensions, symbolism/intangibility and technology/tangibility, are interrelated in various ways (Hirschman 1982 p. 537).

Various perspectives exist on why consumers pursue different forms/fashions of consumption. A behavioural science perspective might accord motivations of conformity, variety seeking, personal creativity, sexual attraction, or socially aware high or low self monitoring behaviour (Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 545; see also Richardson & O'Dwyer 2003 for self monitoring among football fans). Economics perspectives might consider notions of supply and demand such as consumers pursuing rare items to command respect and prestige, or engaging in conspicuous consumption (Veblen 1899; Solomon *et al.* 2006). Sociological models might focus on issues such as collective selection or Simmelian trickle down theories (Simmel 1950; McCracken 1990; Solomon *et al.* 2006). Postmodern approaches to the cultural production system and how it leads to various consumption and production modes is less specific in its consideration of origins. There is a blurring of various fashions, rules, norms, and cultures, whereby a multiplicity of consumption styles pervade consumer culture in the early twenty-first century, all at the same time (Solomon *et al.* 2006). Different individuals, or groups of fans, may in the same social context have different consumption habits and styles due to the contemporary embracement of liberating aspects of the postmodern era (Firat & Venkatesh 1993). Consumers may adopt or create particular "styles" that may be recognised as a manner of "being-in-the-world", which both "represents" and expresses "subjectivities" (Küpers 2000 pp. 304-5). Autonomy is not total (Firat & Venkatesh 1995; Shankar *et al.* 2009). Things like language play a core role in how consumers create, change, and perceive culture, given its centrality in modes of representation and understanding (Brownlie 2000). RAWK is almost entirely

textual/linguistic, thus it may play a pivotal role for its members' consumption and production (e.g. representations, understanding, perceptions, ideas, beliefs, plans for action) of LFC brand culture.

According to SDL, an understanding of non-firm stakeholder (consumers/fans) co-creative activities is fundamental to successful service-provision from the mutual point of view of supplier and consumer, if the supplier uses this knowledge of the consumer to help co-create or collaboratively co-produce tangible and intangible products/services that fit all stakeholder expectations (Vargo & Lusch 2004). According to CCT, an efficient manager is skilled in the art of reading a situation they are attempting to organise or manage in order to then react accordingly (Küpers 2000). The task for football clubs (suppliers) is to create a *leading-match* in which the expected and felt experiences of all of the organizational role-players, or stakeholders, can be satisfied (Küpers 2000). In SDL, researchers suggest starting with the consumers' value creation processes to identify which of those processes the (supplier) club has the ability and wish to support (Payne *et al.* 2009). This requires a full understanding of the fan's brand experience and brand engagement (Payne *et al.* 2009). Some managerial approaches to achieve this have been accused of being too distant from the customer-perspective [e.g. service blueprinting (Kingman-Brundage 1989; Brown *et al.* 1994)] (Brookes & Lings 1996; Payne *et al.* 2009). So, instead, the *matching* (Küpers 2000) of expectations with service, given consideration of fans' consumption experiences, in this thesis, uses the CCT perspective to research LFC culture ethnographically by understanding the fan narrative on RAWK (Thompson 1997; Küpers 2000; Bengtsson & Ostberg 2006; Kates 2006). This represents valuable feedback on the service and consumption experience usable from the SDL perspective as organizational learning (Payne *et al.* 2009).

A growing theme of marketing literature has been that the goal of the marketer in the twenty-first century should not be to exploit individual consumers, or consumer tribes/brand communities (Zwick *et al.* 2008). Instead, it should be to see them as partners who can teach a kind of valuable expertise and experience (Cova *et al.* 2007). Such partnership requires greater interaction and dialogue. This may be somewhat reflective of the ideal of the dialogic community in hermeneutic philosophy (Arnold & Fischer 1994). This could be extended to increasing dialogical interaction between consumers and

suppliers in the design, production, and delivery of goods and services for the mutual benefit, in value-terms, for both (Vargo & Lusch 2004). This dialogue simply involves conversation where participants actively listen as well as speak and accept other points of view as worthy of consideration (Bernstein 1983; Gadamer 1989 p. 385; Arnold & Fischer 1994). A basic foundation stone is all partners having the "good will" to try to understand one another. Rather than an "us" and "them" attitude to the relationship between fans and managers, this perspective would emphasise mutual communal relations being fostered encouraging co-production (Wikström 1995). Similarly, Fisher & Smith (2011) refer to a co-creative approach that utilises technology such as the Internet as opening up the potential to something akin to the "ideal speech situation".

Consumers may enact multiple social roles to convey a multitude of symbolic meanings, including ones relating to identity and/or lifestyle, given choices and uses of consumption resources such as clothing, vehicles, homes, food, drinks, magazines, fragrances, pets, entertainment, and alterations to our body, or any combination or "consumption constellation" or "diderot unity" of these or other consumption phenomena (Levy 1981; Hirschman 1986b; McCracken 1986; 1990; Solomon 1988a; Belk 1995). Thus, to enact certain social roles, fans must be able to engage with, or have access to, consumption objects/resources to create a bridge to access the meanings invested therein (McCracken 1990). To do this, given the centrality of ownership, property rights, and possession in contemporary industrialized society, consumers must often own a particular consumption object (Belk 1988; 1995). Thus, issues regarding ownership and/or access are pivotal. Research on consumers in industrialized societies has portrayed them as having distinctive traits; they are innovative relative to new products or ideas; they have highly developed personal preferences; they exhibit high levels of information seeking; they are motivated towards personal achievement; they seek mastery and control over their environments in identity pursuits (Sartre 1943; Hirschman 1985). Control over consumption resources, ownership, property rights, and possessions are sometimes communal (Belk 2010). This may be seen to strengthen group cohesion, traditions, and reduce the development of consumption hierarchies within the group, promoting a sense of oneness (ibid).

The postmodern era in CR (Sherry 1991; Solomon *et al.* 2006 pp. 600-6) has led to coverage of various streams focussing on (post)modern issues relating to consumer

responses to marketing offerings, regularly featuring consumers' controlling tendencies, including the (postmodern) age of globalization, environmentalism (green consumption, recycling), political consumption, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Stakeholder Theory, Corporate Citizenship). Some of these issues have stimulated theory regarding the "power" that consumers have to work via consumption towards idealised lifestyles, not just for themselves, but for their wider social, cultural, and environmental context (e.g. buying eco-friendly goods). Consumers may thus engage in various roles or identities that may be seen to represent consumer activism or consumer movements, large or small (see Mead 1934; Goffman 1959; 1969; Solomon 1983; Gabriel & Lang 1995; Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 6). Solomon *et al.* (2006) attribute this to increasing awareness of the political and moral consequences of consumption choices, and thus the emergence of the political consumer. Many consumers buy products that conform to their political and moral values and refuse to do business with companies or buy products that do not. This may thus be somewhat representative of Smith's (1976) 'hidden hand'. Some refer to this as consumer sovereignty (Slater 1997; Bannock *et al.* 2003). Consumers are much more than "buyers"; they also engage with and are critical of other aspects of business and marketing (Saren *et al.* 2007; Porter & Kramer 2011). Exemplary are "adbusters" who rebel against a perceived oppressive streak within some marketing, sometimes engaging in "culture jamming" or boycotts (Crane & Matten 2004; Solomon *et al.* 2006). Kozinets (1999 p. 258) observes that the Internet, and the contemporary phenomenon of e-tribes (RAWK) is allowing for consumers to unite, thus empowering them to increasingly say "no" to forms of advertising or marketing that they find invasive or unethical.

Recognition of the vast complexity of consumers' 'power' and awareness in the marketplace leads contemporary marketers to recognise, as mentioned in section 2.07, the need to "listen" to consumers' views (Glaser 1995; Rappaport 2010; Fisher & Smith 2011) on many issues that go far beyond traditional utilitarian models (product price, value, quality, effectiveness, aesthetics) to include broader issues. Specifically, in football, Morrow (2003) says that the role and importance of good communications between clubs and their communities must be highlighted. Potential examples exist in commerce generally, where some organizations now set up joint task forces to communicate with boycotters, for example, to bring about dialogue and consultation (Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 608). However, some products, particularly cultural products have a whole raft of unique issues (Hirschman

1986b; Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 358). According to Solomon *et al.* (2006 p. 358) the problem for:

> many producers of cultural products is that on the one hand they like (for good pecuniary reasons) the iconic cult status their products may obtain, but on the other they neglect that part of the love for cultural products is sharing them with other devotees. The big question remains within as well as outside cyberspace: Who owns culture?

As derived from observing RAWK and literature weaving, a heavily related and intertwined problem may be - who *controls* culture (see Folkes 2002 for relatedness of "ownership" and "control") or who plays what *roles* in the maintenance and change of cultural forms (Hirschman 1986b; McCracken 2005). Consumers of cultural products such as books (*Harry Potter* fans; Brown 2007), music (see music fans who adopt and adapt the clothing fashions of their favourite musicians or genre of music; the heavy-metal-look in Elliott 1994a; see also Hebdige 1979; McRobbie 1989; or music fans who do cover versions of their favourite songs), television shows (*Star Trek*; Jenkins 1992a; Kozinets 2001), and movies (*Star Wars*; Jenkins 1992b; Cova *et al.* 2007) often become fanatical (fans) to the point that they wish to exert influence and control over the object of their desire. Some theorize that CR should consider the, often uneasy, play, performance, or "dance" between all or any parties involved in a consumption context to uncover some of what is happening, and who is controlling (intentionally or unintentionally), or attempting to control, what (Brown 2007; Cova *et al.* 2007 pp. 8, 15).

This thesis studies the phenomenon of cultural control amongst football fans who may be seen as extremely emotionally attached and loyal to brands they see as parts of themselves (Scarry 1985; Belk 1988; Schultz *et al.* 1989; Conn 1997; Fournier 1998; Football Task Force 1999 pp. 37-46; Hamil 1999; King 2000; Giulianotti & Robertson 2004). Sherry & McGrath (1989) portray such attachment of supernormal signs to consumption objects as relating to a form of fetishism that moves beyond the realm of erotic aestheticism. In conditions where these signs/meanings are created by a shared collective, CCT locates the sociality of the artefact (Sherry & McGrath 1989; Mehta & Belk 1991; Bettany 2007 p. 43). Via these artefacts, particular ideologies may be pursued on the basis of the meaning the artefact has ideologically (Sherry & McGrath 1989). They may be used in self development, maintenance, and cultivation (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton 1981;

Schultz *et al.* 1989). Through aestheticization of experience (Featherstone 1991; Elliott & Davies 2006) consumers may open up zones of ephemeral and limited autonomy/control in the marketing system (Desmond *et al.* 2000; Cova *et al.* 2007 p. 15). This is evident in online contexts; they appear to be more active, participative, resistant, militant, playful, social, and communitarian than ever before (Kozinets 1999; Cova *et al.* 2007 p. 16). If a fan cares deeply for their club and what it means to them as an identifier, they may have more of a stake in controlling that meaning through their consumption of it, intentionally or unintentionally, given the sociality of the artefact.

Comparisons may be made with notions of "individuation" and "integration" (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton 1981; Schultz *et al.* 1989). Consumers 'differentiate' themselves as an "idiotic"/individual self, through being autonomous, self-determinant, self-contained, and engaging in self-control or making self-choices; "individuation". Consumers "integrate" themselves into "social selves" through being relational, connected, joined, associated, and/or involved with others (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton 1981; Schultz *et al.* 1989). It is a dialectical process (Jenkins 1996). The symbolism and meanings of the cultural context are thus relevant to fans' consumption and production. A consumer or producer may create, maintain, or change their individual identity through being-in-the-world as a consumer or producer in specific ways, for example, and this has implications for culture (Sherry & McGrath 1989; Cova & Cova 2000). Exemplary is how consumers engage in various consumption rituals that allow them to "groom" or shape the meaning of what they consume and/or the context of their consumption and also access these meanings (McCracken 1990). This consumption and production has communicative power (Sherry & McGrath 1989). Symbolic meaning is actively created in the act of living (Hudson & Ozanne 1988). Firat & Dholakia (1998) say that everyone is a player, an actor. Different groups of actors may well be engaged in many different interactions simultaneously. They all make a contribution to what is happening on the entire stage (ibid p. 155), and what it all means symbolically. They act out various and multiple roles. They are all also affected by what happens to varying degrees, given how it forms their context, or part of it. For example, Avery (2008) discusses identity and selfhood and how they relate to consumption in her investigation of Porsche consumers. She shows how the predominantly male customer-base engages in resistance to the introduction of a new model of Porsche, the Cayenne, based on their view that it was too feminine and would damage

their identity as masculine through association with Porsche. This behaviour may relate to what Folkes (2002) outlines as a common trait among many consumers; the ownership goal. The consumer acts out various roles in anticipation that these will evoke certain responses from his or her audience (Solomon *et al.* 1985; Folkes 2002). The ownership goal is one that involves control over objects or another's behaviour (Folkes 2002).

"Ownership" in its western, "legal" form is a social construction and ownership is, in some societies, seen as a much less individualistic phenomenon. For example, in Aboriginal Australian societies, collective communal "sharing" is seen as a stronger norm than individualistic proprietary ownership (Belk, Groves, & Ostergaard 2000; Belk 2010). Similarly, in his discussion of how consumers invest meaning in goods, and subsequently access those meanings, through various rituals, McCracken (1990 p. 85) refers to how consumers may have ownership of an item without possession of it, paradoxically. To take possession of a consumer good, the consumer must deploy possession rituals that allow extraction of the meaningful properties that have been invested in the consumer good, or investment of new meanings. Possession rituals allow consumers to lay claim to, and assume a kind of ownership of, the meaning of a consumer good (McCracken 1990). The meaning of the good is moved thus into the life of a consumer, into their possession. In this thesis, LFC fans may own various LFC related items or merchandise, but they do not own the club as a business, even though they help co-create the brand meaning and thus value that it thrives on. This is a potential example of Marx's (1844/1964) concept of 'alienation', which describes how capitalism allows for the capitalist to take ownership of the products of workers' labour, and thus aspects of their selfhood (Marx 1848/1964; Slater 1997). This thus leads to some lack of control over what has been created by the worker; in this case the concept could be extended to refer to the creative capacities of consumers, who co-create the brand culture and thus, somewhat, its value, but still do not legally own the brand. It is interesting to differentiate between the kind of 'ownership' and 'possession' that McCracken (1990) talks about, and utilise these variations of the two concepts to understand how fans ritualistically attain meanings from the brand community surrounding LFC, and thus develop feelings of 'possession' over LFC, if not legal 'ownership' over LFC. This is an extension, by inversion, of McCracken's observation of the possibility for 'ownership' but not 'possession', following interpretation of RAWK.

Tucker (1974) points out that not all consumer goals are immediate and prompt to readily identifiable momentary market transactions. Consumer satisfaction, for example, may be distant and indefinite, as with a student of education or a churchgoer (Tucker 1974). It may be measured in a multiplicity of ways, including, "happiness", "emotional maturity", or "self-actualization" to name but a few (ibid p. 34). Schultz *et al.* (1989) discuss how emotion may form a very important part of consumption experience; saying that possessions consumers are strongly attached to tend to provide positive emotions, while possessions consumers are 'weakly' attached to tend to provide negative emotions. This thesis investigates whether consumption objects consumers are strongly attached to, such as football clubs, may invoke both positive *and* negative emotions. Fans are usually very loyal (Hamil 1999), even when they are unhappy with their club, for whatever reason. The strange phenomenon of adoring the brand while hating the company is mentioned by Cova *et al.* (2007 p. 22). Maybe this kind of fan/club relationship could be explained by comparing it to the type of fan obsession mentioned by Lewis (1992b) in her investigation of the contradictory tension between both love *and* hatred found in many fans' relationships with their object of adoration. "Lack of recognition" appears to play an important part in this unusual relationship (Lewis 1992b p. 158). So, possibly a lack of interaction and dialogue is one root of the problem where hatred develops. Brown, A. (1998b), Taylor, R. (1991; 1992), Haynes (1995), Barber & Williams (2002), and Williams & Neatrour (2002) have carried out research that finds a perceived lack of consultation between British football fans and their clubs, and related authorities (e.g. the Football Association), throughout history. This lack of consultation means football fans often have little direct control of brand management via official channels such as interaction with brand managers themselves. But, consumption can help consumers establish self/not-self boundaries (Belk 1988) and a sense of control and mastery over their environment beyond simply that involving interaction with brand managers (Schultz *et al.* 1989; Grossberg 1992; Cova & Cova 2000). Cova & Cova (2000) illustrate practices by which French bank customers re-appropriate the corporate space in ways not intended by the companies and thus exert some limited control over their consumption and its context separately from any company employees or managers. At the tangible-object level, McCracken (1990) similarly describes various consumption rituals that create more individualised or autonomous meanings to be invested or displaced into material possession. Regarding fans, Jenkins (1992a; 1992b p. 213) refers to such "appropriation" of materials produced by the dominant culture industry

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and subsequent reworking of them into terms which better serve subordinate or subcultural interests as "textual poaching". A lack of consultation between football clubs and fans may stunt fan control over its consumption context. But, literature on fan co-creation (Pongsakornrungsilp 2010) shows they may still behave in various ways signifying self-expression, whether it is loyalty or adaptation to the status quo, a search for adjustments, avoidance, or a call for a dramatic overhaul through some means. Depending on how consumers engage with the world around them, they may be seen to appropriate.

"Appropriation" brings to mind several different notions, including those of possession, personalization, autonomy, control, potentiality, or that of a 'norm' (Cova & Cova 2000). It can be seen as the act of making something "one's own", through either taking something for oneself, or making it one's property, or making it correspond to the use for which it is intended by the person engaging in the appropriation (ibid). Legal terminology refers to the term as relating to notions of possession, or ownership. In technical terminology, it means achieving mastery/control of an object/environment (ibid). When Arnould & Price (1993) and Price *et al.* (1996) investigate white water rafting on the Grand Canyon rapids in Colorado, they represent how clients engaging in a leisure activity (consumption) can appropriate nature by confronting it and creating meaning for it and themselves (Cova & Cova 2000). Belk (1988) highlights the mountain climber's assertion of control on nature through mastery of its peaks and thus extension of the self to them (see also Sartre 1943). In less 'natural' environments, such as man-made servicescapes, like football, consumer autonomy is diminished somewhat due to other competing interests like market hegemony (economic profitability for service providers) or related community members' desires, motives, and actions, all in overarching cultural and natural conditions at that moment. However, there is still the potential for appropriation (or re-appropriation; see Cova & Cova 2000). The new millennium has heralded an age where consumer-guerrillas are using products and images in ways that are foreign to the traditional 'managers' or 'producers' of such products (Cova & Cova 2000). These unorthodox uses may not be merely simple semiotic games, but genuine acts of rebellion against the authority of the traditional producer (Gabriel & Lang 1995). This often involves the rejection of the legitimacy of claims of marketing systems and challenging of hegemonic order, without an outright rejection of its products (Gabriel & Lang 1995; Cova & Cova 2000). This may involve intangible consumption activities related to the symbolic culture, and/or tangible actions

such as boycotts and active consumer resistance (e.g. Richardson 2007). These complex processes of vying for 'control' have been interpreted in related literature to be the result, in some cases, of consumers adoring a cult brand but hating the company that developed it, or acquired it by buying the company or the branding rights, due to differences of, for example, commercial taste. Exemplary are fans of *Star Wars* who reject and despise George Lucas (Brown *et al.* 2003), or users of the *Apple Newton* device who reject *Apple* for its discontinuation of service (Muniz & Schau 2005). In these cases, fans of the product/brand/consumption phenomenon were so passionate that they began altering the 'product' or even making their own; e.g. *Star Wars* fans becoming digital cinematographers and producing their own versions of the films (Cova *et al.* 2007 p. 22) or writing their own fan-fiction (Jenkins 1992a; 1992b); *Harry Potter* or *Lord of the Rings* fans writing their own alternative stories (Lanier & Schau 2006; 2007; Brown 2007). The consumer toolbox to engage in 'appropriation' (Jenkins 1992b; Cova & Cova 2000) increases through the explosive growth in use of new media like the Internet (Cova *et al.* 2007). Gergen (1991) refers to "multiphrenia"; a scenario where postmodern consumers are potentially faced with so many choices of symbolic resources and multiple roles and responsibilities that fragmentation and complexity occur (see also Sherry & Kozinets 2001). This potentially leads to a fragmentation of one singular identity into various identities or roles (single reality into multiple realities) (Firat & Venkatesh 1995; Goulding *et al.* 2002). So, being a "raver", for example, does not always mean the same thing. Not all "ravers" behave the same way (Goulding *et al.* 2002). Similarly, not all football fans behave the same way; nor does even just one football fan behave the same way all of the time. A particular fan/group may behave in various ways at various times, thus enacting various roles that may be theorized variously. This thesis sets out to delineate various *roles* LFC fans perform in controlling/co-creating their consumption (Deighton 1992; Firat & Dholakia 1998). Hirschman's (1970) discussion of how customers/members may respond to a decline in a firm, product, service, member-organization, or state, forms a major foundation of this thesis' role-analysis. Hirschman (1970) outlines three general ways consumers/members behave in response to discontentment relating to something they consume (e.g. product) or something they are a part of (e.g. political party or workers-union). These, *exit, voice, & loyalty,* are taken as three fundamental roles in this GT.

According to Hirschman (1970), the traditional model of the competitive market economy within the discipline of economics predominantly only recognises two consumer-processes - buying or not buying. That is to say that when a consumer bought a product, they were deemed to be satisfied by it, and when they did not, were not. "The customer who, dissatisfied with the product of one firm shifts to that of another, uses the market to defend his welfare or to improve his position; and he also sets in motion market forces which may induce recovery on the part of the firm that has declined in comparative performance. This is the sort of mechanism economics thrives on. It is neat - one either exits or one does not…success and failure of the organization are communicated to it by a set of statistics" (Hirschman 1970 pp. 15-6). So, exiting the market is one option for the consumer, or at least, exiting from buying from *that* firm. If one is a member of an organisation (e.g. a workers-union), the notion of *exit* is represented through leaving the organization.

Voice offers another perspective; a firm's customers or organization's members express dissatisfaction to management or to some authority to which management is subordinate or through general protest addressed to anyone who cares to listen (Hirschman 1970). It is a messier concept than *exit* because it may be graduated by degree from faint grumbling to violent protest; it implies articulation of one's critical opinions rather than something private. It is political action par excellence (ibid). It is championed by political scientists as *the* nonmarket mechanism of choice for active citizenship.

Hirschman points towards an exceptional opportunity to show how a typical market (*exit*) and a typical non-market mechanism (*voice*) can be seen as equally valid and important in both traditionally economic domains (business) and political ones (e.g. political parties). As an example, disatissfied consumers often choose not to *exit*; they may "kick up a fuss" in search of a product or service that is closer to their expectation and thus force improved quality or service upon "delinquent management" (Hirschman 1970). Various researchers promote equality of some conceptions of *voice* and *exit* when discussing marketing and business (McDonagh 1998; Holt 2002; Belk 2004; Penaloza 2004; Baker *et al.* 2005; Hamilton 2007; Peattie 2007).

Exit from buying a product is not quite as simple as it may appear. If a consumer needs a product, such as electricity, for example, and the service provider is doing an unsatisfactory

job, but is the only one in the locality, then the customer cannot stop using it due to the lack of readily substitutable alternatives (Hirschman 1970). The role of *voice* increases as opportunities for *exit* decline. There may be other reasons for lack of *exit* being a viable option. A major one is *loyalty* (Hirschman 1970).

Loyalty represents a "special attachment to an organization" on the part of the customer/member (Hirschman 1970 p. 77). Such special attachment may also exist between a consumer and various other phenomena, such as material goods and possessions (Schultz *et al.* 1989), or brands (Fournier 1998), regardless of who the brand or company is owned by in some cases (Cova *et al.* 2007). Loyalty makes *exit* less likely (Hirschman 1970 p. 77). The likelihood of *voice* increases with the degree of *loyalty* (ibid). "A member with a considerable attachment to a product or organization will often search for ways to make himself influential, especially when the organization moves in what he believes is the wrong direction" (ibid pp. 77-8). It holds *exit* at bay, activating *voice*. A strong attachment often leads to intention to keep consumption objects in a consumer's life for a long time or forever (Schultz *et al.* 1989), as with many football fans who have "sacred" or "magical" relationships with their club (Richardson 2007). *Loyalty* is a concept that goes beyond repeat purchase (Jacoby & Chestnut 1978) or "narrowly cognitive utilitarian decision-making" to represent "talismanic relationships consumers form with that which is consumed" (Belk *et al.* 1989 p. 31; Fournier 1998). *Loyalty* raises the cost of *exit* (Hirschman 1970). It has been described as a secular ritual comparable to a monogamous human sexual relationship (Sherry 1987). Hirschman (1970) claims that *loyalty* is at its most functional when it looks most irrational [non-utilitarian (Fournier 1998)], when it means strong attachment to an organization that does not seem to warrant such attachment because it is so much like other substitutes that are available, and he says that football fans are an ideal example of such irrational *loyalty* (Hirschman 1970 p. 81). In effect, this is due to a monopolistic scenario (Conn 1997) that is largely the result of high prices of *exit* specified by Hirschman (1970) as potential for loss of lifelong associations or the "unthinkability" of *exit* that is largely down to internalised feelings, whereby the individual believes that leaving a certain group carries a high price, even though no specific sanction may be imposed by the group. These feelings may be comparable to those of "addiction" (Elliott 1994b). Potential moral and/or material sufferings resultant from *exit* may lead a fan to cling to their club, or it could be that the former-member would continue to care about

the activity or output of the organization even after *exit*. The member cares about the group's or firm's deterioration whether s/he stays on as a member or not. Schultz *et al.* (1989 p. 361) mention that strong possession attachment tends to lead consumers to take very good care of the object they are very attached to, and thus they are protective of it, not wanting to see it lost, stolen, or damaged in any way. This care and maintenance may be referred to as a 'grooming ritual' (McCracken 1990 pp. 86-7). Belk (1988 p. 154) observes consumers exhibiting tendencies to exercise control over their most cared for possessions. So, if football fans on RAWK are possessive towards LFC, then possibly this helps to explain their wish for greater control over it, through grooming rituals, to 'care' for it.

Sometimes *loyalty* is due to consumer-members' belief they are a "quality-maker", and thus if they withdraw, quality will lower further (Hirschman 1970 p. 99). In this case, the member/consumer is involved in both supply and demand sides, in traditional economic terms; both the production and consumption of the organization's output. Football fans help to produce and consume the matchday given their role as atmosphere generators (King 2002; Richardson 2007 p. 127). So, if the stadium was nearly empty, it would appear that the matchday atmosphere would suffer, and thus the product may suffer.

The existence of these three roles (exit, voice, loyalty) is important for Hirschman (1970). He sees them as mechanisms, which organizations must be aware of and responsive to. "The greatest interest centres here naturally on those "perverse" or pathological cases where an organization is in effect equipped with a reaction mechanism to which it is not responsive: those who are affected by quality decline do vent their feelings in one way or another, but management happens to be inured or indifferent to their particular reaction and thus does not feel compelled to correct its course" (Hirschman 1970 p. 122).

Cova & Cova (2000) explore a concept they term *twist,* which they add to Hirschman's (1970) three theoretical responses. Cova & Cova (2000) refer to this as a consumer "position". This study takes consumer "role" or "position" to denote a response to market offerings or consumption contexts. So, *twist* is adopted as a consumer "role". "Role" is posited as an interactive, dramaturgical, participative identity theory related term (Goffman 1959; Firat & Dholakia 1998 pp. 147, 154; Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 210). The terms "roles" and "positions" are both considered relevant. Here, usage of the term "role" allows the

theatre to be invoked as a metaphorical medium of cultural interaction that is set against the medium of economic interaction, the market (Firat & Dholakia 1998 p. 154). Everyone is a "player" or an actor, all contributing to what is happening on the stage of consumption/production. All actors may take on various roles simultaneously and even engage with different groups, tribes (Maffesoli 1996), and interactions concurrently (Firat & Dholakia 1998 pp. 147, 155).

Through engagement with these roles, "quality making" fans on RAWK are sharing consumption (Belk 2010). While it is possible to view such communal gatherings as VCs through the lens of reciprocal exchange relationships, even helpful at times (e.g. Chan & Li 2010), at the extreme, this exchange lens could lead to what is described as the commodification of everything, even social interaction (Radin 1996; Agnew 2003; Belk 2010). Looking through an alternative lens than one that focuses on the utilitarianism of the marketplace and exchange (Graeber 2001), it may be posited that sharing is ubiquitous, yet routine sharing often goes unnoticed, unappreciated, and taken-for-granted (Belk 2010). "Sharing tends to be a communal act that links us together as people…one that creates feelings of solidarity and bonding" (ibid p. 717). According to Belk (1987b; 2010), we normally consider our immediate family to be a part of our extended self, and thus sharing with them is like sharing with self. Sharing outside of the immediate family is where the phenomenon becomes most interesting. It leads to consumers seeing ownership as common or shared, through collaborative consumption (Felson & Spaeth 1978), which may be seen to be occurring in brand communities and co-creation of brand meanings via VCs (Belk 2010). Such ritualistic collaborative consumption initiates and celebrates self-extension via an act of communion that leads to the expansion of the sphere of the extended self by expanding the domain of common property, making self-boundaries more permeable to other consumers (Belk 2010). Sharing is bound up with ideas about property, ownership, and self, which lead to possessive attachment to consumer goods and feelings of mastery and control of possessions (Kleine & Baker 2004; Belk 2010). Brand communities show signs of, both, sharing *and* possessive attachment over the brand, as being compatible phenomena within the group (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; Mathwick *et al.* 2008). Although members of a brand community may be possessive of their particular branded objects, they share a reverence for the brand and find that joint possession is enriched by the sense that it is being shared with a like-minded brand community (Belk 2010). Belk (2010) says that

fans of sports teams are exemplary. Similarly, the term *appropriation* is useful here. It implies possession and mastery (Cova & Cova 2000) just like possessive attachment (Kleine & Baker 2004) through sharing (Belk 2010). A consumer may take elements of market offerings and craft a customised consumption experience out of them (Cova & Cova 2000). This is where Cova & Cova (2000) locate the consumer response (role) *twist*; the consumer uses products and images in ways different to those intended by the marketing firm to which they relate; the consumer diverts the marketing system in order to conquer it, or appropriate it, through *twist*-ing its meaning (ibid). Füller *et al.* (2007) discuss how members of various basketball-shoe brand-communities (e.g. Nike) use the Internet (e.g. Niketalk forum) to design their own styles of shoes, using similar shoes on the market as inspiration and even incorporating brand symbolism and trademarks into their highly-sophisticated designs. Füller *et al.* (2007) refer to this as *innovation creation*. It could also be viewed as *twisting*.

Even though various theorists promote marketing and business managers' embracement of value co-creative resources (Wikström 1995; Fuller *et al.* 2007), the interaction with fans, in particular, has sometimes not lived up to even the most basic of customer-centric values of mainstream marketing in the real world (see Conn 1997 for exploited football fans; Brown 2007 for mistreated *Harry Potter* fans). Kozinets (2007) discusses the complex interplay between companies who relentlessly pursue profit through the commercial control of creative, mythic, cultural images and the ordinary consumers to whom these cultural phenomena mean something much deeper, sometimes leading to market exclusion of vulnerable consumers who cannot afford to pay. These vulnerable consumers are, however, part of the culture of the brand itself, given their status as prosumers (Brown 2007; Kozinets 2007). Kozinets (2007) promotes the view that both the creative consumer and the cultural producer share the same goal: the enlargement and expansion of the culture of consumption. The *manner* of this expansion creates countless potential conflicts however. Grossberg (1992), Brown *et al.* (2003) and Kozinets (2007) refer to one such conflict as being over consumer-desired "authentic" versions of the culture and what way it is produced/expanded in commercial terms and symbolic/meaningful terms. CR shows various examples of fans appropriating and twisting elements of what they consume (e.g. Jenkins 1992b on *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*; Brown 2007 on *Harry Potter*). "Fans are

consumers who also produce, readers who also write, and spectators who also participate"
(Jenkins 1992b p. 214).

These control-struggles may be made more amicable through stakeholders, such as
companies/clubs and consumers/fans, becoming more collaborative; working together to
co-create the culture in tangible dialogical ways through some variation of collective Open
Source Marketing (Pitt *et al.* 2006), open innovation (Chesbrough 2003), value co-creation
(Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004), democratizing innovation (von Hippel 2005), SDL (Vargo
& Lusch 2004), innovation creation (Fuller *et al.* 2007), co-innovation or collaboration
(Tapscott & Williams 2006), crowdsourcing (Howe 2006), wikinomiks (Tapscott &
Williams 2006), or co-production (Wikstrom 1995; Payne *et al.* 2009). Greater
collaboration could be construed as movement towards the ideal dialogical community
(Arnold & Fischer 1994), or what Cova *et al.* (2011) call collaborative capitalism. Brower
(1992) outlines how one group of television fans became quite powerful as "tastemakers"
through engaging in a "quality discourse" with television-network executives. According to
RAWK members and literature (Humphreys & Grayson 2008 p. 15), such tangible
interactions between stakeholders in cultural production (company-consumer co-creation)
are rarer than the, less tangible, interactions between fans themselves, who continuously
engage in symbolic cultural production (consumer-consumer co-creation).

So, the cultural production process contains overlaps, intersections, and conflicts between
groups or interpretive communities (Jenkins 1992b; Solomon *et al.* 2006). These may relate
to issues regarding "authenticity" and who controls the overall fan cultural narrative to
make it authentic (Jenkins 1992b; King 2002; Richardson 2007). Increasing club-fan
collaboration and dialogue may go some way towards representing "ontological care" for
the fans as whole human beings, if taking an existential encounter perspective (Jensen &
Lindberg 2000). This would require club management and staff to have abilities that
include empathy, multi-disciplinary skills, and the flexibility to meet individuals on a
situational and existential basis. Management may attempt to facilitate individual fans'
experience and change according to their own conditions, taking account of the concept that
the life of each fan is being changed and enriched through football consumption.
Ontological care is not an easy undertaking (Jensen & Lindberg 2000). It requires aiming
towards empathetic understanding of all fans for and in themselves as part of the wider fan

group, as part of society, and how football as a consumption phenomenon plays a part in the being-in-the-world of fans (Geertz 1974; Thompson 1997). Academically, hermeneutics is a useful approach, as utilised in this study. In more practical terms, a step towards this may involve "listening" (Fisher & Smith 2011) to fans, engaging in consultation and dialogue with fans, and allowing the knowledge produced to become a core resource that is learned and reflected upon to be utilised by all decision makers within the football club; encouraging greater club-fan understanding and the empowered fan as co-producer of value with the firm (Fornell 1981; Senge 1990; Wikström 1995; Vargo & Lusch 2004). Forthcoming chapters elaborate on this. One important/valuable facet of the fan experience that is co-produced, drawn from RAWK, is club success, financially and in football-terms. This relates to fan emotion.

2.09   SUCCESS AND EMOTION: THE THRILL OF WINNING AND 'BASKING IN REFLECTED GLORY'

An existential hermeneutic position takes the perspective that all understanding and experience is always partly made of emotional moods; there is no purely cognitive or rational understanding or experience (Heidegger 1962 Division One; Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000 p. 84). "Feeling is not free of thought, nor is thought free of feeling" (Zajonc 1980 p. 154). Emotion, cognition, and collective social relations all play prominent roles as people engage with the world leading to constructions and reconstructions of the self, like fans on RAWK (Turkle 1995; Sherry & Kozinets 2001).

'Success' is an important property of this thesis' main concern; RAWK data indicates these football fans tend to wish their club to be successful by winning football matches and trophies (see also Richardson 2007). Cialdini *et al. (*1976) observe a tendency to "bask in reflected glory". "Through their simple connections with sports teams, the personal images of fans are at stake when their teams take the field. The team's victories and defeats are reacted to as personal successes and failures" (Cialdini *et al.* 1976 p. 374). Geertz (1972) sees emotionality in Balinese cockfighting too, interpreting a sense of thrill through risk, despair through loss, and pleasure through triumph, among participants, with these emotions being central not only to this activity, but also the entire culture in Bali. The cocks are interpreted by Geertz to be representing their owner - so, when the cock wins, the owner

wins. Similarly, Belk (1988 p. 157) says, "if one's spouse is seen as an extension of self, it would seem to follow that the success of a spouse should raise one's self-esteem in much the same way as personal success…[due to]…a shared sense of prestige". Substituting the word 'spouse' in Belk's observation to read 'football club', instead, reinforces the relationship between fans and their club's success. In this way, because fans tend to experience a form of vicarious production (Holt 1995 pp. 7-8), recognising their co-productive activities, they take some credit for the victories of the team itself through what Belk (1988 p. 157) calls vicarious consumption via the extended self. Fans, as brand community members become emotionally involved in the club's welfare (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; McAlexander *et al.* 2002; Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 358). The fans' image/identity is somewhat dependent on their team's success. It is equally pertinent to note that fans tend to remain loyal regardless of whether they get the success they crave or not, in many cases (Conn 1997; Hamil 1999; Richardson 2007). However, the desire for success is in itself widespread and fundamental to the endeavour, as an underlying primary goal of supporting a football team, as is drawn from analysis of RAWK (see Chapter 3 & 4).

Fans tend to experience intense admiration and depth of feeling - love, madness, lust, despair - displaying strong emotional valence (Lewis 1992a; 1992b; Vermorel & Vermorel 1992; Elliott 1994a) with regard to how they consume their club; there are plenty of emotional highs and lows in this deeply meaningful consumption experience (Jenkins 1992a; Maffesoli 1996; Cova 1997). Holt (1995) refers to these emotional states arising during 'consuming as experience' as forms of appreciation that may arise from positive or negative emotional responses to watching a baseball game at the stadium. Such emotional experiences lead to fans in football often having a deep sense of emotional ownership or communally shared possessiveness (Maffesoli 1996; Football Task Force 1999; King 2000; Richardson 2007 p. 52; Belk 2010). These feelings of emotional ownership may help explain how fans desire success for their chosen club.

Fan attendance at football matches may be compared to playful, experiential, or fun consumption (Hirschman & Holbrook 1982; Holbrook & Hirschman 1982; Richardson 2007). Other forms of consumption of football matter too such as wearing a football jersey, talking about football to a friend, watching it on television, or even holding a conversation about it on RAWK. Beyond such acts of everyday football consumption, fans often desire

more, in the shape of club-success. Possibly, this is a form of hedonic pleasure seeking, sensation seeking, or thrill seeking (Hirschman & Holbrook 1982; Celsi *et al.* 1993). Brands are conceived as clusters of functional and emotional values; the brand itself, and what it means, is experienced (de Chernatony 2006; Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004). Part of what fans value experientially may be positive emotions they derive. Simonson *et al.* (2001) say that this emotionality is the focus of "hot" research.

Positivists see emotions as psychological internal (causal) states of reactive and deterministic humans (Küpers 2000). They are theorized as objective, explainable phenomena. Interpretivists, on the other hand, see understandable emotions as lived experiences which occur in a situated, social context (Denzin 1984), particularly those drawing from areas such as existential hermeneutics (Heidegger 1962; Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000) or phenomenology (Küpers 2000). Küpers (2000) emphasises the importance of feelings and emotions in consumption (p. 299). They are changeable, reflective, perceptual and relational (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Küpers 2000 p. 298). In his discussion of "prosumers" of services, Küpers (2000) says that emotionality and cognition/experience are coincidental to all consumption. They are inseparable.

Campbell (1987) argues that modern hedonism is characterized by a shift in focus from emotions towards sensations, with the aim being largely to do with the imagination and immediate experiences. Flow experiences involve complete immersion in an activity and demand real involvement (Csikszentmihalyi 1992; Goulding *et al.* 2002). Campbell (1987) notes that the search for hedonic pleasure involves exposing "oneself to certain stimuli in the hope that they will trigger a desired response" (p. 60). Football fans experience elation that may be considered hedonic pleasure through the thrill of seeing their team play and/or winning/success. Campbell (1987 p. 92) refers to the "imaginative enjoyment of products" in which large facets of a consumption experience can be made up of a romantic image of the experience, or hopes for how the experience will develop, which can be triggered by consumption environments or objects that lead to positivity for the consumer. This even involves the potential for a state of "desiring" rather than "having" as a focus of "pleasure-seeking" (Campbell 1987 pp. 86-7). This is "modern autonomous imaginative hedonism" (Campbell 1987). It may be possible to compare this feeling of "longing" and "imaginative enjoyment" with the experiences of football fans, which are similarly largely based on

hopes for the future; e.g. the hope that the fan's team will win the league, or a specific match, or several matches, or trophies. Hedonic motivations appear to be quite central in football fandom. Although, it may not be just hedonism, or indeed hedonism at all, that drives this. The hedonic thrill seeker is a possible explanation. Tucker (1974) provides an alternative in his discussion of the motivations of churchgoers and students. He says that they do not seek relatively prompt and specific consumer satisfactions. An example may be when someone buys a sandwich to satisfy immediate hunger. Straight forward market transactions are not easily visible in the case of a churchgoer seeking salvation, nor are clearly identifiable consumer "satisfactions". Tucker refers to the satisfactions being sought as "distant" and "indefinite". This is a potentially apt explanation for the underlying drivers behind fans' continued consumption of thousands of football clubs across the world, even though only one team can win each league each year, for example, given the apparent centrality of team-success to fandom, on RAWK anyway (see also Richardson 2007). Political, religious, and educational institutions, for example, appeal to deeply held attitudes and fairly fundamental cultural characteristics rather than utilitarian aspects such as convenience and value, or even intangibles such as fashion or sensory pleasure, as criteria for acceptance (Tucker 1974 p. 33). This thesis will attempt to explain what drives football fan consumption online in forthcoming chapters; its value. The "value" of a product or service or any consumption phenomenon to a fan and their lifestyle is not perceived as something simple or straightforward or to be exploited for managerial marketing aims (Friedenberg 1965). Nor is "value" equated with monetary measures, like "dollars" or "euros". As Tucker (1974 p. 35) says, "to speak realistically of values, one must have some knowledge of the meanings of acts and products and the way in which they fit into a life pattern". It is not about economics, but some marketers are accused of using myopic economic-gain as their driving goal. Kozinets (2001) refers to how *star trek* fans say their love for *star trek* has led to them being unreasonably exploited for economic gain. Hamil (1999) and Conn (1997) point out similar exploitation of football fan loyalty for profit. This exploitation may be exemplary of the mindset that has sometimes existed amongst marketers or consumer researchers that their task is to 'market' consumers into doing what the organization wants, through various means of persuasion (Tucker 1974). The alternative point of view is that consumers are not to be 'managed' like flocks of sheep (Gabriel & Lang 1995). They may indeed be core to "innovation" and production through being

allowed to impose "*their* will upon the organization" (Tucker 1974 p. 33). Brown (2007) compares this to the Hegelian master-slave dialectic.

Fromm (1976) differentiates between two major modes of existence - "being" and "having". If we equate "having" with "consuming", and consider that narrow views of people as strict "consumers" have been criticised as limiting (Tucker 1974), or simply misrepresenting, the actuality of consumption that is observed as involving productive aspects, even if only at the level of "consumers as active co-producers of desire" (Belk 2001; 2004 p. 70), then we may possibly posit that there could be overlaps between Fromm's (1976) "having" and "being", conceptually at least. "Having" (consuming) may indeed involve productive elements and thus, partially at least, overlap with aspects of "being", especially when a very broad definition of consumption is used (Belk 1987a). The well-being of a society cannot be equated with narrow versions of materialism, consumer satisfaction, capitalism, or marketing manager profit, but consumption ("having") does play a role in society, and thus well-"being" all the same (Tucker 1974; Belk 2004; McCracken 2005; Porter & Kramer 2011). Football consumption is shaped by culture and meaning processes, but it is also utilised by fans as part of the complex meaning creation processes of their wider human life (McCracken 2005) as part of their being-in-the-world - their existential situation; they are continuously coming to understanding, continuously being changed and enriched culturally through consumption (Jensen & Lindberg 2000). Their world is not something separate in a dualistic person/world way (ibid). They experience it through interpreting it on an ongoing basis, thus they partially constitute it, and have further desires to achieve specific consumption-experience goals, such as the success of their chosen football club.

Success, however, is not entirely achievable through pure interpretation, of course. So, fans rely on others such as players, club management, and ownership, to play their part in producing desired experiences. Fans may take action to pursue goals like success and may even attempt to persuade/control other fans, or management, or players, or commercial management towards doing the same. The reason for this may be that, as outlined throughout this chapter, consumers tend to regard possessions as parts of their identity (Belk 1988). James (1890 pp. 291-2) says that these possessions have a major role to play in the emotional well-being of the consumer: "if they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they dwindle and die away, he feels cast down". So, if a football club "waxes and

prospers", then fans appear to similarly feel triumphant, on RAWK. Football clubs are highly important to many fans' lives (Hamil 1999; Richardson 2007); they "matter" (Grossberg 1992). Belk (1988 p. 158; 1995 p. 72) says that such highly cathected possessions in one's extended self tend to be better cared for, maintained, and safeguarded by consumers (see also Belk 1987c). Consumers often see possessions as a form of security in their lives (Belk 1988 p. 154). So, it may be argued that this helps understand why fans appear to show controlling impulses towards the objects of their affection (see also Grossberg 1992). A decline in club performance on and/or off the pitch may lead fans to take decisive action towards attempting to take control of club-fortunes, given a 'caring' and 'safeguarding' intention (see grooming in McCracken 1990); with club success being an ultimate desirable outcome, due to the positive emotional well being the fan-community experiences as a result. Cialdini *et al.* (1976) say this glorying in success is understandable if the celebrator plays a part in its creation. Extant literature (King 2002; Richardson 2007; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010) posits that fans do play a part, given their co-creation of various facets of football on places like RAWK, as is further detailed in Chapter 4. Thus, club success has value for fans.

2.1 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter outlines the areas of literature, primarily CR and football research, which most relate to this thesis' GT. All literature is related through the process of literature weaving and theoretical sampling according to GT. As will be shown in Chapter 3, the GT of fan consumption on RAWK finds that Community Membership and Co-Creation/Production is the prime mover of action or main concern, with primary properties being Control, Community Identity, and Success. Thus literature that tackles these and similar concepts is most prominently referred to throughout the current chapter.

Initially, the development of CCT that is proclaiming itself as a standalone CR discipline is traced. Then, football research is summarised with relevance to substantive issues from RAWK. Next, important CCT topics such as consumer identity, community and consumption, perspectives on brands and branding and meaning, co-production and co-creation of this meaning and thus value, success and emotionality, and how this all relates to notions of control and subsequent consumer roles in the process of cultural production

are summarily addressed to open up a space for placing this GT in conversation with related theory. These topics are related with areas beyond CR such as SDL from marketing management, and aspects of media and communication studies (given the prominence of the Internet in this study), social theory on identity, anthropology and more.

Chapter 3 details this study's research design. Chapter 4 then details the discussion, interpretation, and argumentation surrounding latter stage data analysis and cultural theory generation allowing for the major contribution of a fan co-creative role typology.

CHAPTER 3.   METHOD

3.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the methods used during this investigation of football fan consumption experience and culture in an online context. These methods are intended to answer research question 1, given in Chapter 1, and detailed further in this chapter. This method follows qualitative approaches (Denzin 1996; Denzin & Lincoln 2005; Belk 2006) and in particular GT (Glaser & Strauss 1967). GT has become increasingly popular as a rigorous research technique in business (Connell & Lowe 1997; Locke 2001), marketing, and specifically CR (see Belk & Coon 1993; Celsi *et al.* 1993; de la Cuesta 1994; Spiggle 1994; Houston & Venkatesh 1996; Hirschman & Thompson 1997; Fournier 1998; McDonagh 1998; Mick & Fournier 1998; Goulding 1998; 1999a; 1999b; 2000; 2001; 2002; 2005; Pettigrew 2000; 2002; Kozinets 2001; Fischer & Otnes 2006). GT is a highly systematic approach that facilitates rigorous analysis of social data to generate explanatory theory with transparent origin in the particular social context(s) under study, thus furthering our understanding of social phenomena (Chenitz & Swanson 1986; Coyne 1997). Here, it allows for inductive discovery of a theory of football fan consumption experiences online, without prior hypotheses and without prior theory to be verified.

As a method, the 'classical', or 'orthodox', approach to GT (Lowe & Kuusisto 1999; Andriopoulos & Lowe 2000; Giske & Artinian 2007) conceived by Glaser & Strauss (1967), and followed by Glaser (1978; 1992; 1998) is the predominant 'variant' (Wasserman *et al.* 2009) used here, with minor secondary influence from Charmaz's (2005; 2006) constructivist revisions. For example, Strauss & Corbin's (1990) 'axial coding' is not used here. See Connell & Lowe (1997) and Follett (2009) for similar adoption of Glaserian GT and avoidance of unorthodox "Straussian" GT.

To discover emergent theory, Holt (1995), Pettigrew (2000), Glaser & Strauss (1967 p. 35), Kozinets (2001; 2002b), Connell & Lowe (1997), Wasserman *et al.* (2009), and Hammersley & Atkinson (2007), promote the suitability of ethnography to complement GT. Ethnography is "the study of people at first-hand using participant observation or interviewing" (Giddens 2006 p. 1016). The style of ethnography used in this thesis is most inspired by Geertz (1973; 1974). Through analysis of research data, hermeneutic

philosophical approaches are drawn upon, as recommended by Geertz (1974) and Alvesson & Skoldberg (2000) (see thesis Chapter 1). Hammersley & Atkinson (2007) also recommend philosophical hermeneutics as a paradigm useful to ethnographers (p. 12). The primary research site for this study is online, thus literature on Netnography (online ethnography) is extensively drawn upon (Kozinets 1997; 1998; 1999; 2001; 2002b; 2009; Sherry & Kozinets 2001; Maclaran *et al.* 2004).

"Netnography" is a term first coined by Kozinets (1997) to refer to the use of ethnography in online contexts in CR (Maclaran *et al.* 2004). It is a relatively new method in CR that can be used to understand VCs (Fox & Roberts 1999; Ward 1999; Hine 2000; 2005; Muniz & Schau 2005). RAWK, the focus of this study, is one such VC. Netnography is a form of ethnography, so its use in conjunction with GT is apposite (Kozinets 2001).

Although Netnography provides the primary source of data collection for this study, GT promotes the use of an 'all is data' (Glaser 1978 pp. 8, 33; 1998 p. 8) approach, which takes everything as a potential data source. So, the data includes data collected in online ethnography, data from interviews [particularly during member checking (Kozinets 2001; 2002b)], memos (Glaser & Strauss 1967) and self-reflective diaries, and related literature, including popular news sources, which is added through the process of literature 'weaving' (Glaser 1998 p. 67). The data was incremental in nature and took on new forms as the researcher added different tools, methods, and techniques of representation and interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln 2005 p. 4; see also *bricolage* in Denzin & Lincoln 2005). For example, as the research process developed, new tactics for theory development emerged. As the substantive description of fan experiences developed and the researcher's understanding of it deepened, theoretical concepts, categories, and linkages were being considered, and thus areas of literature to be covered became apparent to the researcher (Glaser & Strauss 1967 p. 37). Such a methodological process is part of the iterative and complex nature of reflexive research (Bettany 2007). It 'emerges', as is the aim of good GT (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Using Netnography with Geertzian ethnography, hermeneutics, GT, and extant literature led to the emergent development and design of the *Grounded Theory Online Ethnographic Process*. Thus, this process forms the layout and structure of this chapter.

3.2   THE GROUNDED THEORY ONLINE ETHNOGRAPHIC PROCESS

This section details the research method the author refers to as 'The Grounded Theory Online Ethnographic Process' (see **Table 3.2**).

_____

Stage 1:   *The identification of an area of interest, gaining access, cultural entrée, data collection, and initial analysis*

Stage 2:   *Analysing, interpreting the data and further data collection*

Stage 3:   *Theoretical Sampling*

Stage 4:   *Further coding, main concern discovery and core category development, member checking, literature weaving, and write-up*

TABLE 3.2:   THE GROUNDED THEORY ONLINE ETHNOGRAPHIC PROCESS

SOURCE: Author

_____

This four-stage process is a summary of how this research has been carried out. It has involved adaptation and combination of a variety of scholarship on methodology [mainly: Ethnography (Geertz 1973; 1974; Sherry 1990; 1991; Delamont 2004; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007); GT (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978; 1992; 1998; Dey 1999; Goulding 2002; Charmaz 2005; Follett 2009; Pidgeon & Henwood 2009); and Netnography (Kozinets 2002b; 2009; Maclaran *et al.* 2004)]. Ethnography and GT are very suitable as methodological complements (Glaser & Strauss 1967 p. 35; Pettigrew 2000; Kozinets 2001; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). Philosophically, hermeneutics is the lens utilised to aid data analysis and interpretation (Geertz 1974; 1983; Arnold & Fischer 1994; Thompson, Pollio & Locander 1994; Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000). This occurs in conjunction with GT data analysis, as recommended by Kozinets (2009).

This is an iterative/simultaneous process (Sherry & Kozinets 2001; Bringer *et al.* 2006). It involves *constant comparison* (Glaser & Strauss 1967). This may be viewed as similar to the iterative nature of the hermeneutic circle towards a fusion of horizons (see Arnold & Fischer 1994; Thompson 1997). The author utilises theoretical sampling inductively to

investigate empirical data with a view to novel and emergent theory development. Glaser & Strauss (1967 p. 105) say their general GT *constant comparative method* template involves a continuously growing process where each stage is transformed into the next, with earlier stages remaining in operation simultaneously throughout the analysis. The comparison between stages and between activities during a particular 'stage' can often be based on memory (ibid p. 106). Through evolving research design (Hudson & Ozanne 1988), stages have overlapped in various ways necessitating much movement between them iteratively. Glaser & Strauss remark (1967 p. 43) that the definite separation of each operation would hinder theory generation (see also Geertz 1973 p. 20).

In the beginning, the researcher engaged in a majority of data collection rather than coding and analysis. This balance quickly changed as collected data must be coded and analysed. This is repeated numerous times following theoretical sampling as the balance gradually shifts until, near the end, when the research involves mostly analysis, with minimal collection and coding only for the purposes of picking up 'loose ends' (Glaser & Strauss 1967 pp. 72-3). Of course, the very 'beginning' (e.g. identifying area of interest) and the very 'end' of the entire process are not continually repeated (e.g. write-up).

The remainder of this chapter will detail each stage of the method. As a visual reference, the author will be using many of the labels on **Figure 3.2**:
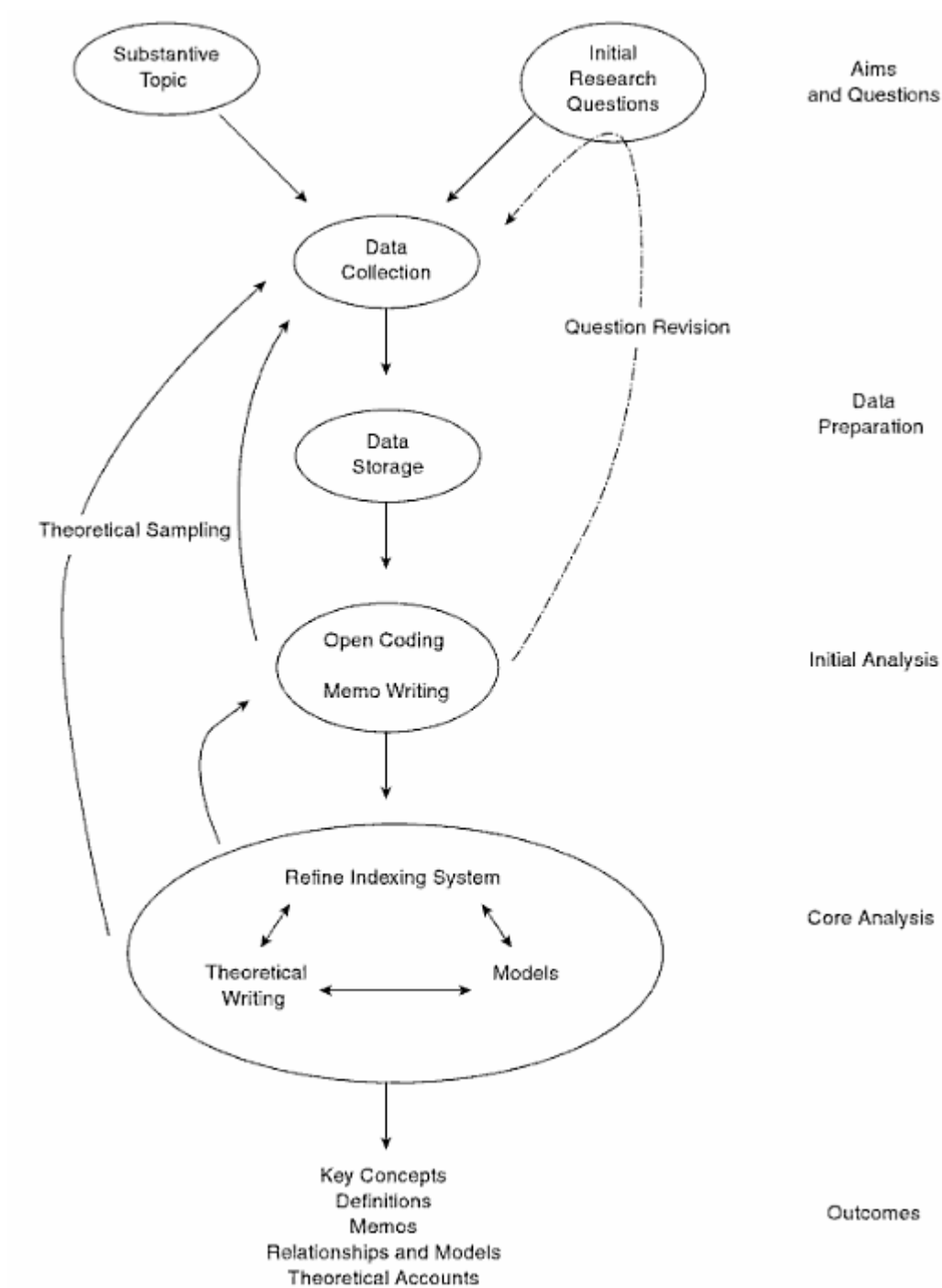
FIGURE 3.2: STEPS IN THE GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH
SOURCE: Pidgeon & Henwood 2009

3.3 STAGE 1: THE IDENTIFICATION OF AN AREA OF INTEREST, CULTURAL ENTRÉE, DATA COLLECTION, AND INITIAL ANALYSIS

3.31 The Identification of an area of interest - Substantive topic:

The author chose to investigate consumption experiences of fans of sports brands. Given the author's familiarity with football, and its huge popularity, cultural and economic importance (see Chapter 2), football (soccer) fans were chosen as the primary research site-informants. As Giulianotti (1999 p. xi) emphasises, it is becoming increasingly 'passé' to point out that football is undeniably the world's premiere sport. Not even a single world-religion can match its geographical scope (Goldblatt 2006 p. x). The amazing popularity of the game makes it a powerful element of modern culture worldwide (Richardson & Turley 2007). This global attraction and almost religious status (King 2002 p. 16; Richardson 2007) has led to it becoming a mammoth industry and a huge part of the global economy in many different ways (Hamil *et al.* 1999). The market for football generates colossal amounts of money. For example, Conn (2008) refers to how a recent Premier League television-rights deal amounted to £2.7billion sterling, over a three year period. Football is also a source of cultural capital on every continent (Giulianotti 2005; Pongsakornrungsilp *et al.* 2008). It truly is an integral part of contemporary society (Giulianotti 1999). As such, it acts as the focal point for this thesis.

3.311 Research Aims and Objectives

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, CCT is the area into which this thesis is placed. Consumers' own meanings are central (McCracken 1990; Sherry 1991). CCT research has shown tribal aspects of consumption are pervasive (Maffesoli 1996; Arnould & Thompson 2005; Cova *et al.* 2007). Kozinets (1997; 2001) presents exemplary investigations of tribal fan-consumption activities studying fans of television shows *The X Files* and *Star Trek.* He (ibid) sees the existence of fans as an important cultural phenomenon and thus one to be studied by CR. Holt (1995) provides further exemplary CR analysis of sports fans through interpretive methods to understand 'meaning' (Geertz 1973; Firat & Venkatesh 1995; Fisher & Smith 2011). Thus, this thesis follows other CCT research by aiming to discover the experiential aspects of consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982) within the context of football fans online, to get at its 'meaning'.

Initially, the research aims were:

- Understanding/theorizing football fandom within the English premier league - specifically LFC fans.
- Exploring what it means to *be* a fan, with a particular focus on the online context.
- Analysis of fan interaction online.
- Understanding fan conflict.

Over the life of the study, prompted by the above research aims considered in conjunction with reflection on various research tasks, research objectives changed and emerged (Glaser & Strauss 1967) to become…

- To generate a GT of football fan consumption experiences and culture/meaning in an online context by analysing all interaction on RAWK - both conflictual and consensual - thus, taking a holistic view (Connell & Lowe 1997 p. 166).
- To present a thick description (Geertz 1973; Sherry 1990) that provides insight and empathy (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000 p. 95) into the culture of fandom through analysis of fan dialogical interaction, which will yield the discovery of the 'main concerns' (Glaser 2001; Giske & Artinian 2007) of fans on RAWK. The main concerns are taken to be the most common and centrally meaningful aspects of fans' consumption experiences (meaning is public - Geertz 1973 p. 12) - i.e. *why* fans consume.
- To understand the 'community membership and co-creation/production' (the main concern) processes involved and how the Internet plays a part in allowing fans resolve this main concern through engagement with roles on a Typology of Consumer Community Cultural Co-creative Roles (the core category) - i.e. *how* fans consume.
- To investigate how CCT (Arnould & Thompson 2005) literature relates to this theory of football fan consumption culture.
- To outline the managerial implications of the findings of this thesis both academically (e.g. to SDL) and practically (e.g. to LFC management).

3.312 Research Questions

Initially, early in the study, research questions were a working list as follows:

- What conflicts exist between fans of the same football club?
- How can we theorize fan-conflict in an online setting?
- Why do fans use online tools/forums?
- What does it *mean* to be a fan? What role does the Internet play in this?
- What are the main concerns (Glaser 1998)/problems/issues of football fans?

Question revision(s): *Questions evolved as follows [see Fischer & Otnes 2006 p. 21]:*

1. How can we investigate football fan consumption experience(s) and culture/meaning online?

2. Why do fans use RAWK; what are the *main concern(s)* of football fans on RAWK [http://www.redandwhitekop.com] (the primary research site)?

The main concern(s) are the prime movers of action (Glaser 1998, 2001; Giske & Artinian 2007); the most common and centrally meaningful aspects of fans' consumption experiences - meaning is public (Geertz 1973 p. 12). The "meanings" participants (fans) construct and attach to any social realm (RAWK) can be viewed as idiographic and somewhat voluntaristic "reasons" for participation (Jupp 2006 p. 24). They are discovered through an emergent ethnographic research design that allows for the discovery of questions that are salient to its subjects, the fans (Katz 2001 p. 446). "Learning what things mean to people makes what they do with them comprehensible" (Charmaz 2005 p. 521).

The main fan concern is interpreted to be *community membership and co-production/creation*, and, thus, in explaining how this is found, it is culturally-theorized as follows:

-How can we theorize *community membership and co-creation/production* in this online fan setting?

3. How does *community membership and co-creation/co-production* (*main concern)* online provide opportunities for consumers to take on varying roles (*core category*)?

The core category represents the basic social processes resolving the main concern (Glaser 1998; Andriopoulos & Lowe 2000 p. 735). It is important to note that, following Hirschman's (1985) and Humphrey & Grayson's (2008) use of dictionary definitions to explain meanings of terminology in CR, this thesis adopts *Oxford Popular Dictionary* definitions of the terms 'create' & 'produce' (Hawkins 1993):

> **Create:** bring into existence; produce by what one does; give a new rank to; make a fuss. (p. 98).

> **Produce:** bring forward for inspection; bring (a performance etc.) before the public; direct the acting of (a play); bring into existence; cause; manufacture; extend (a line). (p. 350).

These two terms are thus very similar, particularly considering how the definition of 'create' contains the word 'produce'. Both mean to 'bring into existence'. So, the two terms are used interchangeably here, given how the usage of 'giving ranking', 'making a fuss', 'bringing forward for inspection', 'directing a play', or 'extending a line', in the above definitions, are not relevant. The definitions are practically synonymous. So, to co-create or to co-produce are similarly used coterminously.

4. How do these roles and related culture, experience, and emotions have implications for management, marketing, and CR?

As detailed in Stage 4 (**Section 3.6**) of the *Grounded Theory Online Ethnographic Research Process*, the main concern (Community Membership and Co-production) has three main aspects, or sub-categories or 'conceptual pieces' (Wasserman *et al.* 2009), namely *Control, Success,* and *Community Identity*. Thus, research question 2, above, implies exploration of these three aspects (see also 'properties' in Pettigrew 2002) of the 'main concern' in our emergent GT. The reader may look ahead to the section on 'coding phases' (**Section 3.6**) to find the summary of how this main concern emerged from data (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Exploring in-depth how this 'ties' together all other aspects of

fandom via this study's GT is an example of 'selective coding', achieved following extensive open coding, and theoretical coding. All these terms are explored over the course of this chapter.

The 'main fan concern', community membership and co-production, is the prime mover of action on RAWK (Glaser 2001; Giske & Artinian 2007) or the most common and centrally meaningful aspect of fans' consumption experiences - meaning is public (Geertz 1973 p. 12). The 'core category' explains how participants (fans) work to resolve their main concern and its conceptual 'pieces' (Glaser 2001; Pettigrew 2002; Giske & Artinian 2007; Wasserman *et al.* 2009) using a contribution of a *typology of seven consumer roles*. Each role represents a "sub-core variable of the theory" (Andriopoulos & Lowe 2000 p. 736). The seven consumer roles are part of the overall basic social process (Andriopoulos & Lowe 2000) of co-creation and are detailed in Chapter 4.

Following Schouten & McAlexander (1995), who discuss the importance of using 'subcultures of consumption' in CR (see also Arnould & Thompson 2005), the 'subculture of consumption' being studied here is LFC fans who use the online forum RAWK (see also brand communities in Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; see also 'interpretive communities' in Kates 2006). Schouten & McAlexander (1995) and Kates (2006) refer to the benefits of using ethnographic methods in such research.

Spiggle (1994) and Hudson & Ozanne (1988) highlight interpretive methods as vital in understanding consumption generally if the aim is to understand and interpret the meaning and experiences of informants, as is a primary aim of this study. Analysis towards drawing inferences from the context using qualitative data and thick description (Geertz 1973; Spiggle 1994) is also the underlying goal of both GT (see Goulding 2005) and netnography (Kozinets 2009). Netnography provides information on the symbolism, meanings, and consumption patterns of online consumer groups. It is widely used in CCT (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; Brown, Kozinets & Sherry 2003; Bengtsson & Ostberg 2006) and also has links to GT (Kozinets 2002b; 2009). GT promotes a primary emphasis on examination of empirical data by commencing research with the phenomenon or behaviour under study, rather than extant theories or pre-conceived frameworks, in order to minimise the chances

that research outcomes will be theoretically removed from the needs of the subject under study (Celsi *et al.* 1993; Thompson 1997; Pettigrew 2002), or 'forced' (Glaser 1992).

Kates (2006) mentions that research using the Internet is important when studying geographically dispersed and diverse consumers given the currently growing importance of the medium (see also Lyman & Wakeford 1999). Kozinets (2009) points out that, in 2009, over 1.5 billion people globally were using the Internet, 22% of the population. LFC fans are a geographically disparate social group globally. Hence, use of these methods to interpretively investigate LFC fan experiences on RAWK is submitted as a strong approach to investigate and answer the above research questions.

So, the methods used in this thesis are used mainly following similar methods being used by researchers carrying out similar studies (e.g. Holt 1995; Kozinets 1997; 2001; Follett 2009). They are also chosen by virtue of these methods fitting the worldview of the researcher and his personal preferences (Guba & Loncoln 1994; Knafl 1994; Annells 1996; Goulding 2002; Leavy 2011). They suit inductive development of theory of consumer meaning and culture. However, there is not one "proper" or "best" way to carry out research, this study included (Jacoby 1985). This study was carried out using a qualitative interpretive perspective that denies that 'one real world' exists that can be tested for (Hudson & Ozanne 1988). Instead, multiple realities are believed to exist given the perceived nature of these realities and how they are continuously changing (ibid; see also Charmaz's (2005) constructivist GT). Conversely, a more 'conventional' positivist framework could have been adopted in this research that sought general law and an 'objective' reality to be found by scientific testing (Hudson & Ozanne 1988; Sherry 1991; Connell & Lowe 1997).

A positivist logical deductive research design may have stipulated starting research only after a specific problem had been identified, in an area of literature, with particular related theory already selected, and pre-planned questions about the puzzle to be solved by framing it in terms of that related theory (Connell & Lowe 1997).

When considering methodology at the outset, a fundamental decision needed to be made regarding whether to do quantitative research, qualitative research, or a mixture. Cresswell

(2009) offers that a key difference between 'quant' and 'qual' is that quant is used for testing theories by examining relationships between measurable variables, whereas qual is useful for exploring and understanding 'meanings'. Given that the research aims and research questions underpinning this thesis are focused on the 'meaning' of fan consumption, qualitative methodology was chosen. However, qualitative methods are many and varied. Other potential methods would include historical marketing research, which could have investigated marketing in football historically (Witkowski & Jones 2006). A focus on managerial brand research (Bengtsson & Ostberg 2006) could have provided normative frameworks for how marketing managers could dominate football and sports markets with powerful value added brands (Aaker 1991; de Chernatony & McDonald 2003). Critical marketing research (Murray & Ozanne 1991, 2006; Saren *et al.* 2007) approaches could have been utilised more strongly, allowing for potential concentration on issues such as consumer emancipation or power-relations from the offset. Advertising in football could have been central for the research focus, possibly looking at its form, the practices of advertisers, or even responses of 'readers' (football fans) to advertisements (Scott 1994, 2006; Ritson & Elliott 1999). The "meaning" that is sought in this study, the meaning of LFC to its fans on RAWK, could have been pursued using psychologically oriented approaches focusing on stimulus-bound associations between the brand and its fans through, possibly, semantic clustering of shared meanings gathered through stimulus-response experiments utilising word associations (e.g. Elliott 1994a; see also Szaly & Deese 1978).

Alternative research foci could have used any selection of other data collection techniques (see Levy 2006). These may have included group or focus group interviewing (Fontana & Frey 2005; Catterall & Maclaran 2006), face-to-face personal interviews (Thompson *et al.* 1989; Fournier 1998; Cotte & Kistruck 2006), fully structured interviews (Fontana & Frey 2005), projective techniques (Rook 2006), introspection (Holbrook 1995; Brown 2006; Gould 2006; Follett 2009), case studies (Flyvbjerg 2007), life-history case studies (Denzin 1978; Fournier 1998), photography (Penaloza & Cayla 2006), studying fandom in film (Holbrook & Grayson 1986), filming or video-recording fans' views on their consumption (Sayre 2006), studying fandom on television (Hirschman 1988), more traditional in-person ethnography or participant observation (Kozinets 2002a; Delamont 2004), or questionnaires/surveys (Sayre 2006).

More managerially focussed research would also possibly have required gaining access to a football club for data collection (e.g. interviewing or observing managers) (Bengtsson & Ostberg 2006), something which can prove difficult (Van Maanen & Kolb 1985). However this researcher had to gain access to RAWK to carry out this consumer-centric ethnography online (Kozinets 2009). This is detailed now in **section 3.32**.

3.32   Gaining access, Cultural entrée, and Data collection:

3.321   Research site for Netnography:

RedAndWhiteKop (RAWK) [http://www.redandwhitekop.com]

The choice of RAWK as the primary research site is 'purposeful sampling' (Coyne 1997; Epp 2008) or purposive sampling (Sherry & McGrath 1989). In the initial stages of GT, a 'purposeful sample' must be selected to begin the study. It involves consideration of the research topic (football fandom online). This topic must then be kept in mind to decide 'where' to sample (Coyne 1997). This sample is not selected from a population due to characteristic variables such as age, gender, or class. "The initial sample is determined to examine the phenomenon where it is found to exist" (Chenitz & Swanson 1986 p. 9). The research site had to serve as an information-rich case context, exemplary of the phenomenon under focus (Patton 1990; Coyne 1997; Epp 2008). RAWK represents a 'naturalistic context' (Sherry & McGrath 1989).

A major reason for choosing RAWK for data collection was when the term 'Liverpool Forum' is searched in Google, Yahoo, and Bing, all three top search engines returned RAWK as number one result (see Kozinets 2009 for similar sampling). The reason why LFC fans were chosen was mainly down to the fact that the researcher's primary knowledge of football centres round this club (see similar sampling in Fisher & Smith 2011). If another club had been chosen, the amount of researcher-knowledge would have been much less and this would have led to a prolonged cultural entrée unnecessarily. Alvesson & Skoldberg (2000 p. 45) point this out when discussing ethnography and how, when the researcher investigates a community that is some part of their own society, such as a subculture or organization, the time requirement is normally lessened because the researcher already has considerable knowledge of the general context in which the study object is located (see also Arnold & Fischer 1994).

Geertz (1973), the anthropologist, and Hudson & Ozanne (1988), consumer researchers, discuss the use of interpretive methods and caution researchers against making generalisations across differing contexts. Generalisations are appropriate within the context or case, but, given the context-specific nature of meaning and culture, interpretive approaches to research do not readily facilitate the statement of generalisations outside of the context of study (Geertz 1973 p. 26). Similarly, even though Sherry & McGrath (1989) allow for the comparison of two contexts, they only do so as a result of having two researchers; one for each site. They say that studying a single research site intensively allows the researcher to amass a far greater wealth of local detail to frame a comprehensive negotiated interpretation of the setting than would be possible with multi-site study. Keeping this in mind, the author of this thesis decided that focussing on one football club via one web-forum would be the most successful method of sampling (see also Fischer & Otnes 2006). The findings and theory produced in this thesis contain "currently useful generalizations" (Leavy 2011). It is a relative theory, relative to context and time. Some level of generalization may be possible through comparison between similar contexts, but not as immutable laws of nature. Findings are current, time-bounded, and potentially somewhat expandable into other domains but only in recognition they are contextual.

LFC play their football in the English Premier League, one of the most successful leagues in football. LFC has a global fan-base (Richardson & O'Dwyer 2003; Richardson & Turley 2006; Healy & McDonagh 2007; 2008; Richardson 2007; Pongsakornrungsilp *et al.* 2008). RAWK has a large membership and post count. Some basic statistics on the forum are as follows (source**:** [http://www.redandwhitekop.com/forum/index.php?action=stats]):

- Total of 33,758 members (12 May 2009)
- Total of 5,710,943 posts to date (12 May 2009)
- Total of 119,850 topics to date (12 May 2009).
- Average of 14.25 new member registrations per day (14 April 2010)
- Average of 2,315.87 new posts per day (14 April 2010)
- Most forum users online at any one time: 10,457 on 31 January 2011
- Male to female ratio: 12.8 to 1 (15 July 2011)

RAWK is an ideal research site given its popularity and depth of issues discussed. Here is a screenshot (or a 'screen capture'; see Kozinets 2009 p. 100) of RAWK (**Figure 3.321a**):
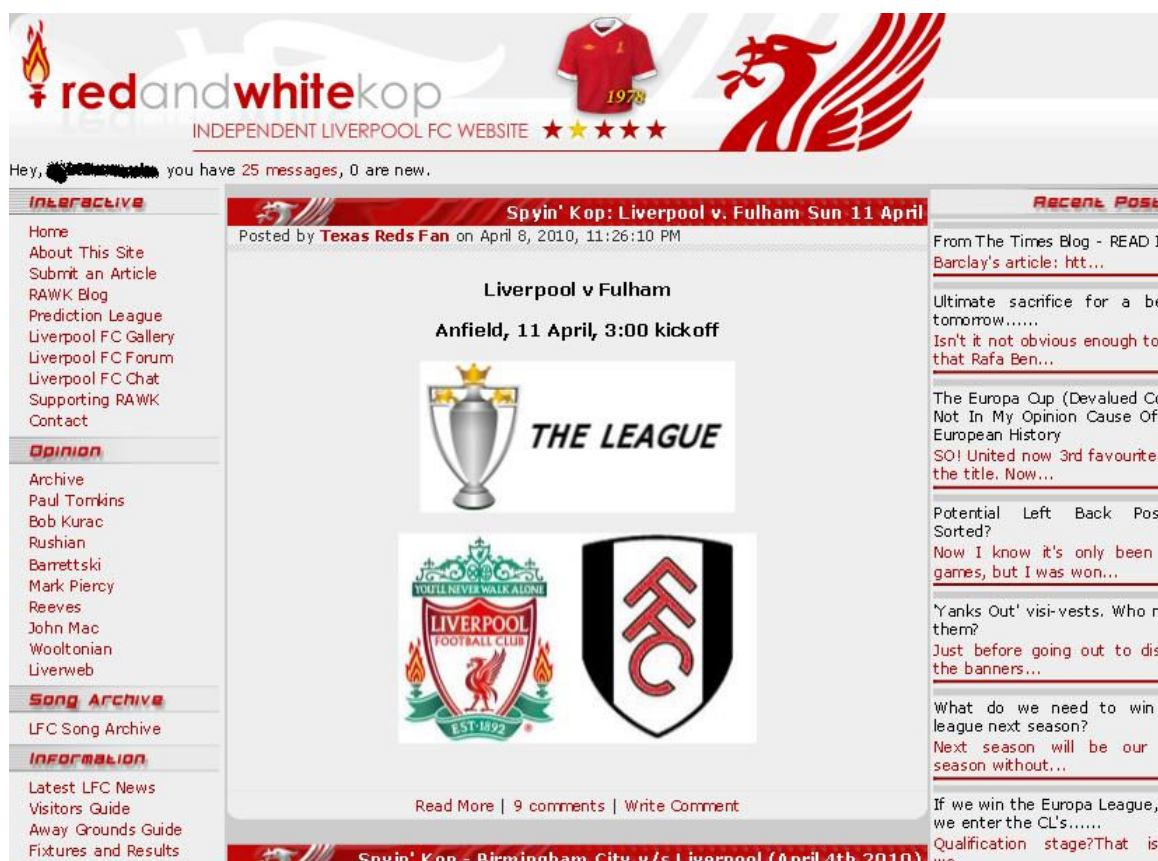
FIGURE 3.321a: RAWK SCREENSHOT ON 12 APRIL 2010
SOURCE: http://www.redandwhitekop.com/index.php

RAWK is a website dedicated to LFC covering a variety of diverse issues; everything from playing team selection, to the state of football more generally as a sport in the contemporary world. The forum itself provides information (**Appendix C**) in the 'About this Site' section of its homepage to summarize its raison-d'être and introduce itself to interested parties. Without repeating all of it, it is worth stressing that the site is independent of the club (for the fans and by the fans); amateur (not a business; without any corporate/industrial connections as an entity); free (no charge for using the site); anyone can join/register; anyone can say anything without fear of censorship unless they are unnecessarily abusive; and global (containing members from all over the world). A list of competing LFC VCs is provided in **Appendix D**.

The forum is the largest and busiest section of the website, but it also contains other features, or links to other features, such as a 'ticket exchange', web-links to other football/LFC related websites (e.g., the Hillsborough Justice Campaign website; the RedAllOverTheLand website, and others); 'news' features covering current topics and events; opinion pieces and columns from regular contributors and football writers; a web-chatroom facility; a photo gallery, to which users can upload pictures, and more (see **Figure 3.321a** above). Below (**Figure 3.321b**) is a screenshot taken of the forum, showing various threads by various users:

FIGURE 3.321b: FORUM SCREENSHOT

SOURCE: http://www.redandwhitekop.com/forum/index.php?board=2.0

3.322   RAWK People and Members

In the above (**Figure 3.321b**) screenshot, member names have been blacked out for anonymity, following research ethics protocol (see **Section 3.323** on Research Ethics). As mentioned in the 'About This Site' section of RAWK (**Appendix C**), it is a community

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dedicated to LFC fans. Anyone can join, and once they join, they can contribute in any way, provided they do not behave in an offensive or abusive way. The site has a webmaster to manage technical aspects of its operation; web servers, the domain name, the visual aesthetics, and hierarchical layout of each page etc. There is an editorial team whose primary task is to make decisions regarding the site's direction in conjunction with a 'governing body'. These act as moderators policing the content on the forum.

The total number of members was 33,758 on 12 May 2009 [http://www.redandwhitekop.com/forum/index.php?action=stats]. Members/posters are allocated 'positions' or 'grades' according to post count in the following order: 'Boys Pen' (0-15 posts); Kemlynite (15-50); Main Stander (50-250); Anny Roader (250-500); Kopite (500-1000); Legend (1000+). There are three other separate grades based on affiliation with the RAWK forum as an 'organisation': RAWK Supporter; RAWK Staff; RAWK Scribe. These three types of posters' post counts vary as the post-count is not correlated to their 'grade'. The researcher email interviewed a member of the RAWK governing body about these grades to gain an understanding of where they come from. The response was as follows (GatekeeperRAWK, field quote 103):

> [RAWK] Supporters are people who have donated to the running costs.
> [RAWK] Scribes - writers/campaigners, have access to an additional hidden forum.
> [RAWK] Staff - mods [moderators] and admin. Appointed by the existing mods when they feel they need some help.

The RAWK Staff and RAWK Supporters' grades appear fairly straight-forward here. A little further investigation was required to understand the nature of the RAWK Scribes' hidden forum (GatekeeperRAWK fieldquote no. 105):

> The Scribes section was originally for the writers who regularly contributed articles to the site. As time has gone on it's become more of a campaigning board, where people who aren't staff can still get together outside of the public eye and co-ordinate activities. It's been used for Hillsborough related campaigning for example.

Please note that quotes from RAWK staff or members are not author corrected for grammatical or spelling errors.

<u>3.323   Research Ethics</u>

All usernames in **Figure 3.321b** have been blacked out for anonymity [see research ethics of Netnography (Kozinets 2002b) (see also King, S. 1996)]. Kozinets (2002b p. 65), in his discussion of research ethics in netnography, also points out two more particularly important 'nontrivial, contestable, and interrelated' issues when carrying out research online:

1)   Are online forums to be considered a private or a public site?

2)   What constitutes 'informed consent' in cyberspace?

He points out that "a clear consensus on these issues, and therefore on ethically appropriate procedures for netnography, has not emerged [yet]" (ibid). There is an ongoing debate regarding issues of whether information, such as forum postings, in cyber space is public or private. Rafaeli (quoted in Sudweeks & Rafaeli 1995) summarily presents one point of view, which is that 'informed consent' (see Hammersley & Atkinson 2007) is implicit in the very act of posting a message to a public forum online. Thus, Rafaeli posits the notion that informed consent (through contact) is not required when observing online interaction/postings for the purposes of research, as long as anonymity of the posters was guaranteed. King (1996) opposes this by saying the modern phenomenon of online forums presents the problem of access and consent in a new format, and thus it must be approached differently too. He concludes that posters to such online forums may not be implicitly allowing their words to be used for research purposes, thus they should be contacted to gain additional informed consent to be sure there are no ethical problems surrounding this unclear issue.

Drawing on this, to satisfy ethical guidelines, the author here sought informed consent via email or personal messages (PMs) from participants on RAWK before printing their views. Also, their anonymity is guaranteed through changing their names or blacking their names out. The 'usernames' that appear beside quotations from RAWK in this thesis have been changed by the researcher to alias titles.

<u>3.324   Gaining Access</u>

Gaining general access (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007) to carry out ethnographic observation on the forum, through contacting 'gatekeepers' (ibid) was necessary. The

researcher signed up as a member on RAWK to contact moderators. Next, the researcher gained access (via email) to the forum for the purposes of research (data collection/analysis) for preparation of a PhD thesis [See email to 'gatekeeper' (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007) in **Appendix E**]. The 'gatekeeper' contacted is listed on the 'About this Site' (**Appendix C**) page on RAWK as being one of the forum's 'Governing Body', so s/he is in a position of authority, and thus a relevant 'gatekeeper' to request permission from (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007).

Once the initial sample had been chosen and engaged with (purposeful sampling), the researcher immediately began theoretical sampling, seamlessly (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Coyne 1997). Theoretical sampling is a variant of purposeful sampling in that it involves purposeful selection of a sample in accordance with emerging codes, categories, and theory (Coyne 1997). But, not all purposeful sampling is theoretical sampling (ibid). Theoretical sampling is the process by which all data collection, coding, and analysis is guided through constant comparative analysis, all being carried out jointly (Glaser 1992; see also Sherry & Kozinets 2001). Theoretical Sampling is further discussed in-depth later in this chapter (**section 3.5**).

During this early time-period the researcher also began 'lurking', cultural entrée, and early posting (Maclaran *et al.* 2004), as is illustrated in the next section.

3.325   Cultural Entrée, Commencement of Data Collection, and Initial Analytical Coding

3.3251 Netnography - Participant Observation

Having gained access, the researcher began Netnography (Kozinets 2002b; Maclaran *et al.* 2004). Kozinets (2002b) describes the need at this point to engage in 'cultural entrée'. Maclaran *et al.* (2004) say the key is to engage in a form of non-participant observation, referred to as 'lurking'. Lurking allowed the researcher to learn RAWK's rules or norms through analysis of the idiosyncratic voice and community style of interaction on a great variety of discussions (Livia 1999). But, the overall culture common to LFC fans was not a stumbling block due to the life-experience of the researcher, a fan (see hermeneutic pre-understanding in Arnold & Fischer 1994).

Commencement of data collection was more straight-forward and faster than traditional ethnography due to the data being previously typed (see Kozinets 2002b; Kozinets 2009). No transcription was necessary (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). This was the most obvious benefit of online ethnography over the traditional form (Kozinets 2009).

Hammersley & Atkinson's (2007) summary of 'what ethnographers do' is useful here to capture how the ethnographic-method literature influenced this study. When referring to 'what ethnographers do', they (ibid p.3) provide the following features of most ethnographic work (see **Table 3.3251** below)**.** The left hand column represents the features recommended by Hammersley & Atkinson (2007). The right hand column represents a short description of how this researcher carried out ethnographic work with these features represented therein.

	FEATURE (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007 p. 3)	HOW THE AUTHOR REPRESENTED IT IN THIS STUDY
1.	People's actions and accounts are studied in everyday contexts, rather than under conditions created by the researcher - such as in experimental setups or in highly structured interview situations. In other words, research takes place 'in the field' [Van Maanen 1988].	The main research site is RAWK, an independent, pre-existing, fan-run online forum that LFC fans use to discuss all things relating to the club.
2.	Data are gathered from a range of sources, including documentary evidence of various kinds, but participant observation and/or relatively informal conversations are usually the main ones.	As well as observing conversations on RAWK, the researcher had many conversations/interviews with members via email and Private Messages. The analyst also made use of various media and newspaper articles when compiling this thesis, given their reporting on football. The method follows Glaser (1998); 'all is data'.
3.	Data collection is, for the most part, relatively 'unstructured', in two senses. First, it does not involve following through a fixed and detailed research design specified at the start. Second, the categories that are used for interpreting what people say or do are not built into the data collection process through the use of observation schedules or questionnaires. Instead, they are generated out of the process of data analysis.	The data collection, coding, and analysis approach is iterative and uses 'theoretical sampling' (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss 1987). The categories in this thesis' GT 'emerge' (Glaser & Strauss 1967).
4.	The focus is usually on a few cases, generally fairly small-scale, perhaps a single setting or group of people. This is to facilitate in-depth study.	The analyst concentrates almost all work on RAWK and LFC, for in-depth study and understanding of the complexity of the context.
5.	The analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings, functions, and consequences of human action and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local, and perhaps also wider, contexts. What are produced, for the most part, are verbal descriptions, explanations, and theories; quantification and statistical analysis play a subordinate role at most.	The local context is mainly provided by RAWK. The wider context is introduced through literature weaving (Glaser 1998 p. 203). It involves discussion and summary of the related football and CR literature for a more macro-viewpoint. Quantitative techniques are not used in formulation of theory.

TABLE 3.3251:   WHAT ETHNOGRAPHERS DO AND HOW THIS WAS USED IN THIS STUDY

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Geertz (1973 p. 9) remarks, when referring to Ethnographic data, "what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to." He recognizes the role of an ethnographer as an active interpreter, making the point that the analysis of culture is "not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning'' (ibid p. 5; Moores 1993 p. 62). This Geertzian interpretation of meaning requires a hermeneutic approach (Geertz 1974).

Ethnography is labour intensive, involving prolonged direct contact with RAWK in an effort to look for rounded holistic explanations (Goulding 2005 p. 299). Here, this is provided through holistic hermeneutic understandings of consumers' stories (Thompson *et al.* 1994; Thompson 1997). The cultural context is RAWK and the period of time is almost four years (2008 - 2012), with about twelve months of intensive engagement. Data was collected using an open-ended approach (Maxwell 2004) following GT (Glaser & Strauss 1967) and Netnography (Kozinets 2009) in a 'natural' setting. 'Natural' settings are ones that have not been set up for research purposes (so, not experiments or formal interviews). This gives ethnography distinctive character (Lupton 1963; Burawoy 1979; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). The participant observational style (Delamont 2004) of data collection used a mixture of observation (reading threads on RAWK), participation (posting to threads on RAWK), and interviewing. Interviewing was 'member checking' to provide additional insights for constant comparative analysis through emailing and personal messaging (PM) RAWK members on a variety of emergent theory-related issues as a routine facet of theoretical sampling (see Muniz & Schau 2005 for similar research design). Participation (posting) was kept to a minimum early on to allow enough time for 'watching' and interpreting the thousands of forum members and hundreds of thousands of conversations. Similarly, following humanism, the researcher tries to keep his presence nondisruptive, while simultaneously recognising that some impact on the phenomenon is inevitable (Hirschman 1986a p. 242). Also, as Delamont (2004) points out, it is important to participate in the setting enough to be able to write feelingly about the nature of the context in question, but the researcher cannot actually spend all of their time participating because that would both prevent the researcher being able to observe the maximum number of social actors. All intensive participation in one activity means the researcher sacrifices observing other ones e.g. if the researcher spent long periods typing forum posts and threads, then he would have been sacrificing those long periods of time that could have

been spent observing/reading/analysing multiple other postings and threads, so limiting his observation somewhat. Intensive participation may also limit the time the analyst has to spend writing fieldnotes, thinking about fieldwork, writing down his thoughts, and systematically testing insights in the setting; i.e. 'theoretical sampling'. Thus, participant observation involves a varying degree of both participation and observation. It is alternately obtrusive and unobtrusive (Sherry & Kozinets 2001). This is a balance which must be struck having considered the necessity to get full coverage of the setting, not just a small number of elements of it, and the issue of taking adequate fieldnotes and time for proper reflection on the substantive reality and emerging theory. As Geertz (1973 p. 15) remarks, "the object of study is one thing and the study of it another."

Bryman & Bell (2003 pp. 323-8) discuss the 'roles for ethnographers' in business research drawing mainly on Gold's (1958) widely cited scheme for classification of participant observer roles, "which can be arrayed on a continuum of degrees of involvement with and detachment from members of the social setting" (Bryman & Bell 2003 p. 323). See **Figure 3.3251**:

Involvement <--> Detachment
|_____|_____|_____|

| Complete | Participant-as- | Observer-as- | Complete |
| participant | observer | participant | observer |
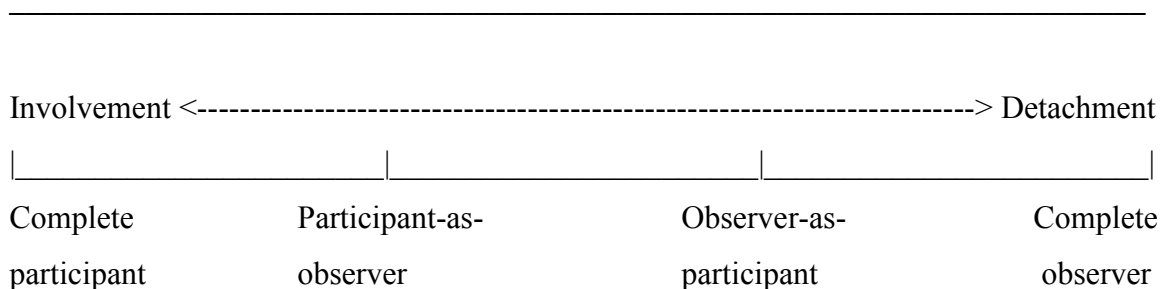
FIGURE 3.3251: **GOLD'S (1958) CLASSIFICATION OF PARTICIPANT OBSERVER ROLES**

SOURCE: Bryman & Bell 2003

While it is difficult to put this method into one of the above roles (**Figure 3.3251**), the primary role would be that of the 'complete observer' given the very minor level of participation for much of the immersion in the setting. "This kind of role relies on forms of observation that are unobtrusive in character" (Bryman & Bell 2003 p. 324). Later, as member-checking becomes more prevalent, the researcher needed to become more participative, through increased posting to RAWK and carrying out interviews via emails

and PMs with members for the purposes of investigating emerging issues and theoretical concepts, as discussed in **section 3.3252** (see Sherry 1990 for similar 'passive' observation followed by more 'active' investigation and member checking).

The netnographic observational data was paper-printed and hard-coded-by-hand, using a pen, by the researcher into emerging codes and categories (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Kozinets 2009). This 'hard-coding' involves 'open coding' [discussed in 'Stage 2' (**Section 3.4)**] for the main concerns of fans (Glaser 1998) (see concerns 1 to 94 later on **Table 3.6111**, and **Appendix F**). This discovery of 'main concerns' is a primary focus of GT (Glaser 1992; Pettigrew 2000; 2002), and also involves theorizing the various strategies employed by the social actors in question in pursuit of resolution of these 'main concerns' in a way that makes sense to both analyst(s) and lay-people (Glaser 1992; 1998; Wells 1995; Pettigrew 2000; 2002). This "resolution" of main concerns is contained in this GT's 'core category'. The concerns will lead to the emergent '*main* concern' and its properties as shown in Stage 4 (**Section 3.6**).

In moving towards this emerging main concern and its related core category, the conceptualisation process of GT is hierarchical, whereby open coding, or substantive coding (see Connell & Lowe 1997), moves toward theoretical coding as individual codes emerge from the data, which are then used to generate insights into more general and abstract concepts, thematic statements, and theoretical relationships (Wasserman *et al.* 2009). This transition to 'theoretical coding' (Glaser 1978; 1992; 1998) occurs emergently as the researcher's immersion (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007) in the setting facilitates emerging theory and abstraction through the constant comparison of open codes.

3.3252 Interviews for member checking: Emails and Personal Messages (PMs)
After open coding and the transition to theoretical coding, 'member checking' of main concerns was conducted via email or personal messaging (PM) informal interviews (Fontana & Frey 2005). It is respondent validation (Kozinets 2001; 2002b; Maclaran *et al.* 2004; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). This represents a form of triangulation (Silverman 1985; Denzin 1989; Fournier 1998; Jupp 2006; Sherry & Kozinets 2001; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007; Epp 2008). Theoretical triangulation is ongoing (approaching the data with a flexible, open mind, considering a variety of potential theoretical positions) (Denzin

1989), due to researcher theoretical sensitivity (Glaser 1978). It should, following GT methodology, maximise the potential for the emerging theory to 'fit' (ibid) the substantive area and reflect fan 'main concerns' (Glaser 1998). Thus the emerging GT of this study was given further 'trustworthiness', 'dependability', and coherence (Wallendorf & Belk 1989; Sherry 1991; Kozinets 2009) through the fan-responses to the 'member checks' (Sherry 1990). These responses were used as more data for constant comparison (Goulding 2002; Pidgeon & Henwood 2009). No account is privileged, following hermeneutics and ethnography (Arnold & Fischer 1994 p. 60; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007 p. 182). They are merely more 'parts' to be compared with 'the whole' and other 'parts' through GT constant comparison and following hermeneutic interpretive guidelines (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Arnold & Fischer 1994; Glaser 1998).

RAWK members may be contacted by other members via the Personal Messaging (PM) facility. Some members also add an 'email' contact facility. Because the researcher in this study is very familiar with much of the culture of LFC fandom, being a fan himself, it may be compared with what Forsey (2010) calls researching 'at home'. This means that the researcher is immersing himself in a context ethnographically with issues that are matters the researcher may well be already caught up in as part of his/her daily life (Forsey 2010 p. 569). These interviews may thus be construed as not somehow entirely different from participant observation; they may be viewed as participant observation in themselves or 'engaged listening.' Such research interviewing does in fact mimic the way much cultural interaction is already conducted, via conversations, emails, job interviews, television interviews, in what is referred to as the 'interview society' (Silverman 1993; Forsey 2010 p. 568). 'Member checking' is discussed further at Stage 4 (**Section 3.6**).

3.326   Data Preparation and Storage

Initially, the researcher kept hard copy print-outs from RAWK of postings on various issues. This amounted to about 1500 pages. These were open-coded and theoretically coded by hand (see also **Figure 3.41a**) (Kozinets 2001). Eventually, a decision was made to use CAQDAS (Computer aided qualitative data analysis software) QSR NVivo following consultation with the research supervisor, colleagues, and method literature (Tesch 1990; Miles & Weitzman 1994; Prothero 1996; Pettigrew 2002; Dey 2004; Jupp 2006; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007; Kozinets 2001; 2009). NVivo's nonlinear design and

coding facilities make it ideally suited to GT (Pettigrew 2002; Bringer *et al.* 2006). The search and retrieval function of such software allowed much faster work, greater efficiency of coding, searching codes, finding individual posts, and coded categories (Bazeley & Richards 2000). It provided an excellent digital filing system, which was much more easily navigated than hard-copy folders and pages. The transition from 'hard-copy' data storage to the CAQDAS digital storage required 'soft-coding' of previously hard-copy-coded work, which facilitated a 'formal' second reading of all data.

This software was not used *to do* the analysis of data; rather the software was used as an *aid to analysis,* which could be called a 'digital filing cabinet'. This analysis was done by the researcher. The software is an *analytical tool, not the analyst*. This decision was made following consultation with method literature (Dey 1993). As Glaser (1978 p. 58) says, "the analyst must do his own coding". This is particularly so in qualitative research if we are to achieve the richness and depth of thick description (Geertz 1973). Hermeneutics, too, champions the necessity for all understanding as linguistic and derived from the interpreter's own reading of an other's text (Arnold & Fischer 1994 p. 55).

So, without using NVivo to *do* the coding/interpreting, there are many benefits to use of CAQDAS as a researcher *aid,* including as a filing system for codes. The most pronounced general benefits of using NVivo were time-saved and higher quality analysis of raw and coded data due to the digital search-and-retrieval system. The digital repository on NVivo allows viewing of each individual 'open-code' separately from the sources of such code when such an exercise was desired to efficiently read/re-read/re-analyse the totality of such data in a coded-category for greater depth and understanding. NVivo also allowed for this to be done with each specific coded selection appearing in context, so the code was not divorced from its origin. Upon reflection, this researcher would submit that such an activity (viewing codes, category by category) would be incredibly difficult with hard-copy data sources due to the overlapping and inter-connected nature of codes, particularly as each new coding-phase was embarked upon.

3.4   STAGE 2: ANALYSING, INTERPRETING THE DATA AND FURTHER DATA COLLECTION

3.41   Open Coding:

Coding begins with open coding, also called substantive coding (Lowe 1996; Connell & Lowe 1997). Keeping Glaser's (1998) notion of 'main concerns' in mind, analysis involved reading posts (hard copy print-outs) to see what fans are talking about (what concerns them). At the beginning, the 'foreshadow problem' (Malinowski 1922; Delamont 2004; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007) sought to discover conflict among fans, but this was broadened to *both* conflict *and* consensus because both are present on RAWK (i.e. *all* interaction). Thus, the researcher takes a holistic view, in-line with GT, humanism, and hermeneutics (Hirschman 1986a p. 238; Connell & Lowe 1997 p. 166; Thompson 1997).

It could be argued that the use of 'foreshadow problems' is at odds with GT, if the concept were conflated with the notion of 'preconceived ideas'. But, Hammersley & Atkinson (2007 pp. 21-2) point out how Strauss (1970) showed how "considerable progress can sometimes be made in clarifying and developing research problems before fieldwork begins" [see also 'generative questions' in Strauss (1987) & Geertz (1973 p. 19)]. Glaser's (1978) discussions of 'theoretical sensitivity' also allows for, even encourages, a certain level of prior knowledge of how the social world and social theorizing works. Glaser & Strauss (1967 p. 252) say the creation of sensitivity occurs not only during a researcher's research study, but also from his/her own personal experiences prior to or outside it. So, in this study, 'foreshadowing problems', rather than 'preconceived theories' or 'preconceived ideas', were allowed and can be beneficial rather than problematic or 'forcing' (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Glaser 1992). Goulding (2001) claims that approaching the data with a totally 'blank-sheet' or empty mind is impossible. Hermeneuticians, similarly talk about preunderstanding being central to understanding the world (Gadamer 1960; Arnold & Fischer 1994; Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000). But, the present author is careful to use his prior knowledge to the benefit of GT theory development, as a theoretically sensitive, open minded researcher (Glaser 1978; Connell & Lowe 1997). Anthropologist, Geertz (1973 p. 27) claims that one does not, and *ought* not, start a study intellectually empty-headed; "theoretical ideas are not created wholly anew in each study." However, this necessitates being sure to avoid forcing (Glaser 1992). This is done by concentrating on facilitating grounded emergence (Glaser &

Strauss 1967). Thus the data is not approached with an initial or pre-conceived theoretical framework, rather the start-point was a 'topic' or 'research focused substantive area' (football fan experiences and conflicts online), from which the data is analysed to discover main concerns. Grounded theorists Connell & Lowe (1997 pp. 167, 171) and Andriopoulos & Lowe (2000 p. 735) claim that while pre-understanding or intuition and intellect are necessary for theory development, they must not become blocks to conceptual analysis. So, being open minded (Connell & Lowe 1997 p. 172) is the aim when studying the setting and the data, to interpret it intellectually, while remembering not to force our interpretations or allow them to become unduly theoretically contaminated by pre-ordained theory (Glaser 1992; Connell & Lowe 1997 p. 171). This may be comparable to phenomenological 'bracketing' (Miles & Huberman 1994). However, as Geertz (1999) says, we *do* begin with *some general notions* of what we would like to look into and how we might go about it. He says we then often find ourselves looking elsewhere into other more interesting areas; we should be open to change. Similarly, this study moved away from focussing on notions of 'conflict', given the widespread consensus on various issues on RAWK. Such flexibility is promoted in GT (Strauss & Corbin 1990; Coyne 1997). Glaser (1978) says the researcher must be flexible to change to ask questions that have 'fit', 'relevance', and 'workability' to emerging theory (pp. 4, 39). Thus, this GT is always in process and 'modifiable' (Glaser 1978 p. 4; Lowe & Kuusisto 1999 p, 173), as with philosophical hermeneutics and the fusion of horizons (Gadamer 1960).

It is intended that the GT produced here is 'modifiable', the codes and categories 'fit' and are 'relevant' to the action of the empirical world they analyse (RAWK), the theory 'works' to explain what is happening, interprets why, and may be somewhat predictive via currently useful generalization (Leavy 2011) or retrodictive causality (see Chapter 1 and Katz 2001 p. 448; see also Geertz 1972 for retrodictive observation/explanation of the cockfight in Bali). This GT is thus presented as satisfying all four of Glaser's criteria for good GT (fit; modifiability; relevance; work) (Glaser 1978; Charmaz 2005 p. 527).

Open coding involved hand-writing in the margins (Giske & Artinian 2007) of hard-copy paper print-outs with pen to keep track of emerging 'codes', 'issues', 'concerns', 'concepts', and 'categories'. These codes refer to more tangible things such as, for example, events (football matches), people (owners, players, manager), things (stadium), and intangibles

such as, for example, 'tradition', 'authenticity', 'the future', or 'club as material vs spiritual'. These codes refer to 'things' fans talk about. They may be 'concepts' or some form of abstraction depending on the nature of the discussion. They are all 'issues' or 'concerns' fans discuss with one another. Each 'code' thus represents a 'category' and each 'category', a 'code', because each category, at this open coding stage, is simply a repository for incidents of each code taken from the data; i.e. all incidents relating to 'ownership' (a code) can be consolidated together as a category of related data. Thus the terms 'codes', 'issues', 'concerns', 'concepts', and 'categories', are all interchangeable and synonymous, in this thesis [see also 'sensitized concepts' (Christians & Carey 1981; Sherry 1991)]. As issues/concerns [both tangible ones and intangible (including conceptual)] were encountered and read by the researcher, they were 'coded' openly. This began with a hypothesis-free mindset in order to allow the substantive meaning of the setting to be explored and understood. These substantive or open codes form 'categories' of data, and these codes can then themselves be subsumed into higher order categories as linkages and relationships are discovered emergently through the process of 'theoretical coding' (Glaser 1978) as is discussed over the course of this chapter. Following Glaser (1978 pp. 56-8), general questions were continually asked during coding such as:

1) What is this data a study of?

2) What category does this incident indicate?

3) What is actually happening in the data?

This represents a similar method to *knocking at the text* in *existential hermeneutics* where the interpreter asks questions, sometimes the same one, again and again, listening constantly to the text, like the cautious tapping at an object until it gives off a revealing sound, or knocking at a door until it finally opens (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000 p. 86). In GT, sensitivity [a keen ear (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000 p. 86); theoretical sensitivity (Glaser 1978)] is necessary to discover and interpret the answer as it emerges (Connell & Lowe 1997). This encourages theory emergence grounded in the substantive meaning of the setting and relevant to the day-to-day 'problems' and 'concerns' of the actors on RAWK (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978, 1992, 1998). See below (**Figure 3.41**) for a 'scanned in' example of a post 'open-coded'. Before looking at this study's coding, let us briefly consider Turner (1981 p. 233), who provides a Table showing an example of how to generate codes/categories from fieldnote data (see **Table 3.41** below):

A. First Paragraph from a Set of Fieldnotes used for Analysis in Grounded Theory Class-Exercises

Paragraph 1

    A row of lorries varying between 30 and 50 queue up every morning in front of the factory to obtain their cement. All lorry drivers and owners place great importance to be first in the queue as this means getting served first. This has added importance in times of cement shortages when the cement outflow from the factory to the private sector is rationed and when the prices of cement are high. In addition to cement customers who come from all over southern regions of the country, there is also a set of lorry owners stationed in H . . . who act as transport agents for other customers. Porcelli is one of these transport agents.

Source: Former factory manager who is embarking here upon a discussion of Porcelli's activities in the area.

B. Categories Generated (to be placed on cards) by Three Successive Classes of Students Analysing the Paragraph Above as a First Step in the Analysis of the Complete Account of Porcelli's Activities

Cement shortage
Competitive behaviour among lorry drivers
Many agents transporting cement
Greater intensity of competition caused by cement shortage
Customers transporting their own cement
Role of factory
Significance of queue system as a means of distributing scarce resources
Economic context of scarcity
Porcelli's role
Significance of time in relation to the queue
Routinised pattern for the distribution of goods
Importance of priority position in queue

TABLE 3.41: TURNER'S CATEGORY/CODE GENERATION EXAMPLE

SOURCE: Turner 1981 p. 233

Turner's example shows the raw/fieldnoted data in part 'A.'. In part 'B.' then, he shows the categories/codes generated through analysis by students. The researcher in the current study does not present the codes/categories *below* the data, but beside it in the margin, as recommended by Glaser (1998), Miles & Huberman (1994), Charmaz (2005 pp. 518-20), and Giske & Artinian (2007). Otherwise, the approach is the same analytically. **Figure 3.41** contains a post with labels to show the reader how data was coded and analysed. **Appendix G** shows the coded data without labels. This all involves the 'constant comparative method' (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978; 1992; 1998; Goulding 2002). See s**ection 3.5** for a detailed description of this term.

tickets at all unless the membership fee is increased by at least twentyfold - I'm sure they'd rather have each AIB member enroll directly in the new scheme. I've no doubt that if this were to happen (or even rumors of it doing so) would get even more people on board with where SOS are coming from.

Besides, what I think is most galling here are two things: not the money-grubbing so much (as most have said, who didn't see it coming) but just no headsup whatsoever and then the mealymouthing explanations of what exactly is happening and where it's headed. But most importantly, for these "initiatives" to be going into place *while still at Anfield* is a complete joke. It's well and good to say Arsenal or the Mancs are already doing it but it's apples and oranges. One thing to build/expand the ground to add corporate seats - another altogether to take away existing ones in some sort of farcical redistribution!

This sort of crap is happening all over of course but I've rarely ever heard of something *quite* like this, especially when it feels like the need to do any of it in the first place is supposedly so we can get a bigger stadium! >:(

Title: **Re: S.O.S - "BELONG" LFC Membership Scheme and Tickets for Corporates**
Post by: ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ on **July 9, 2008, 06:39:05 PM**

Dont think as many people would be arsed if everyone thought that this extra revenue would be given to Rafa or for the better of the club, but i think most have an idea of where it will really be going. Ill pay it but only because ill have to next year.
It was going to come sooner or later but it doesnt help that the 2 highwaymen convieniently have large sums to make up for.

Title: **Re: S.O.S - "BELONG" LFC Membership Scheme and Tickets for Corporates**
Post by: ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ on **July 9, 2008, 07:01:30 PM**

I think the reason that this is causing so much unhappiness lies in the fact that this new scheme, in essence, is a tax on your average Liverpool supporter.

I expected price rises, I think anyone with half a brain cell did, however I expected them to occur steadily and annually, rising to their highest point when we finally got into Stanley Park.

I think the majority of people expected rises in ticket prices, merchandise, programmes and Stadium Tours.

But to bring a completely new, more expensive and untested scheme in to replace an the fan card, which is compulosry if you wish to buy a ticket in any given season, will shock people. And it's clear that that shock is turning to Anger.

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23/09/2008 22:03

FIGURE 3.41:   EXAMPLE OF OPEN CODING TO HARD-COPY PRINT OUT, WITH READER-LABELS

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In the bottom left corner of **Figure 3.41** & **Appendix G** is the *page number* of this post. The *main body* contains information of 'who' has authored each post. The researcher has erased this information for anonymity. The posts, contained in the *main body* of text, are coded by the researcher in his own hand writing along the right side of the page, as indicated by the text box to the right of the diagram with the word *'Codes'*. This coding-in-the-margin, or 'marginal remarking', is an adaptation of the qualitative data analysis method described by Miles & Huberman (1994 pp. 66-7). They refer to GT coding and how it involves analysing the text, reading it line-by-line, and then coding below or beside the paragraph to indicate the category/label/code. Glaser (1998 p. 147) too describes GT coding as involving "writ[ing] the codes in the margin next to the incident which triggered the occurrence of the code." These codes are not 'prefabricated' and have a 'code-in-use flavour' (Miles & Huberman 1994 p. 58) given how they emerged from data, thus accurately reflecting it and not 'forcing' it to fit some pre-conceived coding schema (Glaser 1992). The hand coding approach is very similar to that of Kozinets' Netnography (2009 p. 123).

3.42   Qualitative Analysis Coding Cards

Records of each code were kept indicating (code-by-code, or category-by-category) where each one occurred recording the post in which it instanced along with the exact page for manual hard-copy search and retrieval tasks (this was all before the introduction of CAQDAS through usage of NVivo). Miles & Huberman (1994) discuss how using 'qualitative data category cards' can aid the researcher in his analysis. Turner (1981) discusses using such cards for administrative and cross-referencing purposes in the generation of GT and provides an example (see **Appendix H**). His category card shows the title of the category, where it occurs in the fieldnote data, as well as some supplementary reminder notes/memos. In this thesis' study, the researcher adopted a similar method of cross-referencing where codes occurred in the data. See **Figure 3.42** below for an example from the researcher's coding reference records with reader-labels. See **Appendix I** for the same example without reader-labels. Note that these are the hand-written 'cards'. Upon adoption of the CAQDAS software NVivo, a digital format was then utilised for administrative and cross-referencing purposes, as discussed later.
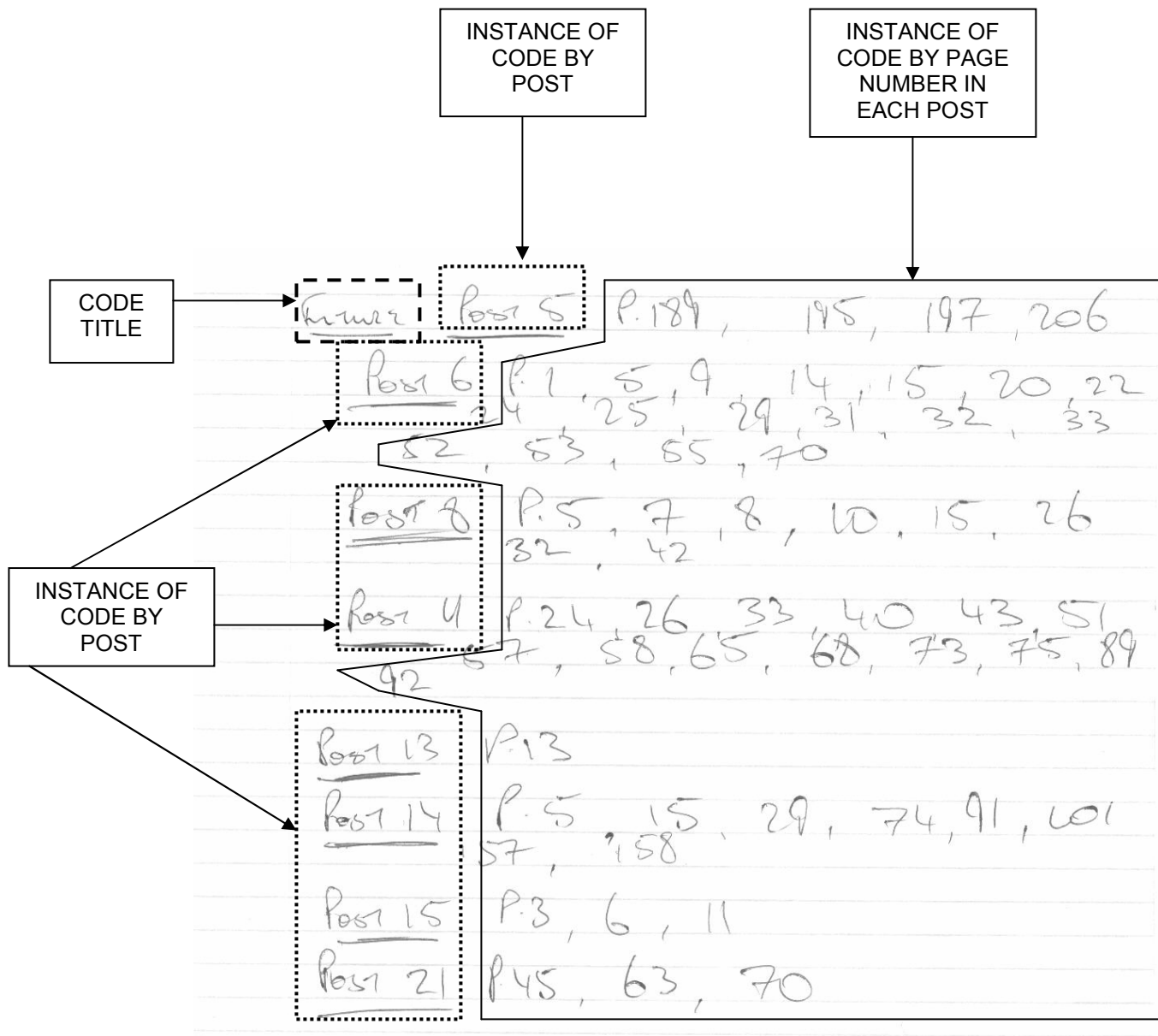
FIGURE 3.42: **HAND WRITTEN CODING CARD REFERENCE RECORD WITH READER-LABELS**

3.43   Digital coding cards (NVivo)

Coding data in NVivo allowed creation of digital coding cards, similar to hand-written ones. Miles & Huberman (1994) discuss using data-retrieval software for this purpose and NVivo has fulfilled this research-analysis tool requirement during this study. They (ibid) discuss the speed that such software would afford the research process and the experience of this study's analyst confirms this benefit. This is illustrated for the reader on **Figure 3.43a** and **Figure 3.43b** below.

FIGURE 3.43a: DIGITAL CODING CARD RECORD FROM NVIVO
WITH SUMMARY SHOWN   115

List of Codes

NVivo Software Tools

Digital Coding Card Record
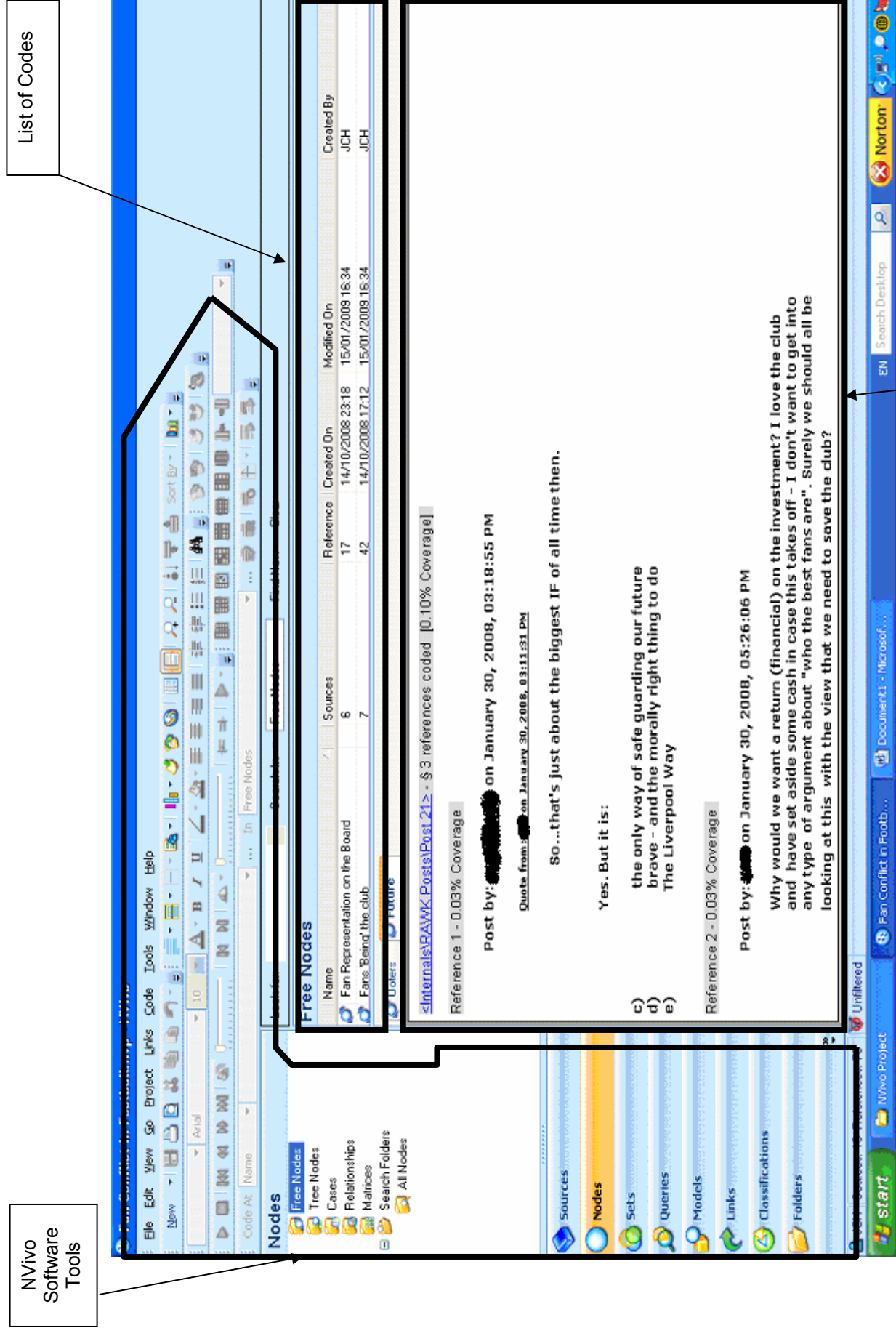
FIGURE 3.43b: **DIGITAL CODING CARD RECORD FROM NVIVO WITH REFERENCES SHOWN**

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Figure 3.43a is a screen-capture from NVivo showing the digital 'coding card record'. Also on the diagram are NVivo software tools and the menu showing some of the list of 94 codes (as listed on **Table 3.6111** later and summarised in **Appendix F**). The important aspect of this diagram is the coding card record, which shows a summary of where the code (referred to as 'node' in NVivo; see Pettigrew 2002) 'Future' can be found delineated by the source location (which post/data source) and folder location on the hard-drive, and also how many instances of this code are contained within that source ('references').

Figure 3.43b is a similar screen-capture, except it shows the coded data itself, compiled by the analyst in NVivo through the operation of coding 'line-by-line'. As the analyst codes a piece of data, NVivo keeps track of which codes are instanced data-source-by-data-source and also compiles these coded-data together under the heading of each code for easy analysis. So, rather than having to refer to the hard-copy coding-card summary to cross-reference each code (which would necessitate manually finding any/each particular piece of data at the location {by folder, data source number/record, and page number} recorded in the summary on the card), the digital system provided by NVivo allows the analyst to immediately see compilations of the data source-by-source or code-by-code, with references to what data is being read/analysed, and the codes relevant to this data.

3.44   Memoing:

Following consultation with the research supervisor and literature, memoing (Miles & Huberman 1994) was ongoing from the very beginning, adopting a very general, informal perspective of memos (Glaser 1978; 1998). These could be anything from a word on a scrap of paper to a typed up document/memo containing complex pieces of theorizing/abstraction or the minutest to the most general of descriptions of something or some concept (Glaser 1998). They are totally free and emergent (ibid). All thoughts and ideas were written down as memos, wherever, whenever, and however they occurred (see also Goulding 2000; 2002). Glaser calls this "interrupting for moment capture" (1998 pp. 182-3). It serves as an integral part of the GT process (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Glaser 1998; Goulding 2002). Thousands of memos have been written over the life of this study. Memos were written, or drawn in the case of memo-diagrams, everyday, on any research-related issues or concepts, often amounting to several pages each. They are the same as fieldnotes (Goulding, Shankar, & Elliott 2002). To promote freedom and creativity, the majority of

these were hand-written. This less-structured, hand-memoing approach was favoured by this author who finds it allowed ideas to develop freely without the constraints of rigid sentence structure or formatting issues, which was found to be the case using computer memos (Glaser 1978). See **Appendix J** for an example of one hand-written memo. The reader can see on **Appendix J** that each memo is dated. This allows the researcher to trace his thought processes and provides a documentary source for recording the thoughts, ideas, and impressions of the researcher at a given moment in time (Goulding 2000). Memos can be revisited any time, so allowing qualitative access to previous moments in the journey, providing the researcher valuable 'data' to mine for greater interpretations of the emerging theory and research report (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Goulding 2000).

3.5   STAGE 3: THEORETICAL SAMPLING

3.51   Theoretical sampling:

Theoretical sampling involves joint collection, coding, and analysis of data in an iterative, simultaneous process (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Goulding 2002). Constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Goulding 2002; Follett 2009) is integral to this (see **section 3.52**). The iterative nature and back-and-forth procedure is discussed by Strauss (1987), who also refers to it as the 'coding paradigm' (p. 19) (see **Appendix K**). Following from one element (data collection, coding, analysis, memoing, writing) of GT, at any stage from beginning to 'end'/write-up, the researcher makes decisions about what to do 'next' based on his theoretical thinking and substantive knowledge. As he learns more about the substantive area and becomes more and more attuned to the 'main concerns' of the active social participants (fans), the analyst must engage in theoretical sampling. Samples are not chosen for their representative nature, nor are they prescribed 'before' the research project is undertaken as may be the case with some other sampling techniques (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Miles & Huberman 1994). Samples are not chosen according to a pre-planned routine as these are more likely to force the researcher into irrelevant directions and harmful pitfalls (Glaser & Strauss 1967 p. 48). Sampling in GT involves choosing the 'sample' in an ongoing and iterative way such that the data 'sampled' are chosen for their characteristic nature as being directly related to the emergent GT in the social context or phenomenon in question. Glaser & Strauss (1967 p. 48) say that the criteria of theoretical sampling are those of *theoretical purpose and relevance*, not structural circumstance. The main sampling

criterion is relevance to the developing GT based on the knowledge, judgement, and theoretical sensitivity of the researcher (Glaser 1978; 1992; 1998). It is ongoing, simultaneous, and iterative. Following the initial purposeful sample selection of RAWK as the research site, as referred to in Stage 1 (**Section 3.3**), this theoretical sampling method was used throughout this study. The emergent direction it provides, giving a link *from* that data that *has* been collected, and the insight gained from coding/analysing it, *to* the type of data that needs to be collected subsequently, gives a developmental progression throughout the research that encourages good quality theory with coherency and *fit* (Glaser 1998). The sample 'emerges' to satisfy the direction of emerging theory, which is developed through researcher interpretation of data provided by social actors close to the phenomenon in question. Thus, it is ideal for social research and in particular an inductive project such as this. During this study, as theoretical codes emerged from the data, the analyst would continue data collection with that code 'in mind'. For example, on various emergent issues and concerns arising from observation on RAWK, the researcher used the platform of interviews via email or PMs with a sample of RAWK members, chosen for their recent activity on RAWK, to further investigate issues to saturate these categories and increase understanding of the complexities of the phenomenon in question. So, particularly in the latter stages of this study, many interview questions arose from the theoretical sensitivity (Glaser 1978) created previously through research analysis of RAWK leading to emerging concepts for investigation.

3.52   The Constant Comparative Method

The concept of the 'constant comparative method' is important here (Goulding 2000; 2002; Schau & Gilly 2003; Muniz & Schau 2005). It involves comparing like with like in search of emerging patterns and themes across incidents (Spiggle 1994; Goulding 2000; Pettigrew 2002; Muniz & Schau 2005). When the analyst read a piece of data, he considers other knowledge of the substantive area (other data; abstractions from other data), in conjunction with his own theoretical sensitivity, and thus his emerging theoretical understanding of the context. This facilitates discovery of insights into the main concerns of fans on RAWK and how these concerns are related given the similarities and differences in varying scenarios. Constant comparison literally means that everything is compared with everything all of the time (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Wasserman *et al.* 2009). Similarities between this approach and the hermeneutic circle (Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy 1988; Thompson, Pollio, &

Locander 1994) led this author to adopt hermeneutics as a philosophical device in data analysis, constantly comparing the 'part' and the 'whole' (see Geertz 1974; Kozinets 2009). The hermeneutic circle is central to ethnographic interpretation (Geertz 1974 p. 43; Kozinets 2009). In practice, netnographic data on RAWK is compared with emails and personal messages (interviews). 'Newer' data is compared with older data. Codes and conceptual categories must be compared directly with other data and also with other codes and conceptual categories, and so on (Charmaz 2006; Wasserman *et al.* 2009). 'Explication de texte' is being carried out as the analyst repetitively asks himself alternating questions about 'what is going on' in particular incidents of data and how this relates to the totality of the data within the overall context of football fan consumer culture online. This leads to an advancing spiral of general observations and specific remarks that emerge through reading and interpretation via interpretive tacking or back-and-forth movement between the sum and the parts, as with hermeneutics (Geertz 1974). The ethnographer eventually consolidates this into a general reading of RAWK culture. Both Geertz (1974) and Glaser (1998) recommend the 'explication de texte' approach to interpretation and constant comparison in anthropological and GT development respectively.

3.6   STAGE 4: FURTHER CODING, MAIN CONCERN DISCOVERY AND CORE CATEGORY DEVELOPMENT, MEMBER CHECKING, LITERATURE WEAVING, AND WRITE-UP

This stage began during *open coding* (the reader should recall the iterative, simultaneous, and overlapping nature of GT). It involves the continuous interplay between the substantive reality, experienced by the research participants and researcher, and the emerging theory where (open) codes become related through the constant comparative method and theoretical sampling. This process allows for *theoretical coding* of categories that subsume other categories and codes and lead to further 'funnelling down' to a main concern and core category that can be *'selectively coded'* (Glaser 1992) for and theorized given how they subsume and relate all other categories and codes in the study.

3.61   Core Analysis and Outcomes:

Analytical coding occurred across five general phases, moving from the 'open coding' or substantive coding in phase one, through 'theoretical coding' that began in phase one also,

but stretched across all five phases until the main concern and core category were discovered, in the fifth and final phase, which were then 'selectively coded' for in conjunction with literature weaving (Glaser 1992). This involves theoretical sampling and constant comparison. The five phases will now be outlined, one-by-one.

3.611   Coding Phase 1

This Netnographic study began with open coding, which moved towards theoretical and selective coding as substantive awareness facilitated emergence of theoretical abstraction (Glaser 1992; 1998). This follows the 'classical GT' approach of Glaser & Strauss (1967), and Glaser's more recent work (1978; 1992; 1998). Please remember, as noted above, this coding schema did not follow the 'axial coding' techniques of Strauss & Corbin (1990). This study is similar to, for example, Follett (2009) or Connell & Lowe (1997) in its 'Glaserian' (theoretical coding) approach. The concentration is on emergence from the substantive area itself, not the application of some pre-conceived coding schemas, as axial coding may be seen to encourage (see Glaser 1992; Connell & Lowe 1997; Goulding 2002). Glaser's (1978) Theoretical Coding does provide theoretical families that may be used for analysis, but, he specifically notes that these are merely suggestive and the researcher may decide not to apply any such coding families if theoretical emergence from the substantive data in question does not encourage it. Emergent theoretical coding, not using any pre-proposed theoretical coding families, is thus the style used in this thesis with selective coding for specific emerging concepts and codes the focus, as stipulated by Glaser (1978; 1998) and Glaser & Strauss (1967) (see also Connell & Lowe 1997; Goulding 2002; Follett 2009).

Open coding produced all main concerns/codes at phase one [94 codes (**Table 3.6111**)]. As categories/concepts emerged, their interrelationships began to become apparent given the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher and '*theoretical coding'* (Glaser 1978).

3.6111 Member Checking [email and personal message interviews]
To *'member check'* (Kozinets 2002b; Maclaran *et al.* 2004), forum posters were contacted via email or personal message (PM) [see Muniz & Schau (2005) and Zwick & Dholakia (2006) for similar use of emails in CR]. This was to decipher fan 'main concerns' (Glaser 1992; 1998) so as to further theorize the main concerns being generated at Phase 1 of the

participant observation online (netnography) (**section 3.611**), via constant comparison of similarities and differences between what emerged from observation, and what emerged from interviews. This thus allows greater theoretical saturation of these codes (Andriopoulos & Lowe 2000). The focus of the netnography is on the daily interactions between forum participants. Their conversations were inductively coded to produce an emergent theory based on the issues/concerns they talk about. 'Member checking' [see also respondent validation (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007)] facilitated 'checking' whether the emerging codes and theory were on the right track, to see if they were grounded in the reality of the setting in question, fandom on RAWK. Member checking also provided more data for constant comparison and the potential for new insights given the depth of responses provided by respondents at this juncture (Pidgeon & Henwood 2009). The approach involved an open, unstructured question frame via email or private message (PM). This was intended to allow for freedom of expression on the part of respondents and thus present the greatest possibility for emergence of 'fitting' 'main concerns' rather than 'forced' ones (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978; 1992; 1998). Giving respondents the freedom to talk in an unstructured way, without imposed limitations of only focussing on researcher-specified issues for example, recognises the GT researcher's task at the early stages of analysis. This is to "sit back and listen while respondents tell their stories" (Glaser & Strauss 1967 pp. 75-6). These stories acted as insights to be used as more data for constant comparison. They were coded and analysed in the same way as the online postings during netnography for consistency (see also Follett 2009), within the context of already emerging categories, given the depth of analysis and theoretical insight gained from work to that point. The following is the generic message that the researcher in this study sent to participants at this early member checking stage:

> Which 10 issues do you find most important, or concern you the most, with regard to Liverpool FC? Why, for each one if possible? And how do you think these issues could be addressed or resolved, for each one if possible?

> You can respond briefly or at length, whichever is your preference, and I would be very very grateful for any assistance you can provide in the study. If it is easier, you do not HAVE to give 10 issues, 1 would be fine, or any number above 10 would be fine too. It is up to you. 10 is just a target.

At this early stage of 'member checks', 60 emails or PMs were sent to 60 forum members, who were chosen on the criteria that they had been recently active, thus the likelihood that they had stopped using RAWK was minimal or non-existent, so increasing the chances of a reply, on this criteria only. Activity was discovered through simply observing threads and seeing that these 60 posters had posted in the previous few days. All 60 members were LFC fans, and members of RAWK, of course. So, they satisfied the criteria of theoretical sampling; i.e. the aim of the open question frame at this point was to discover the main concerns of members of RAWK (LFC fans) and all 60 are members. So, their points of view should be theoretically relevant in this regard. 25 members replied and these replies were treated as more data for constant comparison in conjunction with all other data (Goulding 2002; Pidgeon & Henwood 2009).

The personal messaging (PM) service provided on RAWK is very similar to a regular email client in its operation, although only RAWK registered members can use it, and they can only contact other RAWK members. It is not a web chat facility. Communicating with RAWK participants across either email or PM was thus a very similar method. The only tangible difference was the lack of a facility to 'attach' documents or other digital objects to a PM as is normally available on an email client. One of the major differences between communication for the purposes of interview across email or PM, when compared to in-person interviews, is the lack of visual nonverbal cues (Markham 2007) such as facial gestures, tone of voice, or bodily/hand movements during conversation. But, as Markham (2007 p. 337) points out, if the researcher is studying an Internet context as a cultural formation or social interaction in an online communication context (as this thesis' study is), then the inclusion of embodied ways of knowing may be unwarranted and even counterproductive.

So, email or PM interviews carried out during this study were beneficial for a variety of reasons when compared to in-person interview techniques. Contacting RAWK members via PM (in some cases) and email (in some cases) was relatively easy regardless of their geographical location. Gaining access to their postal address for example may have proven quite difficult. Email/PM provides a useful, informal method for contacting users in a medium they are familiar with, thus allowing trust to build between researcher and informant easily in many cases (Kivits 2005; Markham 2007). Emails and PMs are low-

cost (free), require no travel (compared to in-person meetings), easy to organize (no need for both parties to be available at the same time; both can make contact at their own convenience; communication is asynchronous), and require no transcription (similar to the online postings) (Kivits 2005). It was assumed that RAWK users were familiar with email as they are required to have an email address to register with the website. A benefit is the fact that almost all respondents to emails and PMs did not live in Ireland (they are geographically dispersed globally). This meant that they would not have been feasibly available for interview in-person, due to resource constraints of the researcher.

The unobtrusive nature of email/PM meant that, in many cases, it was easy for the interviewer to build up the trust of informants once two-way contact had been made so that they felt it safe to speak freely (Kivits 2005). This meant establishing a rapport with respondents in a conversational informal way, often talking about recent football results or other LFC related issues that both the interviewer and informant were knowledgeable about. The ongoing management of this two-way relationship required a continuous alternation between 'interviewing' and 'conversing' (Kivits 2005; see also Sherry & Kozinets 2001). This meant that interviews took place over months rather than hours, with both parties having the freedom to take as much time as they liked to reply. Informants were allowed the freedom to talk about whatever they wanted in order to encourage maximum emergence in the data (Glaser & Strauss 1967). The format of emails/PMs also meant that some emails were quite short (a paragraph), whereas others sometimes amounted to ten or twenty pages depending on the depth the informant went into regarding an issue/issues. The asynchronicity also allowed for greater emergence of data, compared to in-person interviews, due to the informants being able to introduce hyperlinks to information, or attachments of articles or other data, independently of the question being asked to point out an issue they felt was important and relevant, something that may have proved difficult within the constraints of a one-on-one interview in-person given issues of time and resources (Kivits 2005). The following is an email received from an informant that illustrates quite well the advantage of being able to send and receive attachments, as well as the beneficial layer of confidentiality and trust that can exist between interviewer and respondent when the interviewer builds rapport:

Hi Jason,

It's really Colin, and I ask of you to please keep my actual email address to yourself.

I hope you are well and are ready to receive my answers to your request. I may have elaborated too much whenever I speak of the owners, but perhaps you may understand how passionate I am about this subject. I have also attached a collection of statements made by all the parties concerned when the Americans took over, just for you to compare then and now.

I do hope it will help in some small way towards your studies.

Take care now.
Céad Míle Fáilte

Colin

2 attachments:

LFCISSUES.DOC - 47 K
WHAT THEY SAID ON THAT FATEFUL DAY.DOC - 39 K
 (Fieldquote no. 104)

It may be observed in this above email that the user is keen for the interviewer to keep the informant's email address private. This shows willingness to trust the interviewer and may also indicate that the medium of email has facilitated contact that may not have happened in-person on grounds of confidentiality. The medium also allowed two attachments to be sent, unsolicited and unrequested by the interviewer. These contained a variety of useful data, including excerpts from interviews obtained from media sources, media articles, and the respondent's own words and accounts. The fact that the researcher was Irish was also a source of friendly interaction, with the informant using the Irish language phrase 'Céad Míle Fáilte' to close his email. This shows how introducing oneself fully and informally to all participants and potential participants can be a vital source of trust and rapport building (Kivits 2005; see also Sherry & McGrath 1989).

At phase one, following the majority of netnographic analysis and subsequent 'member checking' for congruence and divergence between the findings of netnographic observation (Kozinets 2009) and open-ended interviews/conversations (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007) via personal messages (PMs) or emails with participants, in

search of the 'main concerns' (Glaser 1998) of football fans in this online context, the main issues discussed amounted to 94 codes as follows:

TABLE 3.6111:   LIST OF ALL 94 CODES AT CODING PHASE 1

For explanation of each of the below codes see full descriptive summary in separate Appendix (**Appendix F**).

All codes (in alphabetical order): (next page)

39th game	Opposition fans
Access to Tickets	Opposition managers
AFC Liverpool	Opposition players
Affordability of travel to games	Opposition teams
Ageism	Players' wages
Andy @ Allerton	Prediction of results
Anti American	Premier League
Approach to opposing ownership	Privacy
Approach to opposing ticket prices	Private Matters
Atmosphere	Profit Vs On-Pitch Success
Authenticity	Real fans
Big spenders vs Small spenders	Reclaim the Kop
Boycott games	Referees
Boycott merchandise	Reserve games
Branding	Revenue methods
Broughton	Sandon
Charity	Scabs
Club affairs out of fan control	Season Tickets
Club Chief Executive	ShareLFC initiative
Club Debts	Singing
Club Ownership	Spirit of Shankly Supporters' Group
Club PR Dept	Sponsorship
Club relationship 'material' vs 'spiritual'	Style of play
Club reputation	Sun Newspaper
Club website	Switching clubs
Commercialisation of football	Team selection
Community	Terracing
Corporates	The Stadium
Disabled Fans	Ticket Prices to attend matches
Expenses	Traditions
Families	Transfers
Fan consultation	TV Deals
Fan Hostility	UEFA
Fan Representation on the Board	We 'are' the club/Being the club
Fans patronized by the club	What other clubs do
Fixtures	WUM
Freedom of speech on forums	Young fans
Future	Youth development
Government intervention	
Hillsborough	
Internal squabbles	
Kaka	
Kick off times	
Kop	
Liverpool Manager	
Liverpool Players	
Local community	
Low income earners	
Media Interpretation of the club	
Membership	
Modern football	
Moores	
Nationalism	
Newbies	
Official Liverpool Supporters Club (OLSC)	
Ooters	

This involved 'Theoretical/~~axial~~ coding' (Glaser 1978; 1992; 1998; Goulding 2002; Follett 2009) continuing from 'Coding Phase 1' (**Section 3.611**). The task was linking 'like-with-like', finding similarities and differences between codes at Phase 1 to begin theoretical emergence. This led to the grouping of similar 'concerns' from Phase 1 (**Section 3.611**) together in emergent categories based on themes/relationships across them. These categories deal with particular types of issues under a specific heading. This represents the beginning of moving beyond specific instances to find the "transcending resonances in subjects' expressions" (Katz 2002 p. 85). Here is a list of these new 'headings'/categories:

• Ownership and control	• Commercialisation and commercial activities
• Fan organisation, representation and protest	• Affordability and access
• Authenticity	• (nature of) Fandom and fan-community (including 'online' community)
• The Past (history, traditions, nostalgia) and the future	• Football team activities and success, and related
• Image	

Each of these categories, above, subsumed codes from Phase 1 as follows:

Ownership and control:

Club ownership	Moores
Anti-American	Club affairs out of fan control
Fan representation on the board of directors	Fan consultation
Expenses	Internal squabbles
Government intervention	Broughton

Commercialisation and commercial activities:

The stadium	Club debts
Commercialisation of football	Club chief executive
Sponsorship	Privacy
Club Public relations dept (PR)	TV Deals
Club website	Branding

Players' wages	Revenue methods
Fans patronised by the club	Charity

Fan organisation and protest:

Approach to opposing ownership	Spirit of Shankly Supporters Group
ShareLFC initiative	Boycott merchandise
Approach to opposing ticket prices	Boycott games
Reclaim the Kop	

Affordability and access:

Ticket prices to attend matches	Access to tickets
AFC Liverpool	Season tickets
Low-income earners	Affordability of travel to games
Big spenders VS Small spenders	Switching clubs
Andy@Allerton	Scabs
The Sandon bar	Kick-off times

Authenticity:

'Real' fans	Authenticity
Official Liverpool Supporters Club (OLSC)	Membership

(Nature of) Fandom and fan-community (including 'online' community):

Fan hostility	Ooters
Freedom of speech on forums	Corporates
We 'are' the club/Being the club	Private matters
Young fans	Families
Local community	Disabled fans
Club relationship 'material' VS 'spiritual'	Newbies
WUM	Ageism
Community	Nationalism
Opposition fans	

The past (history, traditions, nostalgia) and the future:

The future	Traditions

Kop	Hillsborough
Atmosphere	Terracing
Singing	'Modern football'

Football team activities and success, and related:

Profit VS on-pitch success	Liverpool Manager
Transfers	Liverpool players
Team selection	Reserve games
Prediction of results	39th game
Youth development	Style of play
Fixtures	What other clubs do
Opposition managers	Opposition players
Referees	Opposition teams
Premier League	UEFA
Kaka	

Image:

Media interpretation of the club	Club reputation
The Sun Newspaper	

3.613   Coding Phase 3

At this point, the researcher continued theoretical coding. The questions were:

- How can we relate the categories/codes from Phase 2 (**section 3.612**) that subsumed categories from Phase 1 (**section 3.611**)?

- What relationships, themes, similarities and differences exist across them when we consider 'why' fans are talking about each particular issue under each particular theme?

- What are fans' aims (what are the intentional benefits) as discussed online and interpreted here, when considering discussions under each category in Phase 2 (**section 3.612**)? What is the fans' 'concern' regarding each category from Phase 2?

Here is the list of new category-headings:

- Control & Involvement

- Success commercially

- Community Identity

- 'Real' LFC

- Success on the pitch

Now, here are the new category-headings for Phase 3 with the subsumed Phase 2 categories below each one:

Control & Involvement:

- Ownership & Control

- Fan organisation and protest

Success commercially:

- Commercialisation and commercial activities

Community Identity:

- Affordability and access

- Nature of fandom

- Image

'Real' LFC:

- Authenticity

- The Past and the future

Success on the pitch:

- Football team activities and success and related

3.614   Coding Phase 4

This phase continued theoretical coding: How can we further relate the categories from Phase 3 (**Section 3.613**)? Here are the new category headings:

- Control

- Success

- Community identity

Here are the new headings along with the Phase 3 categories that each one subsumes:

Control:

-        Control & Involvement

Success:

-        Success commercially

-        Success on the pitch

Community identity:

-        Community Identity

-        'Real' LFC

3.615   <u>Coding Phase 5 (The Main Concern)</u>

The ultimate goal from the beginning [Phase 1 (**section 3.611**) in this study's coding] is to discover the main concern and core category (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Glaser 1992). Thus, when the interrelationships between codes and categories, which are discovered through constant comparison between codes, categories, and their properties (Dey 1999), are further analysed the product is the main concern and core category of the study.

The Main Concern is:

Community Membership and Co-Production/Creation

The three major 'conceptual pieces' (Wasserman *et al.* 2009) or 'properties' (Pettigrew 2002) of this main concern are:
-        Community identity
-        Success
-        Control

At this point, *'selective coding'* (Glaser 1992) is the main activity the researcher engaged in. Relating the three major conceptual pieces is important here in order to saturate this main concern and its related core category. The core category represents the fan resolving of this main concern. The core category is theorized in this study as a *Typology of Consumer Community Cultural Co-creative Roles* that will be presented in Chapter 4.

So, through engagement with the data, interpreted utilising a combination of 1) a Geertzian ethnographic approach that implies a hermeneutic circle and some hermeneutic pre-understanding towards a fusion of horizons, and 2) the GT constant comparative method, as recommended by Kozinets' netnography, this thesis' GT emerged. It is somewhat similar to what may be called a mid-range theory (Merton 1968; Pidgeon & Henwood 2009). Also, since we have reached the stage in the study where the main concern and core category have been discovered, this now allows for *'literature weaving'* (Glaser 1998 p. 203) to inform the theory further and improve conceptualisation of the core category (Pettigrew 2002). *'Literature weaving'* means consideration of other theories of all kinds, from grand theories, to mid-range theories, to other lower level (according to abstraction) case descriptions; all "woven into the theory as more data for constant comparison" (Glaser 1998 p. 67). Overlaps are targeted (Andriopoulos & Lowe 2000 p. 739). This means 'tacking' back-and-forth between the local minute detail of RAWK fan interaction and the overall global football-industry context and the global context of business, sport, and consumption generally, whilst including (or weaving in) relevant literature to gain a fuller theoretical understanding of the culture under investigation (Geertz 1974; 1983; Kozinets & Handelman 2004).

This concept of the 'main concern' is a central aspect of GT discovery and methodology. It acts as the focal variable in the emergent theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967). All data, codes, and categories are subsumed into one main concern. It pulls together all strands of the study's conceptual findings and allows explanation of the setting and the behaviour under study. By identifying the core purpose behind consumption behaviours and all the processes involved, the researcher increases their understanding of consumers' (fans') motivations and experience in the setting (Pettigrew 2002). It has theoretical significance and is traceable back through the data (Goulding 2000). This is outlined in this summary of the 'coding-phases' whereby the researcher has moved from the descriptive 'main-concerns' at the open coding stage [Phase 1 (**Section 3.611**)] to the central *main concern*, 'Community Membership and Co-Production/Creation'. See the tabulated format below (**section 3.62**) for diagrammatical illustration of each stage from open coding to theoretical coding, to selective coding of the main concern and core category. This selective coding is the result of the emergence of the main concern and core category around which the study then revolves (Dey 1999). Consideration of this study's core category helps explain fan-

consumer-behaviour with regard to any or all of the concerns and codes contained in all five phases of the theoretical coding process outlined here.

During 'theoretical coding' and 'selective coding' (Glaser 1992), interrelationships between concepts are investigated directly following their emergence as centrally important during 'open coding' and the early part of 'theoretical coding'. These interrelationships can be investigated through Strauss & Corbin's (1990) axial coding, or Glaser's (1978) comprehensive theoretical coding. The latter method is used here. Having discovered the core category and engaged in selective coding (Glaser 1992), returning to the data and reconsidering the theoretical emergence as a result of the insights provided by the core category and related 'main concern', the goal is to ensure that all investigation provides 'theoretical saturation' (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss 1987 p. 21) (when nothing new is learned with continued theoretical sampling) before 'leaving the field' to write-up the research report. However, it is important to remember that a GT is only ever presented at a point in the process of its development and can never be called complete or finished (see 'theory as process' in Glaser & Strauss 1967) (see also philosophical hermeneutics and the fusion of horizons in Gadamer 1960). A researcher can choose to leave the field and write up the "final" theory report when all categories are 'saturated' (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Dey 1999 p. 8). But, theory is a process not a destination. Glaser & Strauss (1967 p. 242) state:

> Theory is clearly seen as a *process*: an ever-developing entity…[This is] because of the changing conditions of everyday situations….”Facts” change quickly.

Similarly, Geertz remarks that all "cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete [a]nd, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is" (1973 p. 29). Even at this 'write-up' stage, the researcher may identify a new 'gap' in his/her theory, or encounter a new concept while considering the study report, which may require further refinement and even various returns to the earlier stages of data collection, coding, and analysis, especially when extant literature is also to be 'woven in' (Glaser 1998; Wasserman *et al.* 2009). Also, practically, GT writing is ongoing from the very earliest stages, through tasks such as note-taking, memoing, and coding (Andriopoulos & Lowe 2000 p. 735).

3.62   All 5 Coding Phases in Tabulated Format

The author now provides the reader with a tree-like hierarchy of the data coding and analysis, tracing from the lowest, most-descriptive codes (Phase 1), to the highest order, most abstract codes (the main concerns) (Phase 5), taking inspiration from the GT methods of Follett (2009) and Wasserman *et al.* (2009).

Coding Phase 1 (see Table 3.6111 in previous section above)

All main concerns (1 to 94)

Coding Phase 2
See next page

Ownership and Control	Commercial Activities	Fan Organisation	Affordability and Access	Authenticity	Fandom	Past and Future	Football activities	Image
Club ownership;	The stadium;	Approach to opposing ownership;	Ticket prices to attend matches;	'Real' fans;	Fan hostility;	The future;	Profit VS on-pitch success;	Media interpretation of the club;
Moores;	Club debts;	Spirit of Shankly Supporters Group;	Access to tickets;	Authenticity;	Ooters;	Traditions;	Liverpool Manager;	Club reputation;
Broughton;	Commercialisation of football;	ShareLFC initiative;	AFC Liverpool;	Official Liverpool Supporters Club (OLSC);	Freedom of speech on forums;	Kop;	Transfers;	The Sun newspaper
Anti-American;	Club chief executive;	Boycott merchandise;	Season tickets;	Membership	Corporates;	Hillsborough;	Liverpool players;	
Club affairs out of fan control;	Sponsorship;	Approach to opposing ticket prices;	Low-income earners;		We 'are' the club/Being the club;	Atmosphere;	Team selection;	
Fan representation on the board of directors;	Privacy;	Boycott games;	Affordability of travel to games;		Private matters;	Terracing;	Reserve games;	
Fan consultation;	Club Public relations dept (PR);	Reclaim the Kop	Big spenders VS Small spenders;		Young fans;	Singing;	Prediction of results;	
Expenses;	TV Deals;		Switching clubs;		Families;	'Modern football'	39th game;	
Internal squabbles;	Club website;		Andy@Allerton;		Local community;		Youth development;	
Government intervention	Branding;		Scabs;		Disabled fans;		Style of play;	
	Players' wages;		The Sandon bar;		Club relationship 'material' VS 'spiritual';		Fixtures;	
	Revenue methods;		Kick-off times		Newbies;		What other clubs do;	
	Fans patronised by the club;				WUM;		Opposition managers;	
	Charity				Ageism;		Opposition players;	
					Opposition fans;		Referees;	
					Nationalism;		Opposition teams;	
					Community		Premier League;	
							UEFA;	
							Kaka	

Coding Phase 3:

Control & Involvement	Success Commercially	Community Identity	'Real' LFC	Success On the Pitch
Ownership & Control; Fan Organisation	Commercial Activities	Affordability and Access; Nature of fandom; Image	Authenticity; The past and the future	Football activities

Coding Phase 4:

Control	Success	Community identity
Control & Involvement	Success commercially; Success on the pitch	Community identity; 'Real' LFC

Coding Phase 5 (THE MAIN CONCERN):

Community Membership and Co-Production/Creation

This main concern is resolved through processes contained in the core category, a *Typology of Consumer Community Cultural Co-creative Roles* detailed in Chapter 4. The main concern is a relatively specific goal, found to be thematic on RAWK.

3.63   Selective coding for the main concern and core category, further member checking, and literature weaving

The research questions must explore the core category, main concern, and the three main 'conceptual pieces' (Wasserman *et al.* 2009) in our emergent GT of fan interaction in the online context RAWK. The main concern is Community Membership and Co-production. These three aspects or 'conceptual pieces' must also be related (Wasserman *et al.* 2009):

-       **Control:** Inferred here are examples of fans discussing issues surrounding 'controlling' the community/brand/brand community (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001) /fan community/club. This category includes notions of involvement with the club, co-production, participation, and day-to-day negotiation. This includes major discussions about ownership and control of the club and also fan organisations and

'protest'/'union' movements designed to give fans more of a 'voice'/input/involvement in the running of the club. Many fan-discussions talk about desires amongst fans for more 'co-production'.

- **Success:** Fans discuss the success (or perceived lack of it) of the brand /club. They divide their definition of success into two important facets covering club-success commercially and also in football-terms (trophies). Important questions asked by the researcher are as follows. How do fans discuss this "success"? How do the commercial and non-commercial aspects of this interact? How do they complement one another? How do they conflict? Interestingly, there is a somewhat dialectical relationship and erstwhile complementary relationship between the commercial and non-commercial (football) side of the club's operations, as derived from fan discussions. How this relates to fans/fandom/fan community is focused on.

- **Community identity:** This covers fan-community-membership related discussions about the 'identity' of who fans are/should be and who fans are not. Here, there is reference to notions of authenticity, affordability, access, the portrayal/image of fans/club, and traditions. This category contains discussions about 'co-production' predominantly specific to fans and between fans.

Saturating these three categories and their inter-relationships involved returning to the data to re-analyse it and also collection of some new data (particularly through member checking interviews), selectively coding (Glaser 1992) through theoretical sampling for these main concerns, properties, and sub-properties until nothing new was being learned from further research (Glaser 1998). Observational netnographic data and interviews (emails and PMs) were used here in conjunction with literature weaving, tacking back-and-forth between relevant literature, data, and emerging theory, acknowledging the 'all is data' style of GT (Glaser 1998 p. 8). This tacking resembles the iterative constant comparison of Glaser, but, also the anthropological method of Geertz (1974), and thus the hermeneutic circle (ibid; Arnold & Fischer 1994 p. 63). Even at this stage, relevant literature sources were treated as repositories of 'ideas' rather than 'truths' (Glaser 1978 pp. 8-9; Giske & Artinian 2007). These 'ideas' contained in extant theories and research reports are used in the same way as all other 'data'; they are constantly compared to one another and to the data

and emerging theory of this study (Glaser 1978). No interpretation is privileged. All related literature ideas and concepts must earn their way into the theory through "emergent fit" and usefulness (Glaser 1978 pp. 8, 31; Charmaz 2005 pp. 512, 525). This will mean comparing the related idea to the substantive context in question, RAWK, and its emerging theory. Related literature is thus drawn upon and its ideas and concepts extended, given "newer meaning" and "use" given the specifics of the context of RAWK (Glaser 1978 p. 9, 31; Charmaz 2005 pp. 512, 525). One prominent example in this thesis is the usage of Hirschman's (1970) conceptual consumer responses, adopted here as consumer roles, which are extended and adapted through "emergent fit" to the empirical data and emergent theory derived from RAWK (see Chapter 4 for more).

Member checking, at this latter stage in the research process, allowed for more 'guided conversations' (McNeill 1990; Llewellyn 2007) in order to selectively code (Glaser 1992) for the core category, main concern, and their conceptual pieces. This involved asking more specific questions of informants or using the concepts and categories emerging in the GT to probe further in pursuit of theoretical saturation within each category and also across them by discovering theoretical relationships (Wasserman *et al.* 2009).

As derived from the coding phases outlined in this chapter and as will be elaborated in the next chapter on data analysis findings, the author submits that this thesis' theory of fan consumption experiences in an online context (RAWK) thus revolves around the main concern of 'community membership and co-production' and its resolving by fans' engagement with interaction roles contained in the core category, a *Typology of Consumer Community Cultural Co-creative Roles* (see Chapter 4). It is central to fans' consumption on RAWK. Fans feel a part of a community through their consumption (see also Schouten & McAlexander 1995; Cova *et al.* 2007). The complexity of this phenomenon and how it relates to the use of the Internet is fundamental to this thesis. The 'main concern' of football fans is thus the concept of 'community', built around their 'identity' and membership of one or many communities (e.g. RAWK, LFC fans generally, football fans generally) through their consumption and co-production activities in each context ('control') and also the related integral fan-goal of 'success' of the club being followed (LFC) in both the football-context (trophies) and the commercial context (profit and revenue); and how all of these inter-relate as central to fan-consumption activity. Fans are using the Internet (e.g. RAWK)

in order to connect with other LFC-fan-community members. This is a part of how they experience being a fan (consumption). The main concern of fans here is this interaction with other community-members, with the next most important concerns being the nature of that '*community*', the *success* of the club to which it relates, and who *controls/co-produces* a variety of important aspects of these things, such as club owners, and fan representatives (if any, and if they are 'consulted'). All of this is played out, discussed, and commented upon, on RAWK.

3.7   CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter sets out the method of this study. It helps this thesis to answer research question 1. The areas drawn upon are qualitative methods such as ethnography, GT, netnography (online ethnography), and hermeneutics. The research design divides the process into four interrelated conceptual stages that are iterative and simultaneous in practice, moving from the early stages of research, when the decision was made to research the topic of football fan-consumption experiences in an online context, to the latter stages in theory development, when the main concern and core category must be discovered and saturated. Combined, they make up the *Grounded Theory Online Ethnographic Process.*

The author has outlined and provided evidence of following research ethics protocol such as gaining overall access from Gatekeepers to the site RAWK, gaining informed consent from forum members before printing their views, and guaranteeing anonymity of respondents.

To maximise the efficiency of hermeneutic argumentation (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000) between possible interpretations, drawn from the participant observation carried out on RAWK, the researcher followed netnographic and ethnographic methods by carrying out member checks for respondent validation. Participant observation online provided most of the data collected, coded, and analysed, but the theoretical and methodological triangulation afforded through using informal conversational interviews across email and personal messages with forum participants added an extra dimension of data for constant comparison through theoretical sampling. It also gave an additional perspective on a variety of issues allowing for much greater theoretical saturation and much stronger interpretations of the

everyday reality of football fans. No data source was privileged. All were compared as like for like, using GT's 'all is data', Glaserian, approach.

Examples of the detailed nature of analytical coding techniques, both on hard-copy paper print-outs, and also through use of the CAQDAS program QSR NVivo, are provided in this chapter to provide the reader with transparent examples of some of the day-to-day operations undertaken throughout this investigation. A detailed description of the five coding-phases produced from these operations provides the hierarchical movement from particularistic substantive data and codes through theoretically coded themes and relationships to the main concern and its properties, which are then selectively coded for while concurrently utilising literature weaving and renewed focus in theoretical sampling. The main concern is introduced in this chapter to begin to answer research question 2. The forthcoming chapter expands on this and other issues explored in this chapter by focussing specifically on data analysis, interpretation, and findings. Chapter 4 thus gives greater detail on the main concerns of fans, and their resolution of these concerns through engagement with roles located in this thesis on a *Typology of Co-creative Roles*, the core category.

CHAPTER 4   DATA ANALYSIS FINDINGS

4.1   INTRODUCTION

Using a Netnographic GT approach to a VC, this thesis considers brand culture/meaning and value co-creation [the terms co-creation and co-production are used interchangeably, as explained in Chapter 3, section 3.312]. The research site, RAWK, contains football fans who are LFC stakeholders. This chapter expands data analysis findings introduced in Chapter 3 regarding the fan main concerns in section 4.2: *community membership and co-production/creation*, and concern properties of *community identity, success,* and *control*. These represent *why* fans on RAWK consume. Next, fan goals are further abstracted to present a more general GT of fan consumption goals in section 4.3. The main concerns and abstracted fan goals are provided to answer research questions 1 and 2. Research question 4 is concurrently contributed to through literature weaving.

How fans consume is theorized in section 4.4. Qualitative analysis leads to the submission of a *Typology of Seven Consumer Community Cultural Co-creative Roles*. The author reflects on existing theoretical consumer responses to market offerings of exit, voice, loyalty, and twist, found in extant literature (CCT and SDL) and detailed in Chapter 2; adopting these as four co-creative roles. This chapter contributes three new consumer co-creative roles of entry, re-entry, and non-entry, as well as extending the four existing ones through grounded emergent fit to RAWK. This typology is provided to answer research questions 1 and 3. 4 is contributed to through literature weaving. The typology shows how fan co-creation is ongoing. Much of this co-creation occurs separately from the LFC company, as, what this thesis calls, 'Coincidental Co-creation'. This study finds an opportunity for football club management/marketers to engage more proactively in co-creative activities occurring outside of management control, by adopting a manager role of 'Collaborative Co-creator'.

To further answer question 4, implications for CR, marketing, and management literature, of the typology, are focused on in section 4.5 and 4.6. A key challenge for managers and marketers is awareness of what drives consumers. This thesis posits in section 4.6 that one way to overcome this is through managers working with VCs to observe fan engagement with the typology of co-creative roles (how fans consume), in order to discover fans' main

concerns/goals (why fans consume). To this end, the overall management role of Collaborative Co-creator may be effective. It would require managers in interaction and dialogue with stakeholders, such as fans, seeking ways to enhance brand value and service provision through 1) greater firm-stakeholder goal congruity, 2) stakeholder satisfaction/positive emotions, and 3) a minimization of the expectation-experience gap. These three concepts represent the *abstract fan goals* detailed in section 4.3.

4.2   WHY FANS CONSUME ON RAWK - THE MAIN CONCERN: COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP AND CO-CREATION

As discussed in Chapter 3, a primary GT study's aim is discovery of participants' "main concern"; specific fan goal or prime mover of action (Glaser 2001; Giske & Artinian 2007). Here, it represents *why* fans consume: community membership and co-creation/production. It is contributed to answer research questions 1, 2, and partly 4 through literature weaving.

4.21   Properties of the main concern

Coding and analysis followed theoretical "funnelling down" (Glaser 1992) to the main concern and its three properties (Pettigrew 2002; Wasserman *et al.* 2009) - success, control, and community identity. Please note, spelling errors in fan-quotations are not author-corrected.

4.211   Success

Fans on RAWK want LFC to be successful through winning major trophies:

> The relationship between fan and club is complicated. Unlike in the case of most buyer-seller relationships, football fans are guided by emotion as well as economics. (Nando, fieldquote no. 106).
>
> While a drop in a team's performance may result in lower attendances, many fans would still stay loyal to the club in an effort to see it recapture its previously good performances (Nando, fieldquote no. 107).
>
> The reason why fans retain the faith, is very simple. There is always a desire to be associated with success, particularly when the success has been achieved against the odds and you can take some satisfaction from the thought that your support has

contributed to the rise of the club and the success of the team becomes a reflection of your own efforts! (Otis, fieldquote no. 108).

These fieldquotes show fans desire LFC success, but even if the team fails to play well, fans tend to stay loyal, "retain the faith". Emotional attachment appears central (see also Schultz *et al.* 1989; Sherry & McGrath 1989; Elliott 1994a; Football Task Force 1999; Kleine & Baker 2004). Much of this may be attributable to what Otis, above, refers to as fans feeling they have "contributed"; it reflects their "own efforts". Otis highlights that fans see themselves as integral to what makes/creates LFC successful (see also Richardson 2007; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010). Also underpinning LFC football success is commercial success. Many fans recognise this, but only as a means to an end. For example, Colin uses Bill Shankly as a "celebrity" (Fournier & Lee 2009) to serve as a figurehead of what his perspective of the general view of fans represents:

As one of our most famous Liverpool manager[s] (Bill Shankly) once said: "At a football club, there's the holy trinity – the players, the manager and the supporters. Directors don't come into it. They are only there to sign cheques." (Colin, fieldquote no. 43).

For Colin, success on the pitch is paramount. So, while he does see a need for the business side to fund on-pitch performance by "signing the cheques" that make it possible, to him it is certainly a subservient element, a support system for the football side of LFC and its success (or otherwise). Similarly, some RAWK members believe that LFC, mainly the former owners, Hicks & Gillett (2007-2010), may want success, but that those owners wanted to make profits, potentially at the expense of team performance:

This idea that [the owners, Hicks & Gillett,] will want to 'make Liverpool a success' is a red herring because their idea of success and ours are two very different things. (Shane, fieldquote no. 48).

While many fans may also want profits, if necessary for club financial health, they care primarily about team performances and success. So, there appears to be an interesting dialectic between commercial success and football success. Fans desire success on the pitch. This may be so they can celebrate their fan community identity and "bask in the reflected glory" of their "shared" "extended self" that maintains a deep meaning for them

through their participation in co-producing or "doing" fandom (Cialdini *et al.* 1976; Belk 1988; 2010; Richardson & Turley 2006; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010; Fisher & Smith 2011). This is similar to the relationship between cock-owners and fighting cocks discussed by Geertz (1972). The cock owners do not fight; the cocks do. But, the owners, who are also spectators when their cocks fight, take victories or defeats personally (see also Bettany's 2007 discussion of purebred-dog owners' grooming rituals in the hope of winning exhibitions). On RAWK, fans' vicarious production and consumption (Belk 1988; Holt 1995) leads them to have similar emotional attachment to how the club (LFC) performs, taking credit when it succeeds, feeling "cast down" when it does not (James 1890 pp. 291-2). The club's welfare becomes absorbed into the welfare and well-being, emotionally at least, of the fan (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; McAlexander *et al.* 2002; Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 358). It may be a result of on-pitch success being representative of a validation that their fandom is somehow justified; that their choice of team is the better one. This choice of club is a simultaneous choice of brand community, even though the decision is often affected by many things such as peer persuasion or family (Olsen 1995; Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research 2000; 2002; McAlexander *et al.* 2002). Such communities may be instrumental to human well-being (McAlexander *et al.* 2002 p. 38). This may be derived from a desire fans have to celebrate their "consciousness of kind", their intrinsic feeling of community towards other fans of the same club, thus allowing them to be happy together, sharing their knowing of belonging to something that is "successful" (Weber 1922; Gusfield 1975; Elliott 1997; Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research 2000; 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; Richardson 2007). Celebrating victories is a shared ritual, a tradition fan communities of victorious teams enact (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; Richardson 2007). Fans share extraordinarily meaningful consumption experiences around brands to which they are all emotionally attached (Arnould & Price 1993; Schouten & McAlexander 1995; McAlexander *et al.* 2002 p. 44). This attachment has been observed to lead to feelings of ownership amongst fans in various contexts (Football Task Force 1999; King 2000; Fisher & Smith 2011; see also Kleine & Baker 2004).

If fans on RAWK do not witness LFC successes (winning matches and trophies), they are upset, but most tend to remain fans. This may be attributable to fandom being "sacred" (Belk *et al.* 1989). Richardson (2007) theorizes that much fan consumer resistance of commercialised elements of football is representative of fans attempting to protect the

sacred nature of their culture from the profanity of the market; maintaining its ideal or "authentic" status (see also Belk *et al.* 1989; Grossberg 1992; Askegaard 1999; King 2002; Brown *et al.* 2003; Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 515). Similarly, in the above Colin quote, Shankly mentions a "holy trinity"; religious symbolism applied to football (Muniz & Schau 2005). Possibly, 1) football success represents "sacred" success, while 2) commercial success represents "profane" success. Goal incongruity ("main concern" incongruity) between fans and the club is thus something perceived by fans, according to Shane above, when it comes to defining "success" (see also Kozinets 2007). The two forms of success can be mutually supportive of one another according to many on RAWK, but unrelenting pursuit of only one may conversely damage the other.

4.212   Community Identity

Ongoing fan consumption and loyalty may be fuelled by the collaborative or communal aspects of being a fan:

> A member of RAWK recently got an email reply from Tom Hicks [former owner of the club pre-October 2010, who was LFC co-owner at the time of email correspondence,] in response to a rant about how he [Hicks] is treating the club. Hicks reply- I paraphrase - "I understand how the fans feel, but this is just business". That comment represents the typical misunderstanding of the relationship between fans and the club they support. If I want to buy a particular brand of (say) clothes - Calvin Kline underware perhaps (only joking) - I would like to get that particular brand, but if it went bust in the morning and I had to get Dunnes Stores best I would be disappointed, but I would get over it.
>
> The same cannot be said of my relationship with Liverpool. If Liverpool FC was closed down tomorrow there would be a huge void in my life. No way could I support another team… It is a tribal relationship. As a fan I am a part of the tribe, I belong. Red is our tribal flag, the Liverbird is our badge of honour, Anfield is our tribal base. To understand the relationship you need to look at why people belong to political organisations, to social groups, even to gangs. It is the common cause, the thrill of winning, the despair of losing, the hope, the esctacy, the agony. …[l]ook at other clubs, less successful ones…[like] West Ham, Villa, Birmingham, they turn up to games week after week knowing that their best they can hope for is survival. (Patrick, fieldquote no. 109).

So, in positing that success ("the thrill of winning" [see also Celsi *et al.* 1993]; the "hope" to win [see also Tucker 1974 for "distant" satisfactions]) is a primary fan concern, Patrick qualifies this, saying it is a "common cause", a communal, not individual, one (see also Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder 2011). This is a result of a "tribal relationship", according to Patrick (see also Maffesoli 1996; Cova *et al.* 2007), between fans and their shared community identity surrounding LFC, its symbolism, and mythology (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton 1981; Levy 1981; Hirschman 1986b; Elliott 1994a; Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998). LFC has a 'linking value' (Cova 1997). The relationships fans develop with other fans become a primary concern, central to ongoing consumption (Fisher & Smith 2011). This can be drawn from Patrick's words, particularly his references to the colour red, which is the same as LFC's jersey; the Liverbird, which is featured on the club badge/logo; and Anfield, LFC's stadium. This is interpreted as representing fans' "consciousness of kind", their shared collective sense of togetherness with one another, but difference from other clubs' fans (Fiske 1992 p. 34; Grossberg 1992; Muniz & O'Guinn 2001). Many fans "feel connected" and enriched by being part of something involving like-minded others (Beverland & Farrelly 2010 p. 843). The team colours, club crest, and stadium provide valued symbolic identifiers, or signs, fans see as communally sacred (Levy 1959; Mick 1986; Belk *et al.* 1989; Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998).

They may value these identifiers because they see them as representative of the authentic LFC community identity they desire (see also Grossberg 1992; Elliott 1994a; 1997; 2004; Ritson *et al.* 1996; King 2000; 2002; Elliott & Davies 2006; Richardson 2007; Beverland & Farrelly 2010; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010). This way, the club, as a desirable, tasteful identifier, is maintained as an authentic communicative symbol (Veblen 1899; Simmel 1973; Bourdieu 1984; Sherry & McGrath 1989; Holt 1995; Slater 1997; Ostergaard & Jantzen 2000; Richardson 2007; Beverland & Farrelly 2010). Patrick, above, also points out that, while hedonic "winning"/success is a primary aim (Hirschman & Holbrook 1982; Campbell 1997), it is the tribal community identity fans are most loyal to, when he refers to other football clubs who rarely have success, yet they do have a fan community. Similarly, Nando says:

> Feeling part of a community is something…Certainly, it makes it easier to go
> through the bad times when you know you're not the only one suffering. Likewise,

it's great to share in the good times with thousands of others. I'm not sure how much of a role places like RAWK play in this. I suppose they extend that connection with the rest of the fanbase, beyond simply the rest of the supporters at the match and any Liverpool-supporting friends you might have. (Nando, fieldquote no. 110).

"Sharing", according to Nando, is what makes being a fan special (Belk 2010). Nando believes fans remain, even when the product is poor (e.g., the club is unsuccessful), because they know they are "not the only one suffering". Also, when things are good, they are enjoyed communally. Richardson (2007) similarly refers to how sometimes loyalty to the team is secondary to loyalty to the community (see also Fisher & Smith 2011 for *Indiana Jones* fans who display greater attachment to the fan community than to commercial merchandise; or Brown *et al.* 2003 for *Star Wars* fans who hate George Lucas). This community, Nando says above, has been supplemented given how traditional offline communities, in the stadium or elsewhere with friends, are now being taken online too as fans adapt to new media thus enriching interaction (see also Kozinets 2009; Fisher & Smith 2011). However, offline, this LFC fan community is suffering due to high match-ticket prices according to many on RAWK. Fans attempted to counteract this, setting up a new, separate football club, AFC Liverpool, which is fan-owned and controlled (BBC 2008). Spokesman, Parry (quoted in BBC 2008), says:

> [AFC Liverpool] is about affordability…the sad fact is that a whole community is being denied the opportunity to grow up in the 'match going' culture.

RAWK members regularly discuss how kids are being priced out of becoming LFC fans:

> Local kids have long been priced out [since the early 1990s] (Rodriguez, fieldquote no. 113).
> If you're a real supporter and it gets under your skin from a young age then the club has got you for life. And most clubs recognise this, hence why there'll be all sorts of offers & concessions to kids to attend games. Unfortunately I think the big clubs [like LFC] …have lost sight of this since the whole 'corporatism' and 'skyism' took hold. I worry about the future of our support…In the 80s gangs of excited school kids would queue to pay a realistic price into the kop (I was one of 'em). Not any more (Dunphy, fieldquote no. 114).

Dunphy and Rodriguez, above, believe children are being priced out of becoming fans. So, some RAWK members participated in setting up AFC Liverpool to provide a substitutable alternative. This may be interpreted as fans displaying their feelings of shared moral responsibility, or shared sense of duty or obligation towards the community, thus leading to collective action via AFC Liverpool (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001). AFC Liverpool attaches itself to LFC's history, culture, rituals, traditions, and values. Thus, it attempts to represent LFC community identity (see rituals and traditions in Muniz & O'Guinn 2001 p. 413) whilst being an unconnected not-for-profit business set-up by LFC fans (for LFC fans and those who cannot afford LFC). It represents a movement against the high prices of LFC and other big clubs whilst also staying close to the LFC fan community identity. This tallies with Richardson (2007) who observes similar instances of football fans resisting the market but not the community possibly because some fans perceive some commercial aspects of fandom as either over-priced or not 'sacred' or 'authentic' (see also Belk *et al.* 1989; Grossberg 1992; King 2002; Brown *et al.* 2003; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010; Fisher & Smith 2011). RAWK members say of AFC Liverpool:

> I spend nearly all my wages on Liverpool games…I love Liverpool FC. Yesterday I donated a bit of money to AFC Liverpool to become a founder member. I think it's a fantastic idea and I'm fully behind it. It's Liverpool FC's little brother….AFC Liverpool will be having all the values of our team, and gives young lads the chance to support a club they can afford to go and see….Obviously I'm a Liverpool fan and I will continue to [be] (Stevie, fieldquote no. 115).

> It is a protest against high ticket prices in football as a whole and the inability of the average fan to go along…affordably, with their kids…to hang around with their mates and sing their hearts out (Shane, fieldquote no. 116).

Symbolically, it is useful to note that countless posts on RAWK are signed by members "YNWA". This stands for "You'll Never Walk Alone", the main song/anthem LFC fans sing communally (see **Appendix L**). It also appears on the club badge. When one fan on RAWK, Colin, discusses his pessimism for the club's financial future/ownership and predicts the club would not be successful, he uses a play on words adopted from this song, possibly representative of the role twist (Cova & Cova 2000):

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[The owners, Hicks & Gillett,] are both technically bankrupt, and if they hadn't seen LFC as a cash cow before, they certainly do now…We are locked in this vacuum until we start bleeding players to pay off the debts…I am even more pissed off now; *I can't see the golden light and I am still afraid of the dark. But I will continue to walk on* (Colin, fieldquote no. 111) [italics added].

Colin believes (previous) club owners (Hicks & Gillett) do not (did not) have the money to make LFC successful through investment in the team and he foresees star players being sold to service debts. This jeopardises possible future success directly, in his view, and he becomes demoralised. He then uses a play on a few famous lyrics (see italics in above quote and compare to **Appendix L**) to show that, even though he is unhappy, he will continue to "walk on", or to be loyal, because he does not do it "alone" - he is part of a much wider fan community who support one another; he signed this piece, "YNWA".

4.213   Control

RAWK members regularly discuss the inner workings of LFC in football terms (e.g. the football team, management, and staff) and business terms (e.g. commercial imperatives, commercial management, ownership). Fans discuss a variety of issues (94 concerns at coding phase one in Chapter 3). For example, they often express a wish to have some control over team-selections:

Agger to drop to the bench tomorrow, recall for Gonzo and Pennant… Kuyt up front (Valderama, fieldquote no. 68).

Fans also express a wish to control other facets of football management's behaviour, including public comments/statements the manager may make:

I hate seeing Rafa [team manager 2004-2010] have a whinge about [next opposition team] Bolton. He doesn't do it with anybody else but it's not the first time with Bolton.…[it] achieves nothing but wind the opposition up (Valderama, fieldquote no. 71).

Beyond team related matters, fans also have plenty of opinion on many other club operations with this study finding ownership issues and club debts as primary concerns (see

section 4.212 quote about ownership and debts by Colin). Commercial management and ownership behaviour is continuously under scrutiny on RAWK.

Related to this are fans' discussions about fan behaviour inside of and outside of RAWK as a response to LFC operations. For example, many RAWK members claim membership of the fan union protest organisations, Spirit of Shankly (SOS) and ShareLFC, both set up to oppose LFC's Hicks-Gillett ownership (which lasted February 2007 - October 2010) (Markham 2010). SOS was formed to represent the best interests of LFC fans, to hold club owners to account, to encourage board room fan representation, to promote fan ownership of LFC, to improve the local area around Anfield, and to build links with grassroots supporter groups (SpiritOfShankly 2011a). ShareLFC was formed to promote democratic fan ownership of LFC (ShareLFC 2010). Both SOS and ShareLFC are independent fan run unions, who organized various protests during this study (for example, see Weston 2010 for details of a rally held in Liverpool city on July 4th 2010, which attracted thousands of fans and was attended by the author of this thesis). Such protests, rallies, marches, and similar campaigns are a hot topic on RAWK:

> Great work by the fans that turned up [for the protest]. I think it's making a difference for a start I don't think Rafa would be the manager right now if it wasn't for the protests (Wright, fieldquote no. 72).

Above, Wright praises fans he believes have played a part in ensuring the continuation of Benitez as coach when they feared LFC would sack him during the Winter/Spring period of 2007/2008. Fans may not have an executive role, but they often believe their opinions should impact on club operations. This appears to be attributable to fans' belief that Hicks & Gillett operated LFC contrary to how fans would ideally like to see their 'authentic' LFC:

> Our great club [LFC] certainly has the ambition from the supporters and most definitely from the manager as well as the players. Where is the ambition to take the club forward IN FOOTBALL TERMS from our "custodians" [owners]? You will have to work long and hard to find any sporting goals from those two [owners] (Zinc, fieldquote no. 76).

General discontentment with Hicks & Gillett (owners until October 2010) led to various demonstrations such as the march mentioned by Wright, earlier. Much of this protesting

was because fans believe those owners' goals were not in keeping with fans' goals. So, in response, fans showed desire to control things at club level themselves to attempt to force improvements, in football and commercial terms. Extant CR literature (Belk 1988; Jenkins 1992a; Lanier & Schau 2007; Richardson 2007; Brown 2007; Fisher & Smith 2011) similarly provides evidence of consumers and fans that have controlling impulses towards consumption objects. Bettany (2007 p. 47) theorizes that this shows how consumers may engage in controlling behaviour in pursuit of their version of the "really real" (see also Fisher & Smith 2011 on authenticity and personalization). This desire to control LFC may result from a feeling of, or desire for, ownership (Folkes 2002; Follett 2009). This appears to align with the ultimate goal of SOS and ShareLFC, who have now formed an alliance, which is to have fan ownership and control of LFC; widely supported on RAWK:

> If we do not get rid of these [owners] I fear we are going to go the same way as Leeds [a club that went into administration early in the 21st century due to mismanagement] (Agger, field quote no. 77).
>
> [Fan ownership is] my ideal, my dream for my club and I've agreed to help ShareLiverpool, if they ever get anything seriously off the ground (Shane, fieldquote no. 23).

In opposition to Hicks & Gillett, fans became increasingly disenfranchised with owners' lack of willingness to engage with fans, or to pursue goals congruous with fan goals (e.g. investing in the team to make it successful; reducing club debts), or to sell their shareholding in a protracted over one year-long saga where uncertainty surrounded owners' intentions (BBC 2010a). This led to the creation of the "Our Club, Our Shirt" or "Standards Corrupted" protest jersey in summer 2010 as a means for fans to attempt to regain some control over club affairs, not only through protesting and spreading the word of their plight, but also through "reduce[ing] income for [Hicks & Gillett]" (Quorn fieldquote no. 112) (see also Croghan 2010; RAWK 2010). To this end, fans create products, like the protest jersey, in direct competition with LFC (see also Fisher & Smith 2011). The jersey idea was submitted by a RAWK member and then put through an informal design process by discussing various ideas on RAWK until a favourable design was found and supported by members as shown in **Figure 4.213a:**

FIGURE 4.213a: STANDARDS CORRUPTED JERSEY DESIGN

Source: http://www.redandwhitekop.com/article.php?id=7104386

This may be interpreted as similar to "innovation creation" amongst running shoe enthusiasts, who create their own shoe designs in online forums similar to RAWK, as theorized by Füller *et al.* (2007). A member at the forefront of the "Standards Corrupted" jersey's creation, Quorn, posts about it, (fieldquote no. 112):

> It's a shirt that lets the owners know how we feel about their…disgraceful management of our club**…**It provides a real alternative to the vastly overpriced "official" shirt and were enough supporters to boycott the official merchandise in favour of our protest shirt, it would reduce income for the current owners**…**Its less than half the price of an official shirt**…**Any / all profits… will be donated to the Hillsborough Justice Campaign and to the Spirit of Shankly supporter group**.** …[It is] massively popular with Liverpool supporters who understand that the real fight for the clubs success (unfortunately) lies off the pitch. These supporters, want to support the team but who are disillusioned with the systematic destruction of the values of the club…As supporters we've enjoyed a unique relationship with the club - our support is regularly acknowledged as a vital part in our history and success,

yet the current owners see only revenue where previous boards recognised our true value. Our challenge …[is] in getting the message out to other supporters who genuinely believe that they're "helping to support the club" by buying the latest shirts and merchandise through the official outlets…Here are the reasons the shirt came about and the reasons all true supporters should buy this rather than the official shirt:

* All revenue earned by the club appears to be used to reduce the owners debt - there is NO evidence of any reinvestment in the club (players, stadium, community regeneration)

* Boycotts of official merchandise are difficult to deliver without a credible alternative option - our protest shirt is less than half the price of an official shirt and looks great

* For every shirt sold we aim to donate more than 10% of the retail price to [the Hillsborough Justice Campaign group] and SoS - ALL PROFITS that we would have earned will be donated directly to these two incredibly worthwhile organisations

* Its a really easy way to get involved and to spread the word and help to bring about a change in ownership. Our campaign slogan "Out of the R£D and into the BLACK" neatly captures our intent and will continue until Our Club has proper owners or until we have a Black Kop.

The reasons for the design itself are pretty straightforward -

We're wearing black because we're effectively in mourning for the club we follow. The standards corrupted logo is an excellent interpretation of the way we feel about the way in which the values of our club have been destroyed by the continued shabby dealings of Messrs Gillette and Hicks who we truly believe are unfit to run any business.

The Standards Corrupted jersey emerged as an idea among fans on RAWK. It was then discussed and developed until the idea became a material reality. Xavier sums the Standards Corrupted jersey up (fieldquote no. 127):

First[l]y, we have to start at the beginning before getting to how the shirt came about. When Tom Hicks and George Gillett took over, there was a renewed sense of optimism around the club, after years of having little to no money to spend on

bettering the squad and bettering what we believed we could achieve, we finally had a clean slate in which to build on, including a new stadium to look forward to and also some owners who seemingly wanted what was best for the club and the fans. What we soon found was the two c(h)ancers wanted the exact opposite of what they said in their first press conference. They didn't want what was best for the fans, they didn't want what was best for the club, what they instead wanted was to gain on their earnings by leveraging debt against the club in order to raise the asking price when they eventually looked to sell. They started valuing the club at ridiculous estimates that reached $1 billion, close to that of Lancashire rivals Manchester United. Our undeveloped marketing, our seemingly poor commericialisation over the years was so incredibly underused that we should have never been valued within £500 million of United, they had marketability around the world, we had it throughout a small portion of Europe.

This realisation that we needed to act fast before we had no club left to support, sparked a siege complex among the masses on the Kop and indeed the world, with Hicks and Gillett's prospective funding agencies (namely RBS) bombarded with e-mails to force the two to sell, even Hicks and Gillett weren't safe in their own country, with a picture of Hicks being posted online whilst he sat outside a bank on Wall Street. Liverpool fans the world over bombarded said bank to the sound of ink being printed in the wall street journal, as the valiant efforts of the many made the front page of quite possibly the most respected tabloid newspaper in the world.

The actions of the many however would not have been accomplished with[out] the ideas of the few, the small group that started Spirit of Shankly, the few that marched upon Anfield, voices loud and proud enough that Hicks and Gillett couldn't drown them out, and of course, a member of our very own Redandwhitekop.com forum, Quorn, who put up £10,000 …to create what became the Standards Corrupted shirt.

So, the Standards Corrupted jersey was first and foremost a fan-response to poor ownership of LFC by Hicks and Gillett. Fans wanted something they could unite around in order to display their distaste for the ownership at the time according to Yeti (fieldquote no. 128):

I thought it was [a] clever idea and a worthy cause – a visible symbol as well as a financial statement – i.e. that the money, our money was for the club not the two leveraged buy out merchants in charge – I did not buy an official LFC shirt. [I

bought the protest jersey instead]….It would have been a tough gig without the internet – the Scouse spring I guess.

Yeti believes the protest jersey was both a symbol of defiance and also one that achieved more material results in that it starved the unwanted owners of revenue. Yeti also believes that the jersey would have been very difficult to make happen without the Internet. Yeti elaborates (fieldquote no. 129):

Well for starters a lot of ideas came from different parts of the country … [one fan] is on the South Coast [UK], [another] up in Dundee, [another] on the Isle of Man, [another] in Ireland, SOS initially based in Liverpool….none of it mattered because location is irrelevant when you have t'interweb … the web was like a rallying point… It allowed like minded people to get together, discuss and bounce ideas around – that was probably my only contribution I was a good 'bouncer', I enjoyed it – I think a lot did, it made you feel like you were doing something when otherwise you'd felt helpless and impotent – it helped provide a sense of purpose – it was all done without any sense of entitlement or ego – just open, creative discussion of ideas and how to make them work – it allowed you to feel part of something bigger than yourself – you weren't a lone voice in the wilderness.

In June 2010, several parallel threads on RAWK began discussing the idea of potentially creating a fan protest jersey. These threads drew a variety of viewpoints on whether it was a good idea or not, and also if it was to become a material reality, how this could/should happen:

If it was a very, very simple design (like say the kits of the 60's or whatever) I might be interested.

If it tries to pitch itself as an alternative "official" shirt, with say some play on the sponsorship etc etc, I think it'd be dangerously close to looking cheesey. I think it'd put a lot of people off. It has to be cheap. Paying £50 for an official shirt is murder, but paying £40 for a blag one is a joke.

As for where the profit goes... Unless this was a SOS led enterprise, I don't think the profit should go to the SOS - there are a lot of people who might be interested in the shirt, wants G&H to sell up, but wants nothing to do with the SOS.

Market it at a low price and any profit goes to the HJC? Can't go wrong with that tactic (Zed, fieldquote no. 130).

How about an all black shirt? black the colour of mourning and also a massive contrast to the [official] red shirts (Aqua, fieldquote no. 131).

Any red would have to be encase[d] in a white border in my eyes. Red and Black only is just too Manc[hester United]-like for my personal taste, so I'm sure I'm not the only one who'd feel that way, a white border or oval would separate the black from the red sufficiently enough I think (Aqua, fieldquote no. 131).

[How about] only black with a message on the front as opposed to a sponsor (perhaps in the Standard chartered font (Aqua, fieldquote no. 131).

I love it! (Bobby, fieldquote no. 131).

Simple design I just put together:

FIGURE 4.213b: STANDARDS CORRUPTED JERSEY PROTOTYPE 1

Just add a sponsor logo and its sorted (Xavier, fieldquote no. 132).

Brilliant as always mate, I do think it needs to be in black or something else that stands out, purple? Those who are willing to buy this as opposed to the official shirt shouldn't care that it's not Liverpool colours as that's not the point. Loving the design though, just wondering whether the save LFC or bleeding liverbird may be more dramatic too? (Aqua, fieldquote no. 132).

Looks fucking boss that (Aqua, fieldquote no. 132).

[Maybe a campaign logo for the front of the jersey could be] Save Our Club (Aqua, fieldquote no. 132).

Just threw 3 designs together (same to the one I did earlier) only this time with [another poster's] brilliant Standards Corrupted logo:

FIGURE 4.213c: **STANDARDS CORRUPTED JERSEY PROTOTYPE 2**

FIGURE 4.213d: STANDARDS CORRUPTED JERSEY PROTOTYPE 3

FIGURE 4.213e: STANDARDS CORRUPTED JERSEY PROTOTYPE 4

Up side to using just plain t-shirts to create them is that they would be cheaper to buy, the material is decent enough and also, since there is very little on the shirt, the costs should be kept to a minimum in printing terms (Xavier, fieldquote no. 133).

Please no red top option, it wont stand out. The mourning in black is extremely potent weapon I think. There may not be enough to change the colour of the kop but if it's available in red there definitely wont be, plus black is nice and slimming for fat c*nts like myself (Aqua, fieldquote no. 133).

I'd never wear a blue kit (Aqua, fieldquote no. 133).

Thats a very good point actually [LFC may release an official black kit], once the third [official] kit [is] out, if many buy it then surely [our] black [protest] kits will be lost in the crowd, same with the away.

Thats why I had a little brain storm before, and thought, what is linked to our past, linked to happier times?......Yellow/Gold, so knocked this up:

FIGURE 4.213f: STANDARDS CORRUPTED JERSEY PROTOTYPE 5

The idea being we keep it sponsorless, and wear them under one slogan "Golden skies are here....when H+G go" or something similar, a banner at the game or outside the ground on match day, indicating the need to buy and wear this shirt instead of buying the official shirt.

If a stall was set up over the road from the ground, with the shirts on show and small slogan banner over the top stating the reason of the shirt, we'll reach more people.

And since its a yellow shirt, it reminds many of the 'oldies' o some of the best years this club has had.

Plus, a sponsorless shirt lowers costs again and also means that the shirt looks classy without being cluttered (Xavier, fieldquote no. 134).

Close up of the crest if anyone wanted to see it in full size and original colour aswell (before I changed it all to white). Managed to find a better justice flame aswell, matches the bird and lettering better:

FIGURE 4.213g: STANDARDS CORRUPTED JERSEY CREST PROTOTYPE

(Xavier, fieldquote no. 134).

[Or, this] could work:

FIGURE 4.213h: STANDARDS CORRUPTED JERSEY PROTOTYPE 6

And that would definately get attention due to the white shoulder.

It would stand out against the crowd at the match and people would be able to see the sponsorship ect

p.s. Apologies that the logo fucked up, couldn't be bothered fixing it properly on photoshop (Xavier, fieldquote no. 134).

Is there any lawyers on here [RAWK] than can confirm this [use of the Standard Chartered bank logo as the template for the Standards Corrupted logo] would be okay? (Aqua, fieldquote no. 135).

Had a quick go cobbling bits of all my favourite designs so far:

FIGURE 4.213i: STANDARDS CORRUPTED JERSEY PROTOTYPE 7

FIGURE 4.213j: **STANDARDS CORRUPTED JERSEY PROTOTYPE 8**
(Aqua, fieldquote no. 135).

As shown by the above quotes, fans presented a variety of designs, rationalizing these designs in various ways (e.g. black = mourning). Fans also discussed the use of slogans, such as the SOS logo, Save LFC, "Golden skies are here…when H+G [Hicks and Gillett] go". Fans wanted the jersey to be noticed, so use of black helped them to differentiate themselves from those wearing the official red jerseys. Fans also engaged in discussions surrounding the legality of such a jersey. The jersey would also require financing and sourcing of a manufacturer:

[Quorn] has taken it upon himself to get in touch with unknown jersey manufacturer Viga, who gratiously accepted the proposal to create the shirts, they did this with complete confidence in the fans efforts…I myself created a number of advertisement poster[s] to help promote the shirt [which retails at about] £20 (Xavier, fieldquote no. 136).

[The Standards Corrupted jersey is] probably the single most ambitious individual initiative outside of setting up the union [SOS] itself because of the cost and the logisitics (Yeti, fieldquote no. 137).

Eventually fans created and agreed on the final Standards Corrupted jersey as shown in Figure 4.213a. Through shared consumption and production (Belk 2010), fans create and control this aspect of their community culture (see also "producerly" fan control or cultural production in Jenkins 1992a pp. 108-9; 1992b p. 231). In jersey design, fans use symbolism such as the Liver bird, a key element of the official LFC club badge (see **Appendix M**) and community identity. This is similar to 'textual poaching' (Jenkins 1992a). Fans who buy this alternative protest jersey refuse to buy the official one in an attempt to regain some control over what it is that they are consuming through letting the "owners know how [fans] feel about [the owners', Hicks & Gillett,]…disgraceful management of our club" (Quorn, fieldquote no. 112). As Quorn highlights, in the fieldquote immediately following Figure 4.213a earlier, fans who choose to buy the protest jersey, instead of the official LFC one, are affirming their community identity as LFC fans. However, they are doing it in a way that does not contribute to the finances of what fans see as a damaging commercial regime at LFC. The reasons why fans' desire for control over club affairs is so prevalent on RAWK are well represented by the protest jersey. Many fans recognise that club success requires activity both on and off the pitch, mutually supporting one another. Fans believe they have a role that includes being critical when on- and/or off-pitch matters are not contributing to success. Quorn refers to the Hicks-Gillett ownership systematically destroying the club, its values (community identity), and its chances of being successful - primary fan goals. Quorn also highlights that "our [fans'] support is regularly acknowledged as a vital part in our [/LFC's] history and success" (fieldquote no. 112). Many fans see their role as central to club successes of the past - Quorn takes ownership of this success as "ours". So, when fans perceive prospects for future success being damaged (see Agger fieldquote no. 77 earlier in this section) fans seek to exercise control, by reducing LFC revenue. This is in the hope

they can do something to make LFC successful again by forcing a change in direction (see also Fisher & Smith 2011 for fans who make it their mission to improve the product even if it means designing and producing their own, more "authentic", versions as competition). Brown (2007) compares consumers'/fans' attempts to impose their will on an organization to the Hegelian master-slave dialectic (see also Tucker 1974 p. 33 for more on consumers imposing their will on an organization).

4.22   Fan Main Concern: Community Membership and Co-creation/production

This is the main concern or specific goal; the prime mover of fan action that ties together the other three GT properties, above. Fans on RAWK want LFC success, given the positive reflection this has for fan identity through basking in reflected glory. If fans are not satisfied LFC is achieving success, they regularly discuss this on RAWK and, when things deteriorated enough during this study, fans increasingly engaged in actions such as offline protest marches, or online co-creation of a protest jersey, attempting to control LFC. Here, clear interaction between online and offline fan experience and behaviour is evident.

All in all, if LFC is not successful, and if fans believe they do not have enough control, they tend to believe that at least they are together as LFC fans online and offline, encapsulated in the song, "You'll never walk alone", a song that is sung at the stadium during every LFC match, and used as a signature online by many RAWK members. This community membership is a major specific consumption driver regardless of satisfaction of other product demands (club success, fan control) (see also Richardson 2007). Fans co-produce this community identity online on RAWK through the simple act of posting to or reading the forum (Schau & Gilly 2003), or offline through singing songs at matches together, like "You'll Never Walk Alone", or even the creation of a new, more affordable club to share with one another, AFC Liverpool - a feature of LFC community identity/culture created and orchestrated using both online (RAWK) and offline means. This online co-creation is evidence of how the contemporary diffusion of information technology, networking, and communications infrastructure such as the Internet has resulted in enhanced productive potential of ordinary social interaction (McQuail 1994; Castells 1996; 1997; 2001; Arvidsson 2011; Fisher & Smith 2011).

However, ideally, fans also want to help co-produce the other two properties of this main concern (club success and control of the club). The "Standards Corrupted" jersey is one example of this, detailed earlier. With this jersey, fans adopt and celebrate many of the LFC community cultural identifiers e.g. the five stars representing LFC's five Champions League successes (see **Figure 4.213a**). But, with the jersey, fans also show some autonomous freedom, not fully conforming to the existing group identity, its norms, or brand/marketing culture as simply passive cultural dupes (Firat & Venkatesh 1993; 1995; Elliott 1997; Slater 1997; Kozinets 1999; Shankar *et al.* 2009). They could have bought the official jersey, but choose to boycott it to show their disgust at club ownership and also to reduce club revenues in the hope of forcing (controlling) LFC to alter its behaviour and thus pursue the on-pitch success fans yearn for.

There are extant literature examples of some football fans refusing to wear official jerseys for various reasons (King 2002; Richardson 2007). These instances further show how fans co-create their own identity and simultaneously create elements of the overall group identity and brand culture through a mixture of conforming to some elements of community culture, changing some elements of it, rejecting some elements of it, or creating some entirely new elements. Thus fans find themselves simultaneously enabled and constrained by their culture and the market (Firat & Venkatesh 1995; Shankar *et al.* 2009). Similarly, Marx & Engels point out that humans, at any point in time, make our own culture and history, but not in conditions or circumstances we have total control over (1962 p. 247). Firat & Dholakia (1998 p. 36) stipulate that "people can only consume either what is already available in society or find means of developing new consumables". The latter requires consumers to "innovate" (ibid). This would appear to be what is happening when fans create and consume their own consumption objects, like AFC Liverpool or the protest jersey. Thus, fans are attaching themselves to the LFC fan community as members, but also helping to co-create it, with RAWK playing a prominent role in this for many. Via football consumption, fans co-create culture (Giulianotti 2005; McCracken 2005; Richardson 2007). RAWK may be seen as emblematic of a cross section of the LFC fan culture narrative fans themselves co-produce (Ricoeur 1981; Gergen 1991; 1999; Kellner 1992; Thompson 1997).

4.3   FROM WHY TO HOW: ABSTRACTED FAN GOALS

So, at this point, this study has discovered why fans consume in specific substantive terms through interpretation of the fan main concern (specific goal) and its three properties (specific goals), above. Next, this study looks to theoretically analyse data and emerging theoretical categories to a further, higher level. This follows Glaser (2002), who stipulates that GT researchers should attempt to achieve some abstraction from time, place, and people, or most of the specifics of the social context. This is in order to put the focus on the concepts that have most fit and relevance to the majority of behaviour in the setting. The following emerged as key abstract fan goals.

4.31   Fans compare their specific goals/concerns with specific club goals/concerns: Goal-congruity versus goal-incongruity or agreement versus disagreement

Fans on RAWK desire achievement of various specific goals or main concerns, as discussed in section 4.2. Fans want interaction and involvement with other LFC fans they identify with as members of the community (see also Fisher & Smith 2011). They have an over-riding concern that the club should be successful. They are not slow to criticise the club when this does not happen and will often attempt to exercise control by any means they can, such as the boycott of official merchandise, through buying the "Standards Corrupted" jersey, detailed earlier. During their discussions about the club, fans on RAWK often express assessments regarding the specific goals of LFC and how these goals compare with specific fan goals/concerns. Zinc's quote, in section 4.213, shows his view that the Hicks-Gillett regime did not have any "sporting goals". Many fans on RAWK fear that Hicks & Gillett desired profit (profane success) at the expense of football success (sacred success), for example. Quorn (fieldquote no. 112) argues:

> The current owners [Hicks & Gillett] see only revenue where previous boards recognised our [fans'] true value.

A goal has "valence"; it can be positive or negative. Fans who are concerned about ticket prices (one of the 94 main fan concerns on RAWK found at coding-phase one in Chapter 3) may agree when they fall or disagree when they rise, for example. Positively valued goals are pursued; negatively valued goals are avoided (Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 95). Considering the dialectic between sacred and profane success, while many fans claim the Hicks-Gillett

regime leaned too much towards commercial success goals at the expense of the football goals, many other fans disagreed that Hicks & Gillett were even successful from a commercial perspective. Quorn says (fieldquote no. 112):

> Messrs Gillette and Hicks … are unfit to run any business.

These fans point towards high commercial debt levels (see also Markham 2010), the lack of a new stadium fans perceive as being needed (see also BBC 2011), and fan boycotts, as representative of how even the potential commercial success of the club was being damaged by high interest payments, lack of a modern increased capacity stadium, and an unsettled fan-base increasingly unwilling to buy club merchandise. Thus, when fans perceive goal incongruence with the club, such as when the club sells a key player (possibly damaging success potential), or raises ticket prices (possibly making it more difficult for community members to attend games), or rarely consults with fans (possible lack of fan control), fans express disagreement. When fans perceive specific goal congruence, such as when the club signs a player they like (possibly increasing success potential), or lowers ticket prices (possibly making it easier for community members to attend games), or consults with fans (more possible fan control), fans express agreement. This all entails fans continuously interpreting, assessing, negotiating, compromising on, and setting goals of and with others and themselves. Concurrently, the chances of achievement are continuously discussed. Fans understand that they cannot always achieve their specific consumption goals/main concerns alone. Much goal achievement requires, at least, the help of other fans and the club itself, all striving towards roughly the same end(s); e.g., for the club to win the league, it requires players, managers, fans, commercial management and so on. This underlines the importance fans on RAWK place upon specific goal/main concern congruity.

4.32   Positive and Negative Emotions: Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

Simultaneously, as fans are engaging in continuous discussions surrounding specific fan goals (main concerns) and the chances of goal achievement, fans display various emotions on RAWK. According to RAWK member, Nando (fieldquote no. 106):

> football fans are guided by emotion as well as economics.

If LFC wins a match, an ongoing positive specific goal, RAWK members tend to display positive emotions. If LFC loses a match, an ongoing negative specific goal, emotions tend

to be negative. Similarly, Hirschman (1970) does not see consumer behaviour as something that is entirely down to rational agreement and/or disagreement on the part of rational consumers (see also Slater 1997). Hirschman (1970) questions some traditional assumptions within economics and business literature such as the idea of the ever-rational consumer, saying it "is surely a defective representation of the real world" (p. 2) (see also Holbrook & Hirschman 1982; Belk 1988; Schultz *et al.* 1989; Holt 1995; Slater 1997; Firat & Dholakia 1998; Laros & Steenkamp 2005; Saren *et al.* 2007). So, when Hirschman (1970) discusses agreement and disagreement, he points towards emotions such as "happiness" or "sadness/unhappiness" (pp. 73-4; p. 103) or anger ("acute unhappiness" or "bellyaching" (p. 88)) that are also an important element of the consumer experience. Likewise, RAWK member, Patrick, describes his fan experience through using emotive terminology as:

> the common cause, the thrill of winning, the despair of losing, the hope, the esctacy, the agony (fieldquote no. 109).

Laros & Steenkamp (2005) discuss the relatedness of cognitive appraisals and consumption emotions, and the links between emotions and consumer satisfaction. They (ibid) present super-ordinate-level "positive affect" (intermediate level: contentment; happiness; love; pride) and "negative affect" (intermediate level: anger; fear; sadness; shame) as the most popular conceptualisations of emotions in CR (see Hirschman 1970; Bagozzi & Dholakia 2006). Both can be found on RAWK:

> Right now [being a Liverpool fan]…means frustration (on the pitch) and anger (off the pitch) (Dunphy, fieldquote no. 120).

This, above, shows fan negative affect/emotion and dissatisfaction. Below shows positive affect/emotion and satisfaction:

> Delighted for Rafa and to get a clean sheet despite our obvious nervousness was terrific (Van, fieldquote no. 121).

These, above [positive emotion/affect = satisfaction] [negative emotion/affect = dissatisfaction], conceptual relationships are a formative and important factor in later discussions, theoretical findings, and diagrams, in this chapter.

Understandable emotions, from an interpretivist perspective (Denzin 1984), are lived experiences, which occur in situated social contexts (Küpers 2000). Co-creative "prosumers" on RAWK, through their consumption experience, are part of ongoing never-ending processes of emotional creation (Küpers 2000) through "doing" fandom both online and offline (Richardson 2007). In agreement with Hirschman (1970), Küpers (2000) claims that consumer experiences are often viewed through an underlying dichotomy between a dualistic understanding of rationality and emotionality (see also Slater 1997). This view is a social construction (Küpers 2000). "Complex, dynamic and interactive feelings emerge coincidentally with thoughts as a form of activity of the job…feelings are not processed information, but an emergent quality of work and consumption as an ongoing process" (Küpers 2000 p. 299). Emotionality and rationality are coincidental and inseparable. Conceptually, one may speak of one or the other, but they are bound up together in consumption experience. So, Hirschman's (1970) fuzzy references to both rational agreement/disagreement side-by-side with emotions such as happiness/unhappiness, coupled with interpretations from consumer culture on RAWK, may be drawn upon to include emotion as a central constituent within this study's understanding of fan behaviour (see also Holt 1995; Richardson 2007). This is similar to how Hirschman relates "acute unhappiness" to "utter disagreement" (pp. 87-8). Fans on RAWK want positive emotions from consuming LFC, rather than negative ones.

4.33   The Expectation-Experience Gap: From Goal Setting to Goal Achievement (or not) and Back Again

Different fans on RAWK tend to display specific goals/main concerns that vary somewhat qualitatively (see also Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder 2011). For example, discussions about specific club success goals often show some fans saying, on RAWK, that the club must aim to finish in the top two spots in the league, while other fans would settle for top four. Patrick highlights this issue across different clubs' fans too saying that more successful clubs' fans will want to win the league, like LFC, while less successful clubs' fans will settle for not being relegated:

> They turn up to games week after week knowing that their best they can hope for is survival (fieldquote no. 109).

If RAWK members expect a certain level of goal achievement, but LFC does not appear to be helping to provide for or deliver this, fans often display disagreement and negative emotions as a result of the gap between the expected goal achievement and the actual experience (see also Küpers 2000 p. 311). This expectation level varies across clubs and even within fans of the same club. Interestingly, it varies according to the context RAWK also; the context according to various factors including fan assessment of goal achievement as an element in setting new goals, from match to match or season to season, for example. This could be viewed as similar to the link between interpretation and action pointed out in Charmaz's (2005 p. 525) discussions of Chicago School theory of social behaviour (see also Blumer 1969). Illustratively, early in this study, fans on RAWK, during the '07-'08 and '08-'09 seasons, tended to be aiming for LFC to win the league, given the exponentially improving team over the previous decade. However, in late-2009 and 2010, RAWK members witnessed a decline in team performance, which they largely blame on inadequate ownership by Hicks & Gillett. Thus, most fans' expectations lowered because of the interpreted decline in performance. While many fans still aimed for LFC to win the league in the medium/long term, they were not expecting it to happen until the team improved through reinvestment by new ownership, which arrived in October 2010, thus creating renewed optimistic fan goals. Fans want LFC to help deliver consumption experiences that fit the fans' expectations. The greater the gap between what is expected and what is experienced, the greater the problem it is for fans on RAWK, and vice versa.

4.34   Goals, Emotions, Expectations & Experiences: Fan Assessments, Negotiations, Achievements, & Role Performance

So, as discussed above, these more conceptual, abstract fan goals emerged from analysis:
1- Fans want rational specific goal (main concern) congruity (agreement) with LFC rather than specific goal (main concern) incongruity (disagreement).
2- Fans want to feel positive emotions/affect (satisfaction) rather than negative emotions/affect (dissatisfaction) as a result of their consumption of LFC.
3- Fans want a minimum/shrinking/small gap between their consumer expectations and consumer experiences, rather than a maximum/growing/large gap.

These three abstract goals are intertwined. For example, on RAWK, when fans discuss the achievement of a specific goal/main concern, such as if LFC wins a match, fans tend to be

happy. So, when the expectation-experience gap is small, or zero, fans display positive emotions, and vice versa. Similarly, fans assess the specific goals of the club and compare these with their own. If there is goal congruity, fans tend to display agreement and positive emotions. If there is goal incongruity, fans tend to display disagreement and negative emotions. If the club pursues goals congruous with fan goals, fans are somewhat satisfied. If the club achieves these goals fans are even more satisfied due to the similarity between what fans expect and what fans experience; i.e. the lack of a gap between expectation and experience. If the club fails to achieve congruous goals, fans are dissatisfied. If the club is deemed to be pursuing goals negatively valued by fans, then fans perceive goal incongruity and thus they are dissatisfied also.

So, on RAWK, 1) goal congruity/agreement, 2) satisfaction/positive emotion, and 3) positively valued goal pursuit and achievement (i.e., a minimal, shrinking, or small expectation-experience gap) tend to be heavily related. Similarly, 1) goal incongruity/disagreement, 2) dissatisfaction/negative emotion, and 3) negatively valued goal pursuit and achievement (i.e., a maximum, growing, or large expectation-experience gap) tend to be heavily related.

This is an integral part of this thesis' GT - the relatedness of 1) consumer rationality/cognition/agreement, 2) consumer emotion/affect/satisfaction, and 3) consumer experiences and how these experiences compare with consumer expectations, whether there is a gap or not. These concepts prove central to forthcoming explanations of how fans on RAWK engage with roles on the consumer role typology, and the contributed diagrammatic illustrations of these qualitative theoretical cultural interpretations. Thus, the concepts and their inter-relationships may be set-out on a continuum as follows in **Figure 4.34a**:

FIGURE 4.34a: CONTINUUM OF ABSTRACT GOAL ACHIEVEMENT AND FAN AGREEMENT, EMOTION, AND EXPERIENCE

ZERO ABSTRACT-
GOAL ACHIEVEMENT

Falling level of abstract goal
achievement

FULL ABSTRACT-
GOAL ACHIEVEMENT

◄- -

- ►

◄- -

UTTER DISAGREEMENT
And/or
NEGATIVE AFFECT
And/or
MAXIMUM EXPECTATION-
EXPERIENCE GAP

Widening disagreement &

More negative emotions &

Widening expectation-
experience gap

FULL AGREEMENT
And/or
POSITIVE AFFECT
And/or
MINIMUM EXPECTATION-
EXPERIENCE GAP

Source: This expands on the work of Hirschman (1970 - particularly see p. 87)

As illustrated on **Figure 4.34a:**

Possibility 1) As fan *agreement/congruity with specific club goals* (main concerns) falls, fan *negative emotions*, and a *growing expectation-experience gap*, tend to be evident on RAWK, which represents a <u>fall</u> in overall fan 'Abstract Goal Achievement'.

Possibility 2) When fan *agreement/congruity with specific club goals* (main concerns) rises, fan *positive emotions*, and a *minimal expectation-experience gap*, tend to be evident on RAWK, which represents a <u>rise</u> in overall fan 'Abstract Goal Achievement'.

Possibility 3) When fan *agreement/congruity with specific club goals* (main concerns) remains the same, the nature of fan *emotions*, and the size of the *expectation-experience gap*, tend to remain the same on RAWK, which represents <u>unchanged</u> fan 'Abstract Goal Achievement'.

So, the extreme left hand side of the above continuum locates, notionally, the point at which Zero Abstract Goal Achievement may occur for fans on RAWK; an extreme outcome of **Possibility 1**. The extreme right hand side of the above continuum locates, notionally, Full Abstract Goal Achievement; an extreme example of **Possibility 2**. Fans want to achieve their abstract goals. These abstract goals are heavily inter-related as discussed earlier in this section. Total failure to achieve abstract goals, or total success in achieving abstract goals, are, in reality, possibly unlikely. However, for theoretical

purposes, fan abstract goal achievement will be discussed with these ideal type concepts in mind for more effective argumentation, given the grounded observations and emerging theory of this study. This has been found through observation and grounded theorization of RAWK data combined with woven in literature that has 'fit' (Glaser 1978), primarily Hirschman's (1970) discussion of how consumers behave. This allows the thesis author to extend Hirschman's discussion of consumer responses and gives scope for the author here to plot, diagrammatically, each role, extending Hirschman's (1970 p. 87) original graph of voice, so all roles may be graphed. These graphs appear in section 4.4 of this chapter.

The title of Hirschman's book on consumer behaviour used as the basis for this thesis' role typology (1970) is 'Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States'. The book discusses scenarios where customer-members perceive a decline in some aspect of what they are a customer/member of, and, as a result, they perform specific behaviours (or what this thesis calls "roles") as a consequence; they are dissatisfied and thus respond. On RAWK, during this study, many fans have increasingly pointed towards a decline in LFC's performance both on and off the pitch, until new owners took over in late-2010 (buying from Hicks & Gillett), as the study was coming to a close. Before this change of ownership, as discussed throughout this chapter so far, fans on RAWK did various things, like setting up SOS, ShareLFC, the protest jersey, AFC Liverpool, protest marches and rallies, amongst others, all largely as a response to their belief that LFC was suffering at the hands of bad ownership under Hicks & Gillett. These responses are thus a result of a decline in what this thesis refers to as fan abstract goal achievement (**Possibility 1** above). Hirschman (1970 p. 88) says "at some point in the process of the organization's heading in the "wrong" direction, members will begin attempts to use their influence to correct and reverse the process, and these attempts will become stronger as disagreement widens". This is similar in Cova & Cova (2000). Although, Cova & Cova (ibid) provide some middle-ground with the introduction of twist. Twisters are not necessarily unhappy/unsatisfied with the service provided. Yet, they do appropriate it for uses that go beyond those intended by management (see also Aubert-Gamet 1996; 1997; Thompson & Haytko 1997). Similarly, fans on RAWK are not always critical. Sometimes they are satisfied (**Possibility 2** above); e.g., if LFC wins a football match:

> We should all enjoy this win, definately our best moment of the season (Uber, fieldquote no. 119).

Depending on the complex relationship between fans on RAWK and LFC, particularly regarding specific goal/main concern setting [abstract goal], goal achievement (or not) (the expectation-experience gap) [abstract goal], and emotions [abstract goal], fans continuously interact in this consumption setting behaving in various ways, all of which help to co-create or co-produce the overall LFC brand culture, community, and value (McCracken 2005; Merz *et al.* 2009). Thus, to explain how fan abstract goal achievement (or not) is related to fans' co-creative behaviour, this study theorizes all fan action on RAWK on a *Typology of Seven Consumer Community Cultural Co-creative Roles*. These are further explored next.

4.4 HOW FANS CONSUME ON RAWK - THE CORE CATEGORY - RESOLVING THE MAIN CONCERN: A TYPOLOGY OF CONSUMER COMMUNITY CULTURAL CO-CREATIVE ROLES

The core category represents how fans attempt to "resolve" their specific main concern (Glaser 1998; 2001; 2002) or achieve their goals. Fans are going beyond the traditional offline realm to co-creatively consume utilising new media, or web 2.0 technologies (Fournier & Lee 2009), like the Internet and RAWK (Kozinets 1999; Auty 2002; Boyle & Haynes 2004; Millward 2008; Fisher & Smith 2011). The core category is represented by the contribution of the Typology of Seven Consumer Community Cultural Co-creative Roles (how fans consume). This study theorizes the core category using a combination of observations and interpretations from RAWK, coupled with the "weaving" (Glaser 1992; 1998) in of literature and extant theory that has what Glaser (1978) calls "emergent fit" to this research setting. The GT core category is supposed to account "for most of the variation in a pattern of behaviour" (Glaser 1978 p. 93). Thus, all, or most, behaviour on RAWK should fit into one of the roles on this thesis' consumer typology. It is representative of "latent patterns" derived from RAWK (Glaser 2002). Hence, it is contributed to answer research questions 1, 3 and, partly, 4 through weaving in literature.

So, this study finds useful conceptual linkages with, and empirical evidence of, the four roles outlined in Chapter 2 (exit, voice, loyalty, twist) (Hirschman 1970; Cova & Cova 2000) and makes contributions to theory surrounding these roles, given the idiosyncrasies

of this consumption setting – the context and time bounded nature of these research findings (see Chapter 1 & 3). Then, the author of this thesis adds three new roles derived from fan behaviour on RAWK (entry, re-entry, and non-entry) to construct the Role Typology. In keeping with Glaserian GT, this typology types behaviour not people (Glaser 1978 p. 69). These roles are not pure or fixed - they are temporal, fluid, and mixed by fans (Goffman 1959; Maffesoli 1996; Firat & Dholakia 1998). The typology allows actors observed (fans) to walk in and out of many behaviour patterns without being "typed" as any specific one of them (Glaser 1978) in recognition of how RAWK members continuously roam between discussions engaging various roles. Depending on the situation, fans may act differently, engaging varying roles (Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 210). This perspective derives somewhat from symbolic interactionism (Mead 1934; Goffman 1959; Solomon 1983; Solomon *et al.* 2006 pp. 210-1). The fan identity or self continuously emerges via interaction with the world, in this case RAWK, via various roles, following a dramaturgical metaphor (Firat & Dholakia 1998; Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 210). Postmodern CR that theorizes the contemporary consumer as portraying multiple fragmented identities also inspires this role typology (e.g. Goulding *et al.* 2002). This contributed typology, like all attempts at representation of consumption culture through anthropological understanding, must be made with acceptance that it is an interpretation (Geertz 1973). Other role typologies (e.g., "types" in Kozinets 1999; see "roles" in Fournier & Lee 2009; Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder 2011; "practices" in Schau *et al.* 2009), provide alternative interpretations of the interactions among some individuals, communities, and organizations in other consumption contexts. Anthropological writing interprets culture, but never represents it completely (Geertz 1973 p. 15). Alternative interpretations and theories may be equally valid provided method and analysis procedures are rigorous; there is not one grand theory sought in CCT, but a multitude of interpretations (Arnould & Thompson 2005).

This interpretation is an illustration of how fans interact with, or respond to, their consumption context (RAWK and wider LFC fan community culture). This is mutually co-creative/productive, co-authorial, or constructive, if only through how fans are mutually constructing their own understanding of this world through interpreting it and thus perceiving and attaching meaning to it and the simultaneous overlapping construction and maintenance of their own identity as a fan, and thus the identity of all fans in some small or

large way through posting on or reading posts on RAWK (Gadamer 1960; Geertz 1973; Ricoeur 1981; Arnold & Fischer 1994; Scott 1994; Ritson *et al.* 1996; Elliott 1997; Schau & Gilly 2003; Charmaz 2005; Bengtsson & Ostberg 2006; Jenkins 2008; Shankar *et al.* 2009; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010). Thus, as fans perceive their consumption world, in this case LFC brand culture, they come to understand it, as with hermeneutics. The fan's horizon is fused with the world around them, the consumption context, including other fans, LFC, and RAWK, as they continuously interpret and understand this context and thus themselves (Arnold & Fischer 1994). As Richardson (2007 p. 39) writes, these "fan communities are…characterised by sophisticated structures and practices whereby individualised meanings are negotiated from the original mass produced text (Jenkins 1992a; Kozinets 2001)".

Having interpreted their consumption culture, fans on RAWK often make and express value judgements about the world as they understand it. Examples are whether LFC is pursuing specific goals incongruous with the fan's own specific goals [main concerns e.g. success], or whether its image or identity is in keeping with the desired authenticity or taste requirements of the fan regarding their community identity, or whether fans have enough control over all of this (see also Ritson *et al.* 1996; Elliott & Davies 2006; Brown 2007; Richardson 2007; Fisher & Smith 2011). Thus, fan(s) respond(s) to the consumption context variously on RAWK. This way they may attempt to maintain the world as it is, or change it, subtly or greatly. Much of this behaviour is interpreted in this study as resulting from fans' achievement (or not) of their abstract goals [1) specific goal/concern congruity; 2) positive emotions/affect; 3) a minimal/small/shrinking expectation-experience gap -OR- see **Possibility 1, Possibility 2,** or **Possibility 3** in section 4.34 earlier] and how fans respond to this. When fans attempt to co-create their consumption world in various ways, they may be interpreted as engaging in a form of utopianism whereby they are working towards a particular "authentic" version of LFC and its surrounding culture (Grossberg 1992; Brown *et al.* 2003; Kozinets 2007; Beverland & Farrelly 2010). This may help to explain why fans are controlling (Jenkins 1992b) - they may want to be "in control" (Richins 2005) in order to pursue a particular "authentic" LFC to use as an identifier (Beverland & Farrelly 2010). This "authenticity" will vary according to the eye of the beholder and their specific consumption goals (Beverland & Farrelly 2010; Fisher & Smith 2011). Different fans will want and get different things out of their relationship with LFC,

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RAWK, and the broader fan community and its culture (Ritson *et al.* 1996; Fisher & Smith 2011 p. 342). LFC and its surrounding brand culture will operate as a valued identifier to each fan in slightly or significantly varying ways (Fisher & Smith 2011 p. 343). Textual interaction on RAWK is important in this process because language plays a pivotal role in how consumers create, change, and perceive consumer culture, given language's centrality in modes of representation, communication, and understanding (Brownlie 2000). Fans' co-creative responses to their interpreted consumption reality, and thus how it helps or hinders their abstract goal achievement, are outlined as follows through the guise of seven consumer co-creative roles. These roles refer to how fans both consume and produce LFC brand culture via the medium of RAWK.

4.41   Voice: Positive and Negative - Rational, Emotional, & Experiential

Hirschman (1970 p. 87) uses a diagram to represent 'voice', which can be simplified as follows:

FIGURE 4.41a:
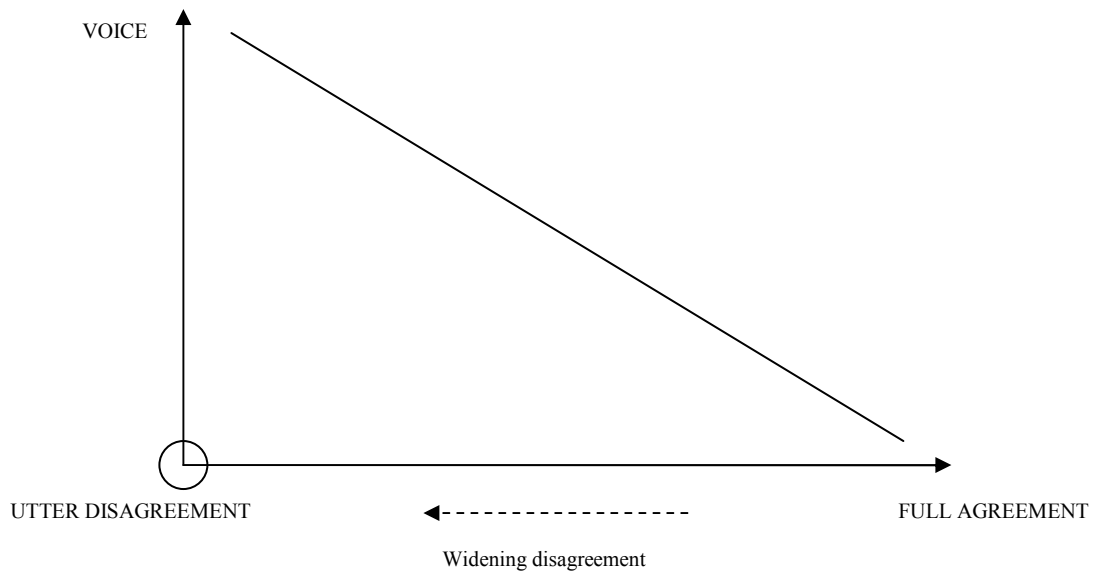
SIMPLIFIED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VOICE AND AGREEMENT. ADAPTATION OF HIRSCHMAN (1970 P. 87) FIGURE 1.

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As displayed on **Figure 4.41a**, Hirschman sees 'voice' as a consumer-member response to negative organizational performance. 'Voice' manifests itself when consumer-members are in disagreement with the behaviour or output of the organization. 'Voice' strengthens and builds as disagreement rises. Conversely, it reduces as agreement takes prominence. Hirschman (1970) says:

> [Voice] can be graduated all the way from faint grumbling to violent protest; it implies articulation of one's critical opinions (p. 16).

> Dissatisfied consumers (or members of an organization), rather than go to the competition, can "kick up a fuss" and thereby force improved quality or service upon delinquent management ...Voice is here defined as any attempt at all to change rather than to escape from an objectionable state of affairs (p. 30).

> Voice has the function of alerting a firm or organization to its failings…The voice option is the only way in which dissatisfied customers or members can react whenever… (p. 33).

> Voice (protests of consumers; appeals to higher authorities to replace existing management) (p. 74).

Similarly, empirical evidence in this study finds RAWK to be filled with consumers engaging in the role 'voice', but it is not always negative. So, an important contribution of this thesis is the exploration of this, given how 'voice' is an integral part of this typology of seven consumer roles, potentially the most important one, because all discussion on RAWK may be perceived as enactment of 'voice' online. As Uber's quote, in section 4.34, shows, when he mentions that fans should enjoy a victory/success in a match, positive 'voice' appears too. This voicing is interpreted here as being related to what consumers want from their fan experience; their main concerns. 'Voice' appears on RAWK as a result of both agreement (voice positive) and disagreement (voice negative):

FIGURE 4.41b:
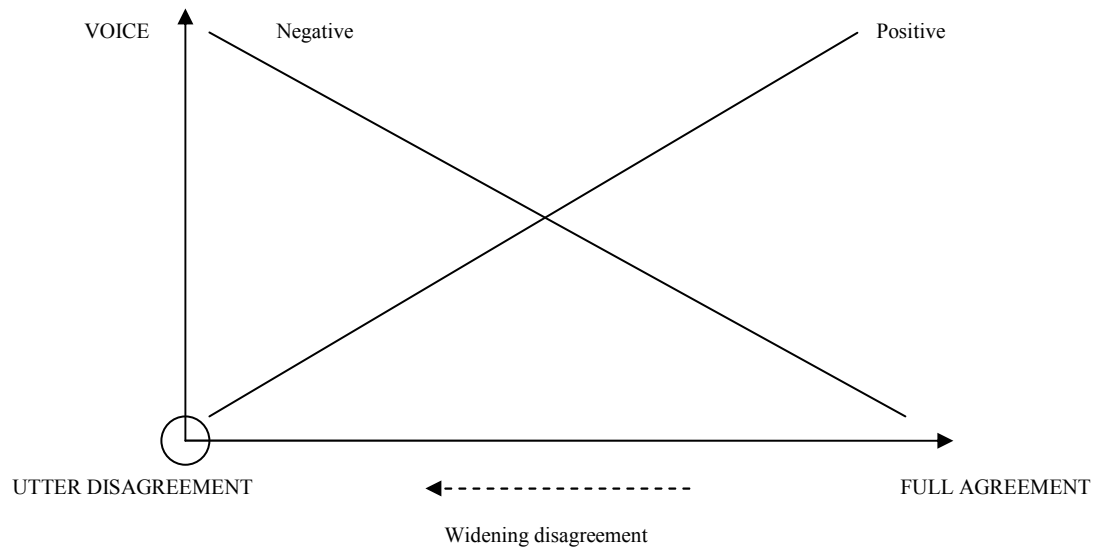
SIMPLIFIED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VOICE (NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE) AND AGREEMENT.

EXTENSION OF HIRSCHMAN (1970 P. 87) FIGURE 1.

On **Figure 4.41b**, the seeming symmetry of 'voice' positive and negative and apparent perfect direct correlation of the lines with level of 'voice' and level of agreement-disagreement is helpful conceptually, but is an inaccurate/simplified representation of the real world. As an anthropological theory of the relationship between fan agreement with LFC behaviour and output and fans' subsequent voicing about it on RAWK, it is what Geertz (1973 p. 15) may refer to as somewhat "fictional", given its necessary simplification for the purposes of abstraction, but it is *not* "false". The amount of 'voice' on RAWK varies, but the hottest topics (main concerns) (both positive and negative) tend to draw the most 'voice', or are discussed as being most meaningful. So, there is conceptual representativeness on the diagram. However, it is not a quantitative measure of 'voice' that is sought here, as long as there is enough 'voice' for it be studied and interpreted. It is the qualitative nature of the 'voice' this thesis concentrates on to develop an interpretive ethnographic theory (Geertz 1973) as opposed to a quantitative one that may use methods such as content analysis.

The rationale applied in this chapter when emphasising the usefulness of visually graphing how each consumer role relates, conceptually, to the abstract consumer goals outlined in section 4.3, and thus the more specific main concerns in section 4.2, draws upon the following. Each of the seven consumer roles is interpreted as a consumer response to how LFC and surrounding LFC consumer culture helps or hinders fans' abstract goal achievement [**Possibility 1, Possibility 2,** or **Possibility 3**]. They interpret how they feel about their consumption experiences and thus respond concurrently. So, this thesis posits that the seven consumer roles may be considered as feedback mechanisms or qualitative performance metrics for management and the firm (in a fashion that will be more fully explored in sections 4.5 & 4.6). This position draws upon the perspective that managers can appraise performance with either qualitative *or* quantitative measures (Grote 2011). Qualitative measures may allow managers to capture nuances quantitative statistics could miss. Quoting Einstein (in Grote 2011):

> Not everything that counts can be counted. And not everything that can be counted counts.

Similarly, Hirschman (1970) uses his qualitative theorization of the role 'voice' as the basis for his diagrams to efficient communicative effect. Thus, graphs are utilised here to help the reader understand the theory behind each role, theory that is qualitatively grounded rather than statistically quantified. The intention is that presentation of how each role relates to abstract consumer goals in a visual, spatial format on a graph may make the theory more accessible to the readers' perceptual mechanisms with the images providing additional cues to guide how this study's comparative analysis developed. The scale of the graphs in this thesis is unimportant, given their qualitative nature. Moving from right to left on the horizontal axes means a fall in achievement of abstract fan goals (in the case of **Figure 4.41b,** fans are less in agreement with club goals; i.e. there is less goal congruity) [see also **Possibility 1** in section 4.34]. Moving from left to right on the horizontal axes means a rise in achievement of abstract fan goals (in the case of **Figure 4.41b,** fans are more in agreement with club goals; i.e. there is greater goal congruity) [see also **Possibility 2** in section 4.34]. Moving from bottom to top on the vertical axes implies an increase in fan engagement with the role in question (in the case of **Figure 4.41b,** fans are engaging in more negative voice as agreement falls, or more positive voice as agreement rises).

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When Hirschman (1970) describes his diagram (simplified earlier as **Figure 4.41a**), he notes that the higher the disagreement, the higher/louder the 'voice', in the main - thus linking consumer rationality with action, like this thesis does with fans on RAWK. But, in discussions throughout his book, Hirschman (1970) also allows for emotion pointing out how the customer-member, who is interacting with an organization behaving in a way the customer-member agrees with, tends to be happier, while the customer-member, who interacts with an organization behaving in a way the customer-member disagrees with, tends to be less happy, as discussed earlier in section 4.32. For example, Hirschman (1970) relates "acute unhappiness" to "utter disagreement" (pp. 87-8). This tallies with the level of emotion empirically evident on RAWK and how it tends to relate to fan agreement/disagreement with specific LFC goals/main concerns as outlined in section 4.3. Thus, relating fan emotion with the role 'voice' is done as follows on **Figure 4.41c**:

FIGURE 4.41c:
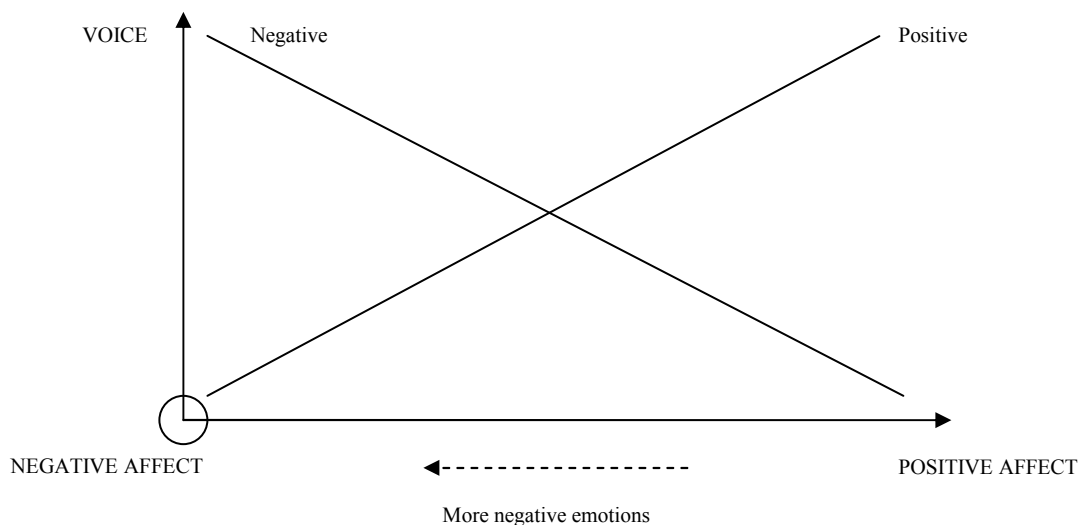
SIMPLIFIED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VOICE (NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE) AND EMOTIONAL AFFECT.
EXTENSION OF HIRSCHMAN (1970 P. 87) FIGURE 1.

As outlined in section 4.3, the abstracted fan goals are to 1) be in agreement with LFC and how it operates, 2) feel positive emotions as a result of ongoing fandom and fan consumption, and 3) find a minimal gap between their expectations as fans and their actual experiences as fans. So, this thesis adds both positive and negative emotion to

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understanding fan engagement with the role of 'voice' on **Figure 4.41c.** This study also adds the concept of the expectation-experience gap on **Figure 4.41d**, given its importance to fans on RAWK, as detailed earlier.

FIGURE 4.41d:
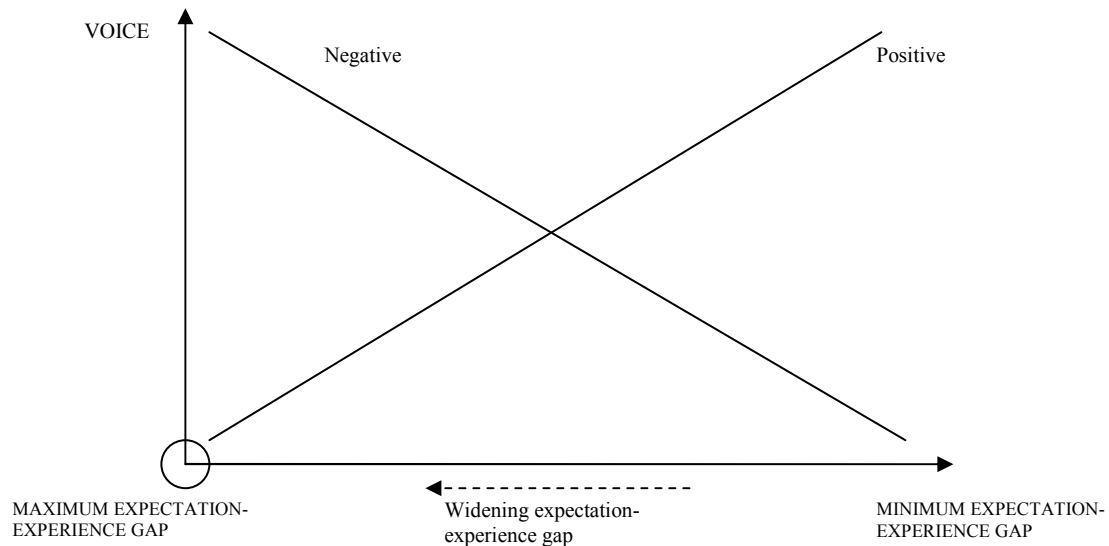
SIMPLIFIED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VOICE (NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE) AND THE EXPECTATION-EXPERIENCE GAP.
EXTENSION OF HIRSCHMAN (1970 P. 87) FIGURE 1.

As displayed on **Figure 4.41c** and **Figure 4.41b,** depending on fans' on RAWK positive or negative emotional states, and how much they agree or disagree with LFC's behaviour and goals, fans will tend to 'voice' positively or negatively. Similarly, as shown on **Figure 4.41d,** the smaller the expectation-experience gap, the more positive fans' 'voice' will tend to be, and the larger the expectation-experience gap, the more negative fans' 'voice' will tend to be. Given the correlation between the three abstract consumer goals outlined in section 4.3, and the subsequent uniform relationships each abstract goal has with consumer role engagement, as displayed in **Figure 4.41b, 4.41c,** and **4.41d**, they are henceforth referred to collectively as "abstract goals" for diagrammatic purposes to save replication. This allows the relationship between the consumer role of 'voice' and the abstract consumer goals to be displayed as follows on **Figure 4.41e:**

FIGURE 4.41e:
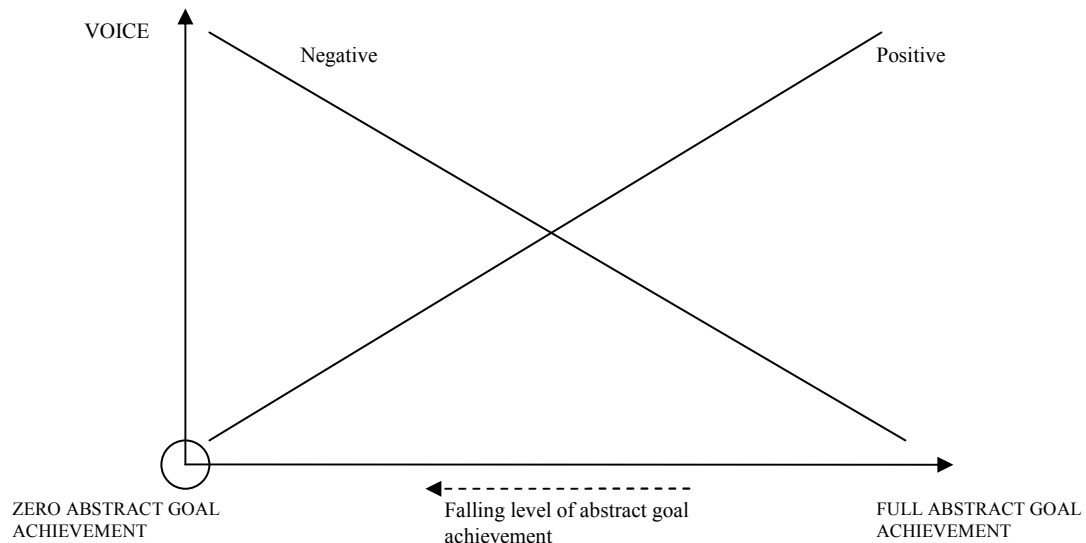
VOICE

Negative

Positive

ZERO ABSTRACT GOAL
ACHIEVEMENT

Falling level of abstract goal
achievement

FULL ABSTRACT GOAL
ACHIEVEMENT

**SIMPLIFIED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VOICE (NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE)
AND ABSTRACT GOAL ACHIEVEMENT.
EXTENSION OF HIRSCHMAN (1970 P. 87) FIGURE 1.**

This follows from the explanation of the correlation between the three abstract consumer goals discussed in section 4.34 and qualitatively conceptualised on **Figure 4.34a.**

4.42   Loyalty to the Community and Loyalty to the Market

Loyalty abounds on RAWK (see also Richardson & O'Dwyer 2003; Richardson 2007; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010). Fans, in RAWK quotes in section 4.21, refer to themselves as extremely loyal and unable to switch clubs. They have a "special attachment" to LFC (Hirschman 1970). A strong attachment often leads to an intention to keep consumption objects in a consumer's life for a long time or forever (Schultz *et al.* 1989), as with football fans who have a "sacred" or "magical" relationship with their club in many cases (Richardson 2007). Loyalty to the product through continuous consumption may further embed/reinforce it into the extended self of the fan through its increasingly being made meaningful or sacred via ritualistic consumption (McCracken 1986; 1990; Belk 1988; Fournier 1998 p. 350; Richardson 2007; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010).

As displayed by the "Standards Corrupted" or "Our Club Our Shirt" jersey, fans on RAWK are fiercely loyal to their LFC community identity. Quorn's summary (fieldquote no. 112 in section 4.213) shows how the alternative jersey displays the role, loyalty. Fans, although refusing to buy the official jersey (boycott), are still loyal to what they see as LFC; a symbolic community identity they co-create, something that is much more than the commercial entity or its owners; something authentic, sacred, and filled with symbolism and mythology (Anderson, B. 1983; Grossberg 1992; King 2000; Kozinets 2001; Richardson & Turley 2006; Thompson 2006; Bettany 2007; Richardson 2007). Through shared consumption (Belk 2010) fans co-create/control this sacred community. In this specific example of the jersey, fans use symbolism such as the Liver bird, a key element of the official club badge (see **Appendix M**) and community identity, to which they are loyal. They also continue to interact with other community members through continued participation on RAWK. Thus, even when boycotting LFC because of a lack of abstract goal achievement, fans tend to remain loyal to the community as represented in **Figure 4.42a**:

FIGURE 4.42a:

LOYALTY TO THE COMMUNITY

ZERO ABSTRACT GOAL ACHIEVEMENT

Falling level of abstract goal achievement

FULL ABSTRACT GOAL ACHIEVEMENT
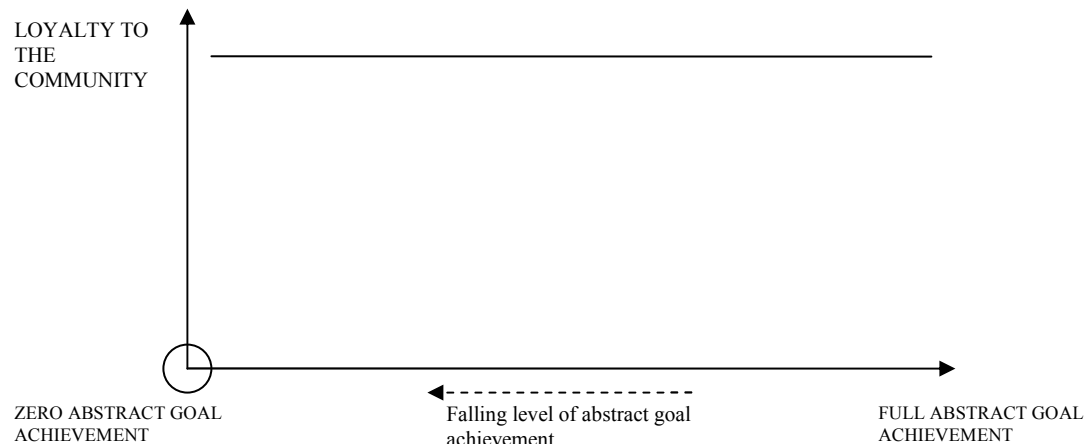
SIMPLIFIED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOYALTY TO THE COMMUNITY AND ABSTRACT GOAL ACHIEVEMENT.
EXTENSION OF HIRSCHMAN (1970 P. 87) FIGURE 1.


Fans may disagree with the specific goals/main concerns of the club, or be dissatisfied/feeling negative emotions because of the gap between expected club

behaviour/performance and experienced reality, but, they tend to be fiercely loyal to the community, as shown on **Figure 4.42a** (see also Richardson 2007).

During 2008, early in this research, jersey boycotters were relatively uncommon on RAWK (although they did exist), but qualitative evidence of people boycotting was beginning to rise. Over the course of this study, fans' negative emotions, disagreement with specific LFC goals/main concerns, and issues with club performance on and off the pitch (expectation-experience gap) all grew (**Possibility 1** in section 4.34). Around the turn of the year, 2007-2008, even though boycotting was rare, fans on RAWK were becoming increasingly disheartened with the direction in which LFC was going given the growing expectation-experience gap after one year of the Hicks-Gillett ownership. This increase in fan opposition was building up progressively from when owners (Hicks & Gillett) took over in February 2007. Their ownership regime led to a great deal of in-depth discussion amongst fans on RAWK and this contributed to the creation of protest groups such as Spirit of Shankly on 31 January 2008 to oppose their ownership, largely given the growth of rumours about the nature of their purchase of LFC being a leveraged buy-out and ownership's lack of support for the team manager at the time (SpiritOfShankly 2011b). This opposition grew continuously on RAWK, with boycotting remaining relatively stagnant in comparison. But, then, suddenly, in the middle of this study, the number of boycotters refusing to do business with LFC rose evidently in 2009.

Hence, the situation dramatically changed in a short time. The observable fans on RAWK claiming to boycott dealing with LFC was very small before Hicks & Gillett took over and for most of the first year of their tenure. Boycotting began to rise, very slowly at first, but gained momentum particularly in the latter half of 2009, and this eventually led to the alternative protest jersey in mid-2010. This slow, then suddenly fast, growth in boycott behaviour was because, while fans on RAWK tend to stick with LFC even though they may be dissatisfied/negatively emotional with it, and may also disagree with various specific goals/concerns the club has, or how it pursues/achieves congruous goals/concerns, or fails to (the expectation-experience gap), there is a point, qualitatively evident on RAWK, where fans eventually decided that enough was enough, as represented on **Figure 4.42b:**

FIGURE 4.42b:
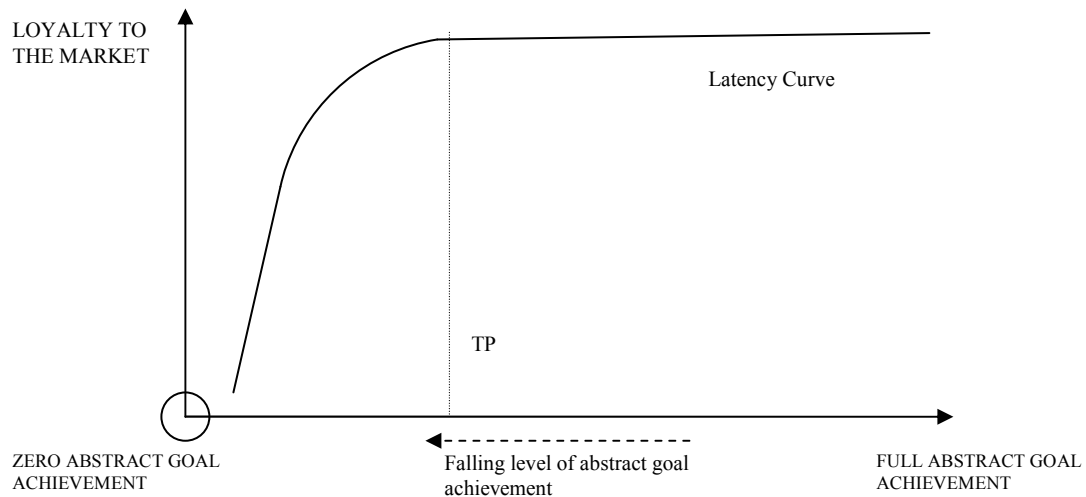
SIMPLIFIED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOYALTY TO THE MARKET AND ABSTRACT GOAL ACHIEVEMENT.
EXTENSION OF HIRSCHMAN (1970 P. 87) FIGURE 1.

There is a tipping point (see TP on **Figure 4.42b**). To the right of TP (on the graph), or before the tipping point as the level of fan Abstract Goal Achievement fell (**Possibility 1** in section 4.34) consistently during most of this study, this diagram represents how fans tended to express their problems on RAWK, but most held short of boycotting. Increasing off the pitch problems, including increasing awareness among fans regarding club debt issues, lack of movement on building the much needed new stadium, lack of competitive investment in the team, and public squabbles between the owners and Rafa Benitez, the manager who had won two major trophies, led fans to a tipping point and the level of commitments from RAWK members to halt business with LFC exploded. The lack of change in fan loyalty up to TP displayed a latent reaction, in loyalty-to-market terms where, suddenly, market loyalty plummets, leading to boycotts. Thus, this diagram may be referred to as a latency curve. It, like all similar diagrams in this thesis, is a qualitative interpretive conceptualization, derived from RAWK data, as opposed to a quantitative objective absolute measurement. Fan loyalty to the LFC fan community remains relatively unchanged, however. While fans may be refusing to buy the LFC jersey, many bought the protest kit. They wear this jersey and continue to participate on RAWK in order to continue classifying or integrating themselves as LFC fans (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton

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1981; Holt 1995), but not ones who agree with, or are happy about their experiences [abstract goals] from consuming LFC under Hicks & Gillett's ownership.

LFC management may want to pay close attention to the difference between loyalty-to-the-market and loyalty-to-the-community, remembering that community loyalty does not equal market loyalty. This may benefit managers because distinguishing between these two forms of loyalty may be important to LFC because loyal fans, participating with LFC in market-terms, potentially promises long-term profitability and market share (McAlexander *et al.* 2002), whereas boycotters, while still loyal to the community, are refusing to do business with LFC, thus possibly damaging revenue and brand value somewhat (Vargo & Lusch 2004; Merz *et al.* 2009). If managers explore why this is happening they may be able to identify how fans' abstract goals are not being met, and could perhaps consider altering LFC's behaviour or output in order to better match fan abstract goals (**Possibility 2** in section 4.34).

4.43   Exit from the Community and Exit from the Market

Exit tends not to be a much used option for LFC fans on RAWK as a response to dissatisfaction with the brand. Most fans do not consider switching brands, for example (see also Hamil 1999; Richardson & O'Dwyer 2003; Sandvoss 2003; 2005; Horne 2006; Richardson 2007). As the quote from Nando in section 4.211 says, a drop in team performances [an integral part of achievement of club success] may lead to a small drop in match-day attendance, but the majority of fans will continue their support in the hope that things will improve. This may be because there is a lack of substitutable alternatives that fans are willing to consider. RAWK member, Evan, says:

> I can't chose which 'brand' to follow and if I don't like the way this 'company' is operating I can't simply switch to the blue one [Everton - LFC's rival Merseyside club]. In that respect it's practically a monopoly…See, for me and thousands like me, football is part of our life, far more important than religion, more important than work (for many) … Unfortunately the custodians [Hicks & Gillett] that should be protecting us are the very people exploiting us (fieldquote no. 125).

So, even though Evan, above, might have problems with LFC commercially, highlighting the Hicks-Gillett ownership as his primary reason, he will not exit from being a member of

the LFC fan community as it is one of the most important parts of his life. For him, choosing another club would be even more difficult than changing his religion, given the sacred bond that exists (see also Belk *et al.* 1989; Giulianotti 1999; 2005; Muniz & Schau 2005). This is represented on **Figure 4.43a**:

FIGURE 4.43a:

EXIT FROM
THE
COMMUNITY

ZERO ABSTRACT GOAL   Falling level of abstract goal   FULL ABSTRACT GOAL
ACHIEVEMENT   achievement   ACHIEVEMENT
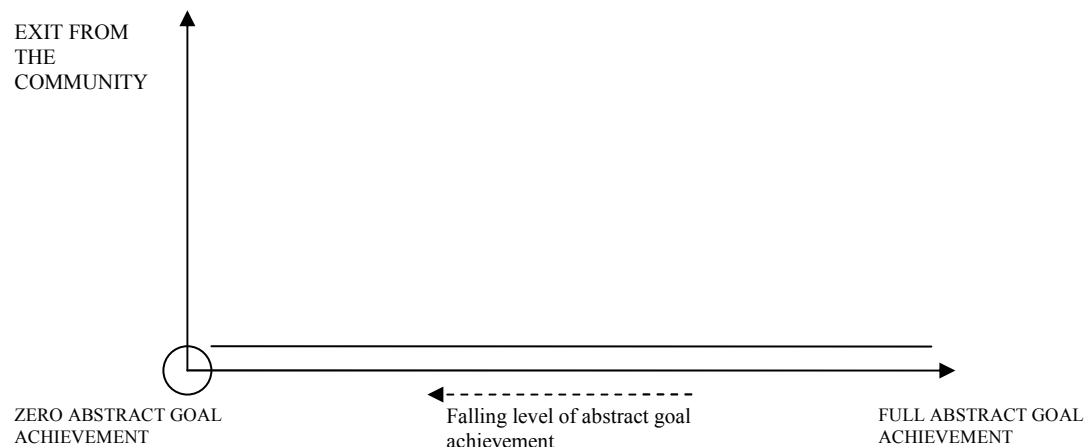
SIMPLIFIED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXIT FROM THE COMMUNITY AND ABSTRACT GOAL ACHIEVEMENT.
EXTENSION OF HIRSCHMAN (1970 P. 87) FIGURE 1.

As indicated on **Figure 4.43a,** most RAWK fans tend to avoid halting their membership with the LFC fan community regardless of how much they disagree with specific club goals/concerns or performance, no matter how negative their emotions are, and regardless of how wide the gap is between expectations and experiences [abstract goals]. Hence, it may be akin to an addiction in some cases (Elliott 1994b). This may create a scenario where fans could be viewed as vulnerable consumers (Baker *et al.* 2005; Hamilton 2007). As Patrick says earlier (section 4.212; fieldquote no. 109) and Evan, earlier in this section, even though they may have problems with LFC commercially, most fans will not exit from being a member of the LFC fan community due to its importance in their life. However, exit from the community is different to exit from the market. With the latter, there is a tipping point (TP) as represented on **Figure 4.43b**:

FIGURE 4.43b:

EXIT FROM
THE MARKET

Latency Curve

TP

ZERO ABSTRACT GOAL
ACHIEVEMENT

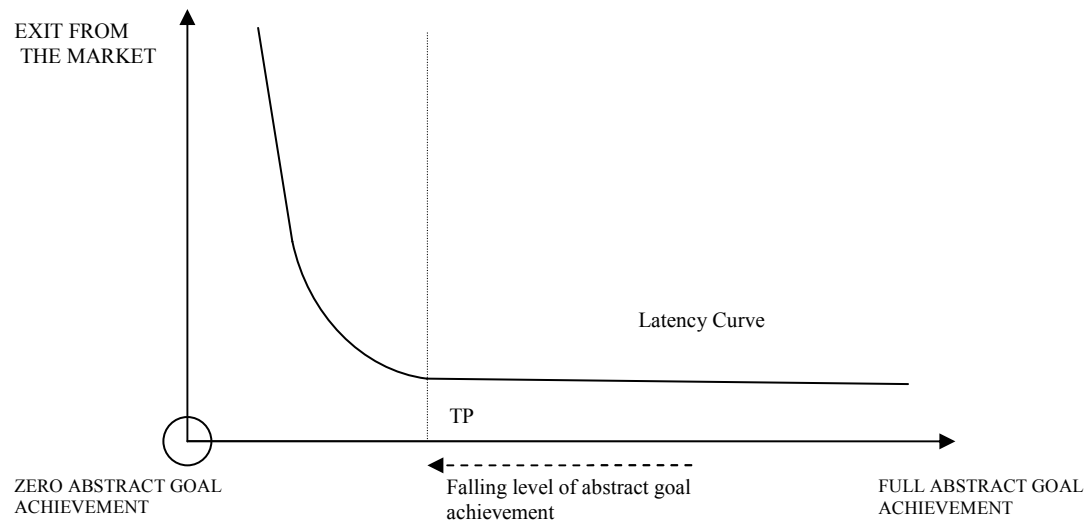Falling level of abstract goal
achievement

FULL ABSTRACT GOAL
ACHIEVEMENT

**SIMPLIFIED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXIT FROM THE MARKET AND
ABSTRACT GOAL ACHIEVEMENT.**
EXTENSION OF HIRSCHMAN (1970 P. 87) FIGURE 1.

Please note that while fans are here referred to as exiting the "market". This is taken to mean that they are halting doing business with the LFC brand company specifically and in a specific instance (e.g., a refusal to the buy the official jersey). Often, these "exiting" fans may choose alternatives, such as the protest jersey while boycotting official LFC jerseys, or AFC Liverpool while boycotting official LFC matches. Thus, if fans halt business with the LFC company, they may be seen to be refusing to exit the overall system of markets/marketing when they choose an alternative that is on the market. So, exiting the market in this context is specifically referring to the exit from purchasing items specifically related to LFC as a company, as opposed to an outright exit from the market system overall. Of course, *some* fans who exit the market of specifically LFC brand company related goods, may choose not to buy any alternatives, thus somewhat exiting the overall market of transactions for goods related to LFC. But, this may still not be a complete withdrawal. To help explain this graph, this thesis draws upon RAWK member Colin who comments on the sudden growth (TP on **Figure 4.43b**) of fans who are exiting the market (e.g. through boycotts) saying that he and various other:

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Rawkites have been campaigning against Hicks and Gillett from the outset [2007, when problems first began to become clear regarding club debts in particular]. We were ridiculed by most because [LFC] were winning matches. Sad to say we predicted something like this [sudden deterioration in on-the-pitch performances in late 2009], but nowhere near as bad as it is now unfolding (fieldquote no. 126).

To Colin, the growth of fan exit from the market came largely because the off the pitch problems eventually trickled down to become a decline on the pitch critically impairing LFC's potential to achieve on-pitch success. This was most apparent from Summer 2009 onwards. This led to dramatic growth (tipping point - TP) in fan declarations of boycotting LFC (exit from the market) on RAWK. However, exit from the LFC fan community remains unobservable on RAWK.

LFC management could be well served if they understand that a lack of fans exiting the market does not equate to fans who are achieving their abstract consumer goals. There is a tipping point, before which fan exit from the market may be almost unobservable, after which fan exit from the market may occur as a tidal wave of boycotting. Before and after this tipping point, fans on RAWK appear to refrain from exiting from the community. This may offer the club opportunities to interpret what grievances fans have, to potentially respond. Limiting fan exit would appear to be a prudent goal for managers.

4.44   Twist: Positive and Negative

Twist (Cova & Cova 2000) is also common on RAWK. When Colin (see section 4.212) uses the song "You'll Never Walk Alone" to describe his dissatisfaction with the club, he twists the lyrics. Two more prominent examples of twist are the Standards Corrupted jersey and the AFC Liverpool club. The jersey creators (RAWK members) celebrate the five European Cups LFC has won using five stars (**Figure 4.213a**). Fans also twist the name of the official club sponsor, Standard Chartered Bank, to "Standards Corrupted", in order to portray a message of discontentment. Similarly, as mentioned in section 4.212, AFC Liverpool is a club set up by LFC fans for LFC fans. It uses a twist on LFC's brand/club name. It also claims to adopt the same history, culture, and values. AFC Liverpool twists the official club symbolism, utilising the colour red in its jerseys and the Liver bird in its logo (see **Appendix N**); the same as the LFC jersey (see **Appendix M**).

So, discontented fans finding that their abstract goals are not achieved may engage the role twist in various ways. However, contented fans, who are positively emotional, agree with LFC goals, and experience a minimal expectation-experience gap, twist in various ways also. The most prevalent examples are fans creating positive songs for favourite players, which they regularly post on RAWK, or flags celebrating club symbolism, which they similarly regularly post on RAWK. Thus, twist behaviour is ongoing, in both positive and negative ways, as represented on **Figure 4.44**:

FIGURE 4.44:
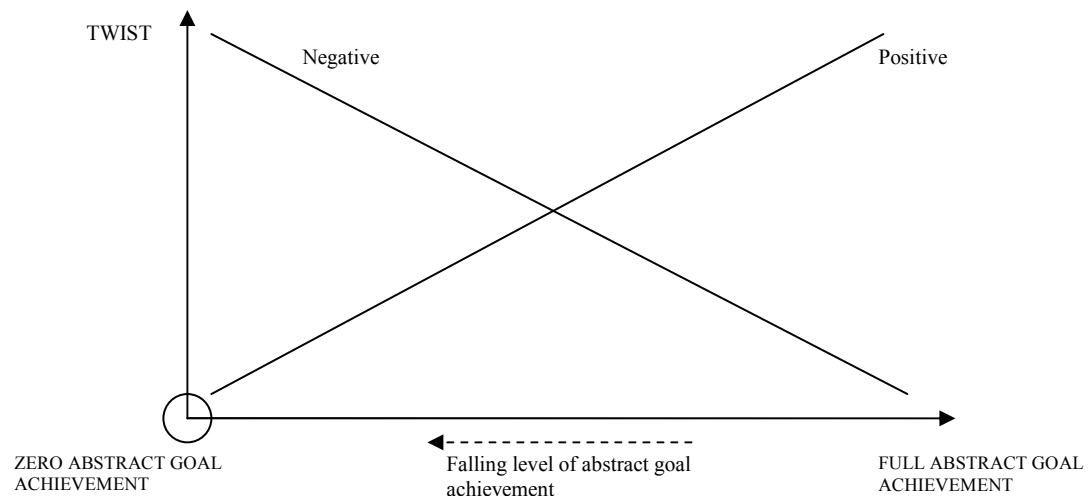
SIMPLIFIED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TWIST (NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE) AND ABSTRACT GOAL ACHIEVEMENT.
EXTENSION OF HIRSCHMAN (1970 P. 87) FIGURE 1.

As conceptualised on **Figure 4.44**, fans tend to twist positively when they agree with specific club goals/concerns, are positively emotional, and there is a minimal gap between fan expectations and fan experience [abstract goals]. An example is when the club signs a player the fans like and they compose positive songs to sing as a result. Fans tend to twist negatively when they disagree with club goals, are negatively emotional, and there is a large/growing gap between fan expectations and fan experience. An example is the Standards Corrupted jersey.

From a CCT perspective, fans may be twisting LFC products/services and symbolism because the sign/symbolic value it holds has diminished, for example, through poor ownership (Levy 1959). When fans create an alternative jersey for themselves, in order to starve LFC of revenue through competing with it (Fisher & Smith 2011), they show continued desire for "artifacts" or "indexical signs" around which they will be able to consume LFC experiences and displaced meanings (McCracken 1990; 2005; Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2000 p. 84; Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 53; see also Pine & Gilmore 1999). However, considering SDL's position that "goods are best viewed as distribution mechanisms for services, or the provision of satisfaction for higher-order needs" (Vargo & Lusch 2004 p. 9; see also Gutman 1982), it may interpreted that some fans on RAWK are no longer satisfied with the service provided by LFC; their higher order needs are not being taken care of. The official LFC products no longer fit the fan's/fans' ideal self-image (Belk 1988 p. 159). So, fans tap into their do-it-yourself ethic (Haynes 1995; Fisher & Smith 2011 p. 337), twisting to create their own products and services, more in keeping with their consumption philosophy, ideal self-image, and needs. The "goods" are "appliances" for service provision rather than ends in themselves (Vargo & Lusch 2004 p. 13). Thus, when the overall LFC service no longer fits what the fans expect, the official LFC appliances no longer have the same symbolic value, so unofficial alternatives are created that fans believe better reflect their 'authentic' versions of fandom. Thus, the alternative appliances or artifacts serve as more suitable identity resources (Elliott 1994a; 2004; Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998; Elliott & Davies 2006). This could be viewed as postmodern fragmentation (Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 622) of the LFC fan culture's overall product offering as instigated by fans themselves rather than LFC. Here, fans show creativity and a level of free expression in furthering a pluralist LFC offering (Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 621).

4.45   Entry

Fans on RAWK tend to want the overall LFC fan community to grow, or, at least, not to decline in numbers, or, worst case scenario, stop existing. This is interpreted as being because, as detailed earlier, fans' main concern is to be involved with and to co-produce this community. To continue achieving their goal of feeling connected or belonging, the community must continue to exist (Beverland & Farrelly 2010). So, their emotional attachment does not just lead fans to care about or love the club or the brand (Fournier 1998 pp. 363-4), but also the community surrounding the brand, given its central place in their

overall consumption experience and their awareness that fans play such a pivotal role in co-creating this consumption experience (Hirschman 1970; Schultz *et al.* 1989; McCracken 1990; Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; Richardson 2007; Merz *et al.* 2009; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010; Fisher & Smith 2011). Hence, many fans feel a moral responsibility to the community (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; Beverland & Farrelly 2010). Exemplary is RAWK fans' desire for more potential, undecided, young people to choose to become LFC fans, or what Colin (fieldquote no. 5) refers to as an urgent need for LFC to improve its "marketing of LFC worldwide" to increase its fan base and thus commercial revenue (see also Conn 2011), so potentially contributing to on-pitch success (see section 4.211). However, Colin stresses that, to do this, LFC must provide products and services that potential fans can afford (goal congruity) otherwise they will look elsewhere:

> To this day [January 2009], I have seen no improvements [in marketing of LFC worldwide], but for the fact that LFC shirts and other merchandise are much too overpriced.

This fan necessity for the club to provide a product that is congruous with the concerns/goals of fans in order to promote new entry and thus a growing fan-base is represented on **Figure 4.45**:

FIGURE 4.45:
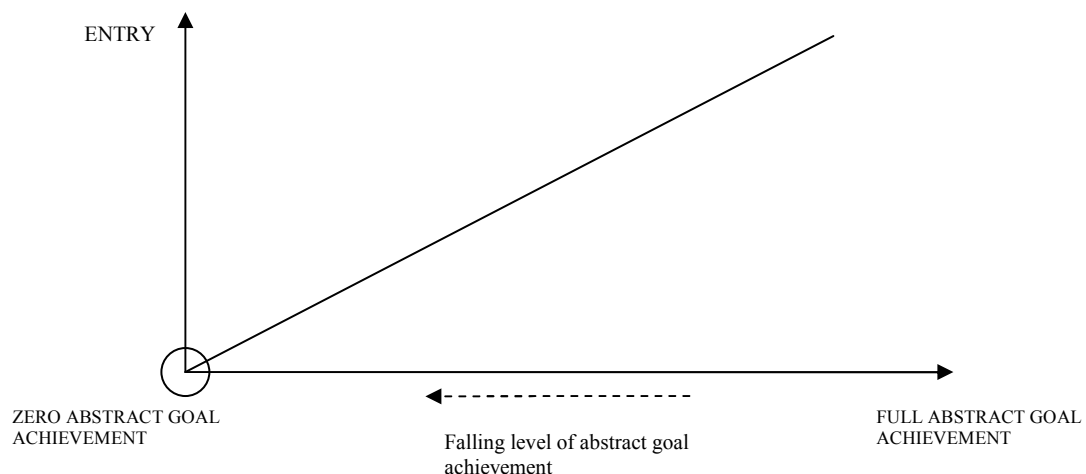
SIMPLIFIED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENTRY AND ABSTRACT GOAL ACHIEVEMENT.
EXTENSION OF HIRSCHMAN (1970 P. 87) FIGURE 1.

As outlined on **Figure 4.45**, Colin, and other RAWK members discuss how LFC should provide a product that potential new fans will agree with, that potential new fans will feel positive emotions from consuming, and that will minimize the expectation-experience gap of potential new fans [abstract goals]. An example is how potential fans might choose a club because it is successful on the pitch, an important specific fan goal in LFC fandom, and potentially elsewhere. With this in mind, Colin mentions that, just after the Champions League success in 2005, he expected to see a global marketing drive from the club selling:

> anything with LFC as winners, anything from shirts to socks. I was ashamed I could not find anything…[I blame] shortcomings in the field of marketing and merchandising.

This emphasises the potential need for LFC to provide a product congruous with specific fan goals/concerns to maximise fan agreement, positive emotions, and the chances of a small/zero expectation-experience gap [abstract goals], in order to promote fan entry. This may be achieved through LFC being successful on the pitch, through facilitating a thriving community and fan identity by providing products and services fans can afford and will use to further continue and embed their identity connection with LFC (e.g. the socks mentioned by Colin above), and through encouraging fans to interact with the club so that fans feel they have a role in controlling LFC's destiny [main concerns].

LFC management may benefit from awareness that fan entry is desired by many existing fans so their community thrives and it opens up possibilities for the club to improve its revenues too. This is perhaps similar to how existing brand community members of the Jeep community, observed by McAlexander *et al.* (2002 pp. 43-4), are so enthusiastic about their brands that they want others to share in this and thus engage in expressions of "missionary zeal". This is what Olsen (1995) calls the 'lineage factor'. Existing brand community members want to introduce other potential brand community members - the "next generation" (McAlexander *et al.* 2002), so they act as brand ambassadors (Fournier & Lee 2009). Many fans on RAWK similarly want LFC to partake in promoting and furthering new fan entry to the community too.

4.46   Non-entry

RAWK members who participated in setting up AFC Liverpool and the Standards Corrupted jersey discuss their motivation to create these alternatives to the official LFC

club and jersey. Fans mention various instances of specific goal/concern incongruity such as high prices or disagreement with the management/ownership of the club in various ways, from lack of investment in the team, to the high club-debt level resulting from the leveraged buy-out of LFC by Hicks & Gillett in 2007 (see also Markham 2010). RAWK members claim such things damage LFC and the potential for new fans to decide to follow LFC or even being able to afford to, on the basis of ticket prices, or jersey prices, for example. Goal incongruity, negative emotions, or expectation-experience gaps [**Possibility 1** in section 4.34] create barriers to potential fans and increase the likelihood of non-entry as represented on **Figure 4.46:**

FIGURE 4.46:

NON-
ENTRY

ZERO ABSTRACT GOAL
ACHIEVEMENT

Falling level of abstract goal
achievement

FULL ABSTRACT GOAL
ACHIEVEMENT
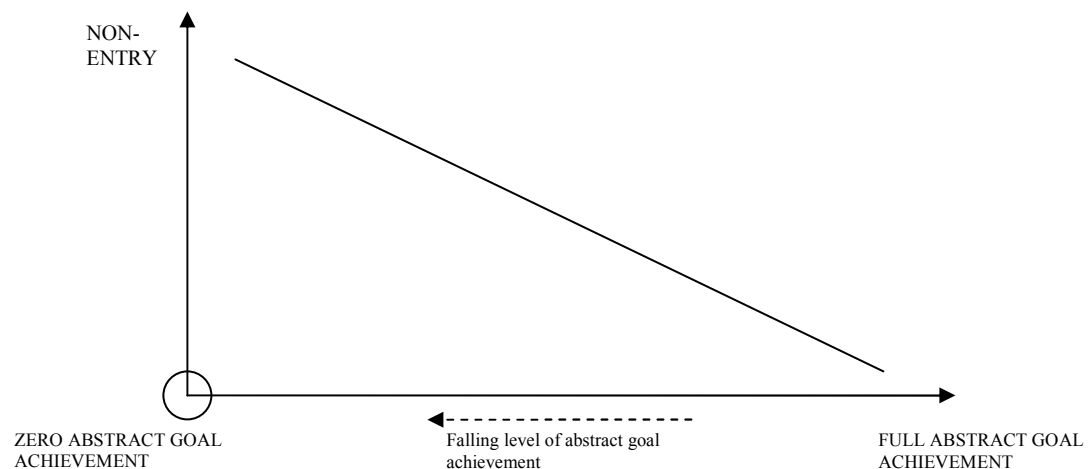
SIMPLIFIED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NON-ENTRY AND ABSTRACT GOAL ACHIEVEMENT.
EXTENSION OF HIRSCHMAN (1970 P. 87) FIGURE 1.

Fans on RAWK see barriers to new LFC fans as a threat because such barriers damage the flow of new members into the LFC fan community as shown on **Figure 4.46**. This potentially damages the possibility of RAWK fans being able to maintain a sustained satisfaction of their main concern into the indefinite future: i.e. the fans' main concern is to be involved with and co-productive of their LFC fan community. They want to feel connected to the community and to engage with its continued creation/construction in an, at least somewhat, agentic, autonomous, active fashion (Slater 1997; Shankar *et al.* 2009; Beverland & Farrelly 2010). Fans have a shared sense of moral responsibility to their

community, and its rituals and traditions (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001 p. 413). So, in response to these threats/barriers to the growth of the LFC fan community presented by the market (via LFC), fans themselves create affordable alternatives (Firat & Dholakia 1998) more fitting to their own consumption philosophy, identity, and demands/goals, in order to reduce barriers (e.g. tackling high ticket prices through creating AFC Liverpool) themselves, because they believe the club/market is failing to do so adequately. This way, fans show their co-creative, autonomous, and controlling tendencies within LFC consumer culture (Slater 1997; Firat & Dholakia 1998; Beverland & Farrelly 2010; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010). They will even produce products/services/brands (e.g., the protest jersey) to compete with LFC's offerings if they believe LFC is not aspiring to the authentic ideals and goals of its fans (Fisher & Smith 2011).

Fans often display behaviour reflective of assisting other consumers in the use of the LFC brand or its culture, if even only providing others with information. But, often, as empirically evident on RAWK, fans co-produce cultural symbols themselves to be consumed by others, like the Standards Corrupted jersey, or new songs to sing at the stadium on matchday in co-creation of the fan atmosphere (produced and consumed by fans) (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001 p. 425; Richardson 2007; Fournier & Lee 2009; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010). Fans continuously co-create their community identity, often believe they have a large role to play in LFC success, and in how all of this is controlled. Many fans refuse to sit idly by as the brand they are passionate about (Cova *et al.* 2007), LFC, "dwindles and dies away", at the hands of bad owners, for example (James 1890 pp. 291-2). Many fans on RAWK will do anything they can to ensure LFC is cared for, groomed, maintained, and it thus waxes and prospers (James 1890 pp. 291-2; Belk 1987c; 1988; McCracken 1990). It is evident that social media, like RAWK, are enabling this behaviour, from the interpretive 'meaning'/meaningful, intangible, symbolic, or 'sign' level, all the way through to the more 'material' or tangible consequences of participation in cultural production of brands and brand communities (see also Hall 1980; Hirschman 1982; 1986b; Elliott 1994a; Scott, 1994; Hirschman & Thompson 1997; Slater 1997; McAlexander *et al.* 2002; Bentsson & Ostberg 2006; Kates 2006; Richardson 2007; Millward 2008; Kozinets 2009; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010; Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder 2011). These findings show how fans on RAWK often use this new medium as a tool to respond when they are displeased with the job being done by the firm or its

marketing department (Kozinets 1999). RAWK members' responses, like AFC Liverpool, are largely designed to co-create alternative consumption objects and symbols for both current and potential new fans, with the latter being provided for through fan circumvention of some of the barriers that RAWK members believe may encourage non-entry – like ticket prices. Fans themselves are continuously outlining things in LFC consumer culture, often created by LFC, which act as barriers, thus promoting non-entry. LFC management may find such information useful, if it is interested in limiting such barriers.

4.47   Re-entry

Boycotting became prevalent amongst RAWK members during this study. A major reason for boycotts has been the Hicks-Gillett club ownership (February 2007 - October 2010) (see also Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder 2011). One fan on RAWK says:

> My main concern about our clubs future is the owners [Hicks & Gillett] and the amount of debt they have put on the club. I am very worried about the manager not being offered a new contract, signings in this transfer window and in the summer. I want the owners gone a.s.a.p. they have been nothing but trouble since they arrived with their constant lies (Torres, fieldquote no. 117).
>
> I will always be a Liverpool fan because Im from there, but I wont go to another game until the owners [Hicks & Gillett] have departed (Torres, fieldquote no. 118).

Torres, above, is boycotting games, yet, will "always be a Liverpool fan", in the community, non-market, sense. Torres is unhappy with how LFC is owned and managed, but claims that, if this changes, she would halt the boycott. Here, this study locates the third new co-creative role; re-entry. This is not an entirely new role, as it appears briefly in Hirschman (1970 p. 86), but this thesis gives it emphasis to make it a role in its own right, given the prevalence of boycotts amongst RAWK members. Torres is boycotting but will return to LFC if the owners sell. So, if the club changes direction and returns towards specific goals/concerns congruous with those of fans, she will be more positively emotional and in agreement with the product/service on offer given how the experienced product/service would be more reflective of what fans expect [abstract goals; see also **Possibility 2** in section 4.34]. Thus, she will recommence business dealings with LFC; re-entry - as represented on **Figure 4.47:**

FIGURE 4.47:
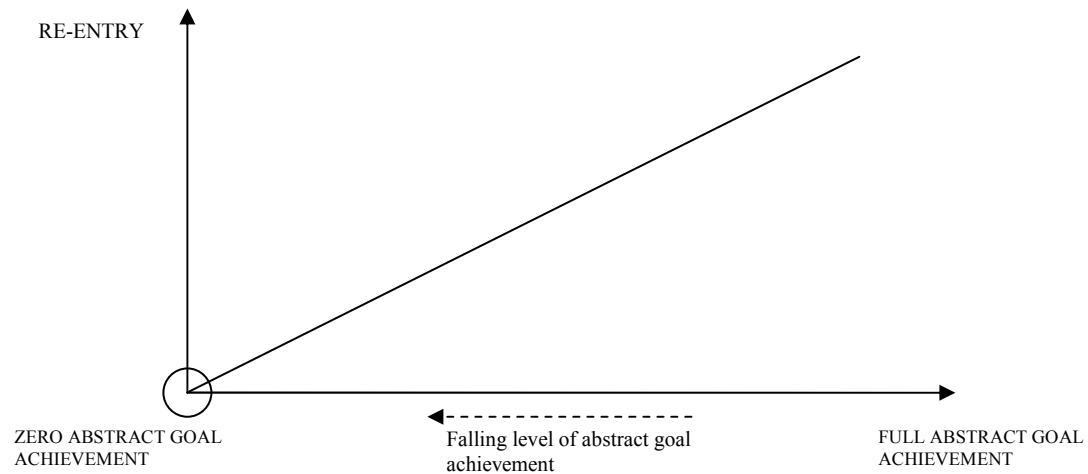
SIMPLIFIED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RE-ENTRY AND ABSTRACT GOAL

ACHIEVEMENT.

EXTENSION OF HIRSCHMAN (1970 P. 87) FIGURE 1.

Most boycotters on RAWK have not stopped caring about or loving LFC (Hirschman 1970; Belk 1987c; 1988; Schultz *et al.* 1989; McCracken 1990; Lewis 1992a; 1992b). But, they engage in boycott in order to make a statement about their opposition to the club's specific goals/concerns, how the club pursues/achieves them (or fails to), and to express their negative fan emotions. In psychology literature, negative emotions are theorized, in some quarters, as leading to "fight or flight" behaviour (Fredrickson & Joiner 2002). On RAWK, fans do not tend to be readily willing to engage in "flight" given their deep attachment to LFC community culture, but, they will halt contributing to LFC in a market sense, if they believe it will help them in their communal "fight" against aspects of LFC that they disagree with or believe are not reflective of the authentic LFC (e.g. the owners).

This boycotting may be perceived as ritualistic "grooming" behaviour (McCracken 1990). However, unlike a material product, the consumer (fan) cannot groom or carry out maintenance on this "product" or extension of the self in a straightforward fashion (Belk 1988). It is not simply a matter of repainting a door or stitching a piece of clothing, for example. Maintaining a consumption object like a football club is much more complex and requires many more people's involvement; not least other fans in the community, but also

the football club representatives (e.g. management, owners, staff). Boycotting may thus be interpreted as making a ritualistic effort towards "maintaining" or "caring for" the club (Belk 1987c; McCracken 1990). Thus, the LFC management may attempt to understand why fans boycott in order to consider altering club behaviour to "iron out the problem" (Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 608), where possible, to, thus, promote re-entry as displayed on **Figure 4.47**. This may be akin to "matching" of the product/service with the needs (goals) of the consumer (Küpers 2000).

4.5   CONSUMER ROLES SUMMARY AND CONTRIBUTION

Table 4.5 summarizes the co-creative roles theorized from studying RAWK:

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TABLE 4.5: TYPOLOGY OF SEVEN CONSUMER COMMUNITY CULTURAL CO-CREATIVE ROLES TABULATED

ROLE	ORIGIN	DESCRIPTION	CONTRIBUTION
Voice	RAWK data & "emergent fit" (Glaser 1978) with Hirschman (1970)	Linguistic communication of cognitive & emotional responses to consumption contexts and experiences	Empirical examples. Emphasis on both positive and negative voice
Loyalty	RAWK data & "emergent fit" with Hirschman (1970)	Special attachment to consumption community or brand	Empirical examples. Emphasis on differences between loyalty to the market and loyalty to the community
Exit	RAWK data & "emergent fit" with Hirschman (1970)	Consumers halting doing business with a brand or halting membership of a community	Empirical examples. Emphasis on differences between exit from the market and exit from the community
Twist	RAWK data & "emergent fit" with Cova & Cova (2000)	Consumers use of products, services, or consumption symbols in ways not originally intended by the brand owners or managers	Empirical examples. Emphasis on both positive and negative twisting of consumption objects
Entry	RAWK data	New consumers buying the marketised products/services of a consumption context (e.g. LFC) and thus becoming part of that marketplace's culture (e.g. LFC fandom)	The entire role and empirical evidence of how existing consumers tend to desire newly entering consumers. Existing consumers also point out ways they believe it can happen (e.g. marketing worldwide)
Non-entry	RAWK data	When potential new consumers do not buy the marketised products/services of a consumption context (e.g. LFC) by choice or because of barriers to entry such as high prices (e.g. due to incongruous goals, or	The entire role and empirical evidence of how existing fans tend to desire limitation of barriers to new fans and also want the brand/club to continuously improve by making its goals more congruous with fans' and then to achieve these goals (e.g.

		perceived expectation-experience gap, or perceived potentially negative emotions)	success, affordability of becoming a community member through marketised consumption), so limiting potential fans' perception of an expectation-experience gap and/or negative emotions
Re-entry	RAWK data	When existing boycotting consumers choose to halt the boycott and resume doing business with the boycotted organization (e.g. LFC)	The entire role and empirical evidence of fans who are boycotting the market (e.g. LFC) but not the community (e.g. LFC fandom), but will re-enter the market if the reasons for the boycott are remedied

Fans on RAWK engage these roles (how they consume) in pursuit of their consumption goals (why they consume). The latter may be viewed as more specific goals or main concerns (section 4.2) or abstract fan goals (section 4.3). Fans' main specific consumption goal (main concern) is community membership and co-creation; all according to their various community identity goals, the success of LFC, and fans' place within controlling/co-creating this success and identity. Fan concerns are abstracted earlier in this chapter to show how fans on RAWK desire specific goal/concern congruity with LFC and agreement with how LFC pursues these goals (see also Kozinets 2007). Fans also aim for positive emotions from consumption experience (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982; Holt 1995; Laros & Steenkamp 2005; Richardson 2007). Thus, fans continuously assess the gap between expectations and experience (see also Küpers 2000), something that fans on RAWK want to be limited/minimized, small or shrinking.

Depending on how much abstract goal achievement fans attain, the nature of it, and their value judgements about it, they respond concurrently through their simultaneously consumptive and productive behaviour, which this thesis arrays on the typology of consumer roles. The seven consumer co-creative roles overlap in many ways. For example, exit from the community is not a much used option given the strength of fan loyalty to their community identity. Thus, 'voice' comes to the fore, as discussed by Hirschman (1970) and evidenced on RAWK. When specific LFC goals (main concerns) are incongruous with fan goals (main concerns) [or are perceived to be incongruous by fans at least], or there is a growing expectation-experience gap, or negative emotion, fans on RAWK often compensate for the lack of exit from the community. For example, fans who buy the alternative protest jersey refuse to buy the official one (exit from the market). Yet, they are

still affirming their loyalty to their community identity as fans by appropriating and twisting many of the club's/community's (brand) symbols in their identity quests (Jenkins 1992b; Lury 1996; Slater 1997; Cova & Cova 2000). This way fans satisfy the observation in some CR literature (Richardson & Turley 2006; Richardson 2007; Fisher & Smith 2011 p. 342) that being a fan is something that you do, not something that you buy. Kozinets' (2001) analysis of "Star Trek" similarly points towards fans differentiating between commercialized aspects of fan consumption and more sacred consumption attained through affective investment by fans in consumption objects and tensions that may result in alternative consumption objects, like the fan-created-literature discussed by Brown (2007; see also Jenkins 1992a; 1992b). Together, fans co-create/control alternative consumption objects, such as the jersey, on RAWK. It is vital to note that this alternative consumption object is not being created in outright opposition to commercialism. It is commercialised in itself, in that it costs money and is positioned as a competitor to the official jersey (see also Fisher & Smith 2011). However, it vies to represent the view that LFC is being steered in the wrong direction by management/owners, on the basis of debts for example, not simply a commercialised one. Also, the protest jersey could be viewed as not-for-profit as all profit is to be ploughed back into fan-related causes and organizations. Even though fan discussions about the jersey (e.g., the quote from Quorn [fieldquote no. 112 in section 4.213]) do protest against high prices for jerseys, it is apparent that many fans, including the protest jersey's creators who are critical of the high prices for official kits, are willing to pay a reasonable price if they perceive the money being spent pursuing specific club goals congruous with fan main concerns, such as reinvestment in LFC, like players for the team, or other behaviours that will help fans feel positive emotions and in control of the club's destiny.

As with this chapter's consumer role typology, the conception of boycotting explained by Hirschman (1970) also outlines the potential for consumers to mix roles:

> through boycott, exit is actually consummated rather than just threatened; but it is undertaken for the specific and explicit purpose of achieving a change of policy on the part of the boycotted organization and is therefore a true hybrid of [exit and voice] … The threat of exit as an instrument of voice is here replaced by its mirror image, the promise of re-entry: for it is understood that the member-customer will

return to the fold in case certain conditions which have led to the boycott are remedied (p. 86).

Similarly, when a fan chooses to purchase the "Standards Corrupted" jersey, they are exiting from the market, through boycotting the official LFC merchandise. They are voicing their discontent through publicising the jersey's protest goals on RAWK and elsewhere. They are loyal to the LFC community identity through display of traditional club symbols, like the Liver bird. They twist this symbolism too, such as the alteration of the official club sponsor to read "Standards Corrupted". With the club, AFC Liverpool, there is similar exit from the market, loyalty to the community, voicing discontent (negative), and twisting of club symbolism (positive and negative), together with the RAWK members' recognition that there are barriers encouraging non-entry of potential fans on the basis of claims that official LFC pricing is too high. Hence, fans encourage entry of new fans and re-entry of boycotting fans or existing fans who can no longer afford LFC, through setting AFC Liverpool prices low and adoption of many traditional LFC identifiers and symbols so AFC Liverpool can act as an alternative consumption artifact.

A primary task of CCT, SDL, and much other consumer, management, and marketing research is to understand how and why consumers consume as they do. The Grounded Theory Online Ethnographic Process, contributed in this thesis through combining various other methods as outlined in Chapters 1 and 3, provides a methodological tool towards investigating, through exploratory research, the goals of consumers in a consumption context, and also how consumers attempt to resolve these goals. In applying this method, this study shows how the method may be used to provide an empirically grounded thick description of why and how consumers (fans) in this context (LFC fandom on RAWK) consume. This thesis achieves this through explicating the specific fan main concerns and properties, abstracted consumer goals, and the typology of consumer co-creative roles (outlined in Chapter 3 and this chapter). The thick description is derived from empirical evidence and makes an anthropological theoretical contribution relevant to researchers in the field of CR, and a practical contribution relevant to anyone wishing to gain a greater understanding of why and how football fans consume as they do. The latter may include football clubs, football fans, football authorities, public policy makers and government, fan organizations, sportswear manufacturers and more.

The consumer role typology provides a theoretical lens that may be used by researchers to investigate consumption contexts that have emergent fit (Glaser 1978) to this theory either online or offline. The qualitative nature, rather than quantitative measure, of how consumers engage with any or all of the roles (e.g. how they twist the product) may be studied to develop an understanding of how consumers consume. This could provide insights into why they consume. For example, LFC fans embrace their community identity through both market and non-market consumption often voicing about their loyalty to the non-market elements as more sacred than the 'profane' marketised or commercial elements (see also Richardson 2007). Each of the consumer roles may thus provide insight into how fans co-author LFC brand culture.

Future research may find further empirical evidence of any of the concepts contained in this chapter and, through emergent fit (Glaser 1978), attempt to refine and extend them contextually. These findings may be generalisable, but only as time bounded, context dependent, currently useful generalizations (Leavy 2011). As such, researchers, managers, or other interested parties may attempt to apply this study's findings in contexts that have emergent fit. The consumer role typology is derived predominantly from CCT theories and methods popular within CR. Stretching beyond CCT and CR, this study also has findings relevant to more managerial marketing streams such as SDL and potentially for practical management behaviour too.

4.6 DISCUSSION: TOWARDS A THEORY OF MANAGEMENT AND CONSUMER COLLABORATIVE CO-CREATION: A ROLE FOR MANAGERS

The seven consumer roles have potentially important implications for theory surrounding management's practical role within service and brand value generation and delivery processes (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004; Vargo & Lusch 2004; Merz *et al.* 2009). Now, this chapter continues discussing the relevance of the main concerns, abstract fan goals, and consumer roles as outlined earlier, to wider CR (e.g. CCT; e.g. Hirschman 1970; McCracken 1990; Balmer 2006; Schau *et al.* 2009), marketing, and management theory (e.g. SDL; e.g. Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004; Vargo & Lusch 2004; Füller *et al.* 2007;

Merz *et al.* 2009; Payne *et al* 2009). This facilitates augmenting this thesis' contribution to answering research question 4, and contributing to extant literature discussions surrounding various theorists' conversations about how management can become more interactive, open, and dialogical in contemporary consumer culture, or what this thesis calls, 'Collaborative Co-creators'. The reason for this is that fans on RAWK continuously mention their desire for relations with LFC management to be much more interactive, transparent, and dialogue oriented, in order for fans to have more of a say in controlling LFC, its community identity, and its success potential. It would appear that fans believe this would facilitate fans' abstract goal achievement much more effectively than the predominant management/ownership style of the Hicks-Gillett regime, which they endured for the majority of this research period.

Various stakeholders may interact in consumption contexts and this interaction may be viewed from the point of view of creation or innovation; e.g. individual fans/consumers, the football club/supplier, and the fan community/VC of consumption. Consumer-consumer co-creation is ongoing on RAWK (see also Prahalad 2004; Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004; Vargo & Lusch 2004; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010; Fisher & Smith 2011; Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder 2011). This study refers to this as 'Coincidental Co-creation'. However, many RAWK members feel they do not have enough impact within LFC brand culture, particularly the operations and decision-making within LFC as a company. This may be a result of members feeling that they have a better understanding of the brand's culture than the club ownership and management does (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; Fisher & Smith 2011). Brand community members in extant literature tend to believe that brand manufacturers, marketers, and managers should be good and faithful stewards of the community's brand (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001). This is not any different amongst LFC fans. However, on RAWK, many fans believe there is a lack of two-way stakeholder dialogue with LFC, and thus a lack of good relations between customer and supplier (Fournier 1998). Fans attribute this to what they see as a lack of brand management reflective of the "authentic" LFC fans desire (Elliott & Davies 2006; Richardson 2007; Beverland & Farrelly 2010; Fisher & Smith 2011). Hence, fans set-up fan union groups to form a collective 'voice' vying for greater control, such as SOS and ShareLFC. Both are fan-controlled and relate to all seven of the consumer roles (*exit, voice, loyalty, twist, entry, non-entry, re-entry*), as already detailed in this chapter. So, this thesis suggests a possible response to these grave fan

concerns through postulating an emphasis on the management role of delivering on the potential for greater supplier-consumer 'Collaborative Co-creation', or what extant literature might call, for example, democratising innovation (Von Hippel 2005), and the benefits of being a listening-led, learning organization (Wikström 1995; Fournier 1998; Rappaport 2010; Fisher & Smith 2011). This requires aligning the concepts of co-authoring the brand, SDL, CCT, and co-creation of value. The consumer role typology is central to this discussion and contribution.

"Collaborative Co-creation" is here defined as managers in interaction and dialogue with stakeholders, such as fans/consumers, seeking ways to enhance brand value and service provision through greater firm-stakeholder specific goal congruity, stakeholder satisfaction/positive emotions, and a minimization of the expectation-experience gap.

To achieve this, this study recommends drawing upon the many marketing researchers who emphasise SDL, given how it encourages customer dialogue with suppliers during product design, production, delivery and consumption (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004; Vargo & Lusch 2004; Payne *et al.* 2009; Fisher & Smith 2011). One vehicle, discussed in CCT and explored in this thesis, which may be utilised by management are brand communities and their co-creation of brand culture, like RAWK (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; McAlexander *et al.* 2002; Balmer 2006; Fournier & Lee 2009). Management could utilise marketing processes, procedures, tasks, activities, mechanisms, and interactions to collectively support the co-creation of value with brand communities (Wikström 1995; Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004; Vargo & Lusch 2004; Balmer 2006; Payne *et al.* 2009). For example, on RAWK, fans' continuous co-authoring of LFC's brand culture, particularly with other consumers, may be viewed as, what this thesis calls, *unofficial* "democratising of innovation" (Von Hippel 2005) or 'Coincidental Co-creation'. Combining CCT and SDL approaches shows how this affects brand value (Balmer 2006; Füller *et al.* 2007; Merz *et al.* 2009; Payne *et al.* 2009; Schau *et al.* 2009; Fisher & Smith 2011; Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder 2011). Even just the fan experience of interaction in a community like RAWK can lead to innovative consumption behaviour/products/services (e.g. twisting). This behaviour and much wider interaction and communal bonding can generate consumer value in itself (Balmer 2006; Füller *et al.* 2007; Fisher & Smith 2011); even if only augmenting the symbolic value or linking value of the brand (Levy 1959; Cova 1997).

As outlined in section 4.2's discussions of fans' main concerns, fans on RAWK want to be part of a community that reflects their desired "authentic" identity (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998; Richardson 2007; Beverland & Farrelly 2010; Fisher & Smith 2011). They also want the centre of that community, LFC, to be successful. Many fans believe they play a part in co-creating this success and identity. However, fans on RAWK desire more input into controlling the brand, given the brand's importance in helping fans achieve their goals. Management could possibly facilitate this greater fan control by considering altering their business model towards adoption of a brand community philosophy, from CCT theory (Arnould & Thompson 2005; Fournier & Lee 2009), and SDL theory that encourages a service centred view that is customer oriented and relational (Vargo & Lusch 2004). This combination could allow a focus on how to co-create brands with consumers and build relations in the process (Wikström 1995; Fournier *et al.* 1998; Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; Fournier & Lee 2009; Merz *et al.* 2009; Payne *et al.* 2009). This could allow managers to integrate the voice of the consumer with the voice of the enterprise (Barabba 1995; Vargo & Lusch 2004). This way, consumers may be viewed as operant resources (sources of skills, ideas, and knowledge) from an SDL point of view (Vargo & Lusch 2004 p. 7; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010 p. 32).

Managers may embrace their role within a brand community philosophy by becoming Collaborative Co-creators of valuable products, services, and experiences (Füller *et al.* 2007; Payne *et al.* 2009) with brand partners such as consumers/fans (Fournier 1998; Kozinets 1999), thus combining a CCT perspective on consumers with an SDL approach to marketing management (Arnould 2007; Schau *et al.* 2009; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010). This way, managers could encourage more of what this thesis calls *official* "democratising of innovation" or innovation creation (Füller *et al.* 2007) through greater stakeholder engagement (e.g. consumers) in a two-way interactive dialogical format, greater understanding of consumer goals (both specific concerns and abstract goals), and thus pursuit of achievement of these goals through supplier-consumer collaboration. This is a major challenge for contemporary managers who may be attempting to redefine their role in the changing marketplace that recognises brands as increasingly social and cultural entities (Firat & Venkatesh 1995; Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004;

Vargo & Lusch 2004; Bengtsson & Ostberg 2006; Kates 2006; Merz *et al.* 2009; Fisher & Smith 2011).

Füller *et al.* (2007) refer to *Reebok* and *Nike* management tapping into online forums as part of their marketing, product development, and innovation processes. Fisher & Smith (2011) discuss how *Converse* shoes are attempting to reinvent their brand marketing through placing customers at the centre of the innovation process. McAlexander *et al.* (2002) detail how the brand *Jeep* holds regular "brandfests" for brand community members to gather at real-world offline events to celebrate their brand (see also Solomon *et al.* 2006 p. 358). This sounds comparable to a football matchday. Similarly, Fournier & Lee (2009) discuss other offline alternatives practiced by *Harley-Davidson* with their close-to-the-customer strategy that encourages ongoing embeddedness of staff and management in the brand community in various ways. Other industry examples include *Apple, Starbucks, Local Motors, Lego*, Spanish bank *Caja Navarra*, and Brazil's *Hospital Moinhos de Ventos*, who are discussed in extant literature as positive examples of a move towards co-creative business models in contemporary commerce (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2011). Similarly, *McDonalds*' management recently revised their marketing mix following exploration of blogs, forums and other consumer generated content (Chan & Li 2010). There are ethical issues here for managers and marketers to consider and the potential to poison the well could be remembered, keeping keen regard for marketing research ethics (Kozinets 2009). Once these potential pitfalls are avoided, the opportunity to enhance firm reputation and brand value is notable (Merz *et al.* 2009; Bartikowski & Walsh 2011).

Online, this could be possible on forums like RAWK. RAWK VC members regularly display desire for more club consultation (voice*,* control), even fan-board-membership, whereby this key stakeholder's views would be represented to top-level management. Fans voicing their wish to have more control represent their underlying motivation to "do" fandom (Richardson 2007). So, LFC management could follow a more "interactive" business logic utilising information technology and RAWK (Wikström 1995).

"Shared" (Belk 2010) 'Coincidental Co-creation', is ongoing on RAWK. This leads to complex consumer behaviour accounted for in this chapter by a *Typology of Consumer Roles*. These roles could be seen as performance indicators efficient managers may use, be

aware of, and responsive to, in the contemporary business environment where "listening" to customers is valued (Rappaport 2010; Fisher & Smith 2011). Consumer role engagement in varying contexts will present alternative "main concerns" due to the specifics of that consumption-scape and how researchers interpret it. For example, one simple qualitative lens that researchers, managers, or specifically football club management and staff, may find useful to understand what consumers are saying about the organization is to remember both voice positive and voice negative, including conflicts (Fournier & Lee 2009), need to be discovered when interpreting fan main concerns, or consumer goals, or what is most meaningful for fans in their consumption experiences, not just one (positive) or the other (negative). Such understanding of consumer engagement with each of the consumer roles may enable managers to begin undertaking the role of Collaborative Co-creation in earnest.

This could see managers becoming proactive about leveraging the power of VCs, like RAWK, to mutually benefit consumers, through greater understanding of the consumer experience and how this can be improved (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2000; 2004; Fournier & Lee 2009; Chan & Li 2010). Managers could consider contacting "e-fluentials", "mavens", or influential community members (e.g., the RAWK governing body), to tap their consumer knowledge as reliable sources of information or "pools of qualified consumers" (Füller *et al.* 2007 p. 70; Fisher & Smith 2011 p. 339). This may help club management spot where it is going wrong (Hirschman 1970), providing opportunities to collaboratively co-create, with fans, new facets of the consumer experience that reflect consumer preferences (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982; Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004; Beverland & Farrelly 2010), or "main concerns"/goals. It may be prudent for managers to use any such awareness and integration of influential consumers within the marketing process in a way that does not entail simply attempting to use such people as trend setters, as may have been the case with some more traditional "controlling" marketing management techniques (Fisher & Smith 2011). Instead, these influential community members may be better viewed as knowledgeable about the brand culture. Thus, instead of the marketer attempting to influence the consumer, the marketer may aim towards a listen-and-learn style approach, where the consumer is placed at the "controlling" side of the interaction, thus empowered to participate in company decisions regarding the brand and its marketing (Wikström 1995; Fisher & Smith 2011). This is something many fans on RAWK want, specifically.

However, to make even greater strides towards a customer-centric approach, relying on the consumer as co-producer of a "flexible" brand that is open to being responsive to consumers' needs, managers may instead decide to observe larger numbers of consumers, given question marks raised in extant literature over whether any consumer may be viewed as an "influential" consumer with any great deal of accuracy in contemporary, postmodern consumer culture (Fisher & Smith 2011). Towards this end, managers may gather information to be used interpreting many consumers' needs, what this thesis calls main concerns (positively & negatively valued) and/or abstract goals, through observation of consumer/fan engagement with this study's Consumer Role Typology. Managers may use the roles as key firm feedback mechanisms. The roles make up an interpretive theoretical framework for deriving marketing relevant insights from the texts of consumer stories (Thompson 1997). In this specific study, through behaviour that may be seen through the prism of any or all of these roles, consumers on RAWK continually interpret, invent, and reinvent LFC brand meaning and community culture and identity according to the lens of CCT (Bengtsson & Ostberg 2006; Kates 2006; Richardson 2007); like "part-time marketers" according to the lens of SDL (Payne *et al.* 2009).

On RAWK, and in the context of LFC fandom, fans are integral to community cultural co-production processes outside of the firm: what this thesis terms "unofficial control" or 'Coincidental Co-creation'. Hirschman (1986b) might call this "informal" control. Fans also somewhat co-produce inside of LFC (e.g., matchday atmosphere [see also Holt 1995; King 2002; Richardson 2007]). However, many consumers believe that, beyond this, they are ignored. So, management could respond by giving consumers more control; greater means to co-create within the club: what this thesis terms "official control". Hirschman (1986b) might call this "formal" control. This could start with more two-way dialogue, and ultimately aim towards a business model built on ongoing Collaborative Co-creation or co-production (Wikström 1995). This appears possible with places like RAWK where the brand itself is at the centre of VC members' community identity. Fournier & Lee (2009) refer to how *Harley-Davidson* and *Vans* shoes recognise their consumer-community as the rightful owner of the brand. They (ibid) also point to how members of VCs could provide valuable contributions to various processes if integrated in a company's innovation process, such as information, knowledge, and assistance (Dahan & Hauser 2002; Füller *et al.* 2007).

Fisher & Smith (2011) also highlight the potential benefits of brands' managers/owners becoming more flexible about management and control, thus allowing the brand to be more open and flexible through encouraging fans to participate in co-creation of the brand, seeing its ownership as somewhat shared between the legal owners and the fans. This presents opportunities to achieve a kind of "matching" (Küpers 2000) between what the consumer wants and what the consumer gets (the expectation-experience gap), thus potentially allowing for the attainment of specific goal congruity and positive consumer emotions [abstract fan goals on RAWK].

Such integration of VCs into management decision-making may take the form of two broad approaches; 1) the virtual integration of community members for specific one-off innovation or informational tasks from time-to-time, or; 2) continuous collaboration with VCs as a permanent source of new ideas and information (Füller *et al.* 2007). An SDL approach would appear to emphasise the latter, so firms can continuously engage in listening, aligning, and matching (Duncan & Moriarty 1998 p. 2; Vargo & Lusch 2004 p. 14).

Business models can be designed to facilitate such ongoing collaboration with network partners and this may strengthen the firm's long term viability (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004; Vargo & Lusch 2004 p. 6). For example, *Harley Davidson* collaborates with the *Harley Owners Group* (Fournier & Lee 2009). LFC could similarly utilise its vast network of VCs, like RAWK (for a selection of other VCs see **Appendix D**), and/or attempt closer offline collaboration with groups like SOS. Community-building activities could thus be treated as companywide expenses rather than simply marketing ones. Light touch engagement is recommended (Kozinets 1999; Fournier & Lee 2009; Fisher & Smith 2011 p. 335) so that communities are allowed to remain organic entities. For example, even just consensual ethical listening (Kozinets 2009; Fisher & Smith 2011) to how consumers engage in *voice* and *twist* roles on places like RAWK could help management understand what makes fans *loyal* to the club and what needs to be pursued to encourage more fan *entry* or *re-entry*. Similarly, awareness of *voice negative* will highlight problems fans have, for which their *loyalty* is tested, and which cause *non-entry* and *exit* (boycott). Understanding how consumers/fans *twist* the product could help the firm identify new product innovations through observation of how consumers use the product in ways not

originally intended by the firm, thus presenting opportunities. Some theorists may refer to this as the firm behaving as a value 'facilitator' (see Grönroos 2011).

It is vital, however, that firms are careful not to fall into the trap of seeing co-creation with customers *simply* as a means of expropriating free consumer labour or a means to pursue exploitation of the communitarian dimension of social life and "govern-mentality" (Zwick *et al.* 2008; Cova *et al.* 2011). This can be circumvented through attempts towards this thesis' suggested managerial role of encouraging management-consumer Collaborative Co-creation recognising that specific consumer goals, consumer positive emotions, and consumer experiences/expectations, are paramount to delivering greater brand value (Merz *et al.* 2009). If these three abstract consumer goals are not core to an approach based on co-production, then possibly the exploitative scenario warned against by Zwick *et al.* (2008) may become more likely. The co-creative space may work best if it does not allow one party to become overly powerful or controlling; instead, both parties could try to see negotiation, engagement, and dialogue, as the way to avoid exploitation of the other. This could be interpreted as managers indirectly or directly pursuing the hermeneutic ideal of the dialogic community where participants having "good will" actively listen as well as speak and accept other points of view as worthy of consideration (Bernstein 1983; Gadamer 1989 p. 385; Arnold & Fischer 1994).

If management formalize links with online (new media; e.g. RAWK) and/or offline fan organizations (e.g. SOS), they may create an environment for a participation explosion whereby *voice* is activated (the art of voice - Hirschman 1970). In doing so, managers should support and engage consumers on their own terms rather than trying to control them according to Fournier & Lee (2009) and Gabriel & Lang (1995). Through this process, managers could gain insight into the "main concerns" of consumers through observing consumer engagement with *voice* and consumer references to the other six co-creative consumer roles - such as when a fan explains why she is boycotting games for example (see Torres quote in section 4.47) - *exit & voice*. In this specific example, management may gain greater understanding of how they can promote *re-entry*. Such embracement of the feedback mechanisms provided through the typology of consumer roles, via, for example, the firm's leveraging of new media (Marketing Science Institute 2010), would potentially raise the rewards for consumers who *voice* their goals (positive and negative). Hence,

consumers may be more inclined to engage the overall process of dialogue and interaction with the club, opening the door to even greater Collaborative Co-creation. This possibly leads to better informed management, enabled to achieve abstract goal congruity and thus value through co-production (Hirschman 1970; Wikström 1995; Kozinets 2007; Merz *et al.* 2009).

Setting up web tools whereby RAWK members can communicate all kinds of information with the club directly through the website is one possibility for managers (Dahan & Hauser 2002; Füller *et al.* 2007). An alternative would be represented by something similar to "innomediaries" (Sawhney *et al.* 2003). Innomediaries are third party actors who facilitate inter-party mediation and specialize in virtual dialogue with communities. This is an emerging area for marketing practitioners. Some examples of institutions that could provide such a service are NewBrandTribalism (http://www.newbrandtribalism.com/), TNS (http://www.tns-ri.co.uk/), or Seek Research (http://www.seekresearch.com/). Also, various academics who are expert in this area could be consulted. Because different firms and academics will specialise in different industries, it would seem that careful listening by management to consumers would be prudent before making any decisions on selecting who would best suit as consultant/innomediary.

Organizations may engage with "innomediaries" as a tool. However, given how fans on RAWK continuously strive for more direct interaction with the club, LFC, itself, innomediaries should perhaps only make up part of any potential solution. So, drawing on both RAWK data and woven in literature, it would appear that the surest route to successfully maximising a brand community philosophy in pursuit of embracing consumer-supplier Collaborative Co-creation (Wikström 1995; Füller *et al.* 2007), and consumer-supplier specific and abstract goal congruity, involves redesigning the entire business model and culture towards this end, not just a marketing department (Fournier & Lee 2009), nor by outsourcing what could be something that may become a core skill for many businesses in the twenty-first century, given the growing emphasis on collective learning in organizations as a core competence (Wikström 1995), particularly amongst SDL theorists (Prahalad & Hamel 1990 p. 82; Vargo & Lusch 2004 p. 5). Innomediaries can help, but appear not to be the full solution.

Illustratively, since new LFC club ownership arrived in October 2010, it is fascinating that there appears to be movement towards a more fan dialogical approach. For example, on the important issue of ticket pricing preventing younger or less wealthy fans from attending matches (mentioned earlier) (entry; non-entry; exit; re-entry), in December 2010, the LFC chairman said on the official website (BBC 2010b):

> we have been listening to supporters since we arrived at the club and one of the key things we have been told is to make sure a new generation of fans are always able to watch the team in action…As a small gesture of our appreciation of the welcome we have been afforded so far…we have decided to make tickets for the Utrecht game free for kids.

Another example is LFC's primary owner, John W. Henry's, twitter presence, where he can be seen holding regular discussions with various LFC fans on various issues (see [http://twitter.com/#!/john_w_henry]). John Henry has also exchanged letters with SOS (SpiritOfShankly 2011c). This may be because, as club captain, Steven Gerrard (quoted on ESPN 2011), pithily said, when referring to the issue of the parting of company between LFC and Roy Hodgson, team coach from summer 2010 until January 2011, "when the Liverpool fans turn against you you have to listen. They are Liverpool Football Club." Perhaps most compellingly, LFC have confirmed an 18-fan Supporters' Committee that will form a "consultation group" in direct dialogue with the club (Liverpool FC 2011). Overall, whilst it is still too early to conclude on new LFC management and ownership's willingness to engage with fans and allow fans to collaboratively co-create/control club policy/products/services/behaviour given how these affect fan community identity and culture, there are several examples which suggest it is an area to monitor, potentially in future research. The club may utilize VCs like RAWK as one resource to continue the key marketer task of listening (Fisher & Smith 2011), to fulfil their role as Collaborative Co-creators.

One tool provided in this thesis that may help is given in Chapter 3 as the *Grounded Theory Online Ethnographic Process*. It can facilitate understanding "why" consumers consume as they do. For example, the main concerns and abstracted goals of LFC fans on RAWK are outlined in this chapter and were discovered using this method. Fans on RAWK are "doing" fandom (Richardson 2007) online, given how much it "matters" to their extended identities

(Belk 1988; Grossberg 1992; Bettany 2007 p. 45). Concurrently, managers can use this method to seek to understand "how" consumers consume in a given context. Along with the method, the *Typology of Consumer Roles* is provided in this chapter towards this end. It may be used by managers or consumer researchers as a practical theoretical lens to qualitatively identify consumer engagement with each role or type of behaviour. Each role is an "ideal type" of behaviour to be compared with "real types" (existing cases) to explore how consumers consume (Jupp 2006 pp. 37-8). Some managerial implications of each role are provided on **Table 4.6:**

TABLE 4.6: MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS OF EACH CONSUMER ROLE FOR A FOOTBALL CLUB MANAGER AIMING TOWARDS BECOMING A COLLABORATIVE CO-CREATOR OF BRAND CULTURE

ROLE	MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS
Voice	Management can measure 'voice' through the simple qualitative lens of "positive voice" and "negative voice". It would appear that management should find ways to increase "positive voice" and decrease "negative voice". This may be achieved through listening to the qualitative nature of voice (positive and negative) to understand what management could change, improve, do more of, or less of.
Loyalty	Management may attempt to understand why consumers are loyal. For example, football fans on RAWK tend to be loyal due to their shared community identity, aspirations for success, and belief that they have a stake in controlling/co-creating this identity and success with other consumers and with the brand itself. Management could find ways to foster fans' ideal community identity, bring success on the pitch, and encourage fans to co-create with one another whilst also allowing them some control in club decision-making through consultation and dialogue. This way, fans' loyalty to the community could be channelled to encourage greater loyalty to the market. Managers can differentiate between loyalty to the market and loyalty to the community in this process.
Exit	Management could perhaps strive to understand qualitatively the consumer main concerns that lead to exit and potentially look to alter management behaviour and/or the brand's product/service offering in accordance with these concerns to prevent exit. Managers could be well served to beware of the latency in consumer exit from the market because lack of exit does not translate to positive emotion, and/or goal congruity/agreement, and/or a small expectation-experience gap amongst consumers. This is due to the lack of willingness to exit amongst some consumers who are very loyal up to a Tipping Point, like football fans. Managers can differentiate between exit from the market and exit from the community in order to understand what prevents each type of exit and to remember that they are not exactly the same.
Twist	Management could differentiate between positive twisting that reflects cognitive goal agreement, positive emotions, and a minimal expectation-experience gap, compared with negative twisting that reflects cognitive goal disagreement, negative emotions, and a large expectation-experience gap. Management can encourage positive twisting given how it represents fan co-creation of their culture. Managers could also use it as a source of innovation. Management can identify negative twisting to understand what drives it and perhaps strive to change manager behaviour and/or the brand's product/service offering as a result.

Entry	Managers can identify what existing fans believe is necessary to increase new fan entry and possibly change manager behaviour and/or the brand's product/service offerings as a result.
Non-entry	Managers can identify what barriers existing fans believe increase non-entry of potential fans and, then, possibly management could consider changing their behaviour and/or the brand's product/service offerings as a result.
Re-entry	Existing fans who have exited the market (e.g. boycotters) are often still members of the non-market community (e.g. RAWK). They also still care about the brand in many cases. Managers can engage with boycotters to understand why they boycott in order to possibly change management behaviour and/or the brand's product/service offerings to encourage re-entry.

Many marketing and SDL theorists stipulate that marketing should become a continuous learning process (e.g. Wikström 1995; Vargo & Lusch 2004 p. 5). Business managers looking to become Collaborative Co-creators may learn from consumers through observation of how consumers engage with the roles on **Table 4.6**. The observations of consumer role engagement should then be *used* by managers as consumer information for reflection and action; what Senge refers to as "real learning" (1990 p. 13). To do this, managers could adopt a SDL to co-create with consumers through integrating VCs into the design, production, and delivery of innovative product offerings (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004; Vargo & Lusch 2004; Füller *et al.* 2007; Payne *et al.* 2009), utilising a cultural (CCT) perspective of consumption, recognising its complexity and importance to the consumers themselves, and, of course, the importance of consumers themselves to the co-creation of the consumption culture (McCracken 1990; 2005; Kates 2006; Bengtsson & Ostberg 2006). Firms can create value through being responsive to customer requirements (Wikström 1995; Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004; Vargo & Lusch 2004; Marketing Science Institute 2010), or, what this thesis refers to as, consumers' "main concerns". Ultimately, the firm could aim for product/service offerings to be congruous with consumer "main concerns", thus mitigating against *exit, negative voice, negative twist*, and *non-entry*; while encouraging *loyalty*, *positive twist*, *entry*, *re-entry* and *positive voice*. These "main concerns" may be discovered through analysis of consumer engagement with any or all of the seven consumer roles (e.g., how consumers *twist* products, or how they talk about them (*voice*)).

So, greater management engagement with VCs as Collaborative Co-creators could help the firm/club develop a deeper understanding of "why" and "how" consumers consume and potentially achieve greater consumer-supplier specific goal congruity, greater consumer

satisfaction/positive emotion, and a minimization of consumers' expectation-experience gap [abstract goals; **Possibility 2** in section 4.34]. This can go beyond marketing programs to embrace a brand community philosophy, retooling every aspect of the organization (Fournier & Lee 2009). Resources could be deployed for company-wide collaboration with consumers as sources of competence and value creation (Wikström 1995; Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004; Vargo & Lusch 2004; Marketing Science Institute 2010; Porter & Kramer 2011). Encouraging all agents of the firm to interact with its brand community could stimulate closeness, nurturing company-community relations (Fournier & Lee 2009) as desired by fans on RAWK. This can lead to management and staff participation in consumer co-creation. One simple example that is eminently actionable by almost any firm occurred when a poster to an online sportswear forum claimed to work for *Reebok* and asked how they could improve their basketball equipment (Füller *et al.* 2007 p. 68). This simple approach may not fulfil a thorough form of Collaborative Co-creation, but it is certainly better than nothing, and would appear to be resource light.

Given the desire for mastery and control amongst many consumers in order for them to continually ritualistically embed a consumption object within their extended identity, it may be argued that the lack of control experienced by LFC fans and highlighted by them on RAWK is representative of their increasingly feeling "alienated" from what they co-produce: LFC brand culture (Marx 1844; Belk 1988; 2010; McCracken 1990; 2005; Slater 1997; Cova & Cova 2000). Sports journalist and Liverpool fan, Richardson (2011a), says that:

> Liverpool FC's anthem is *You'll Never Walk Alone* - but has this franchise left their fans behind? A generation who grew up watching football in the 1970s and 1980s now feels alienated by the clubs they followed as children. The instinctive connection between the terraces and the players has gone. A football ground used to be the centre of a community. Now it is just another out-of-town shopping mall.

So, Richardson says that many Liverpool fans are feeling disenfranchised and disconnected with/from the club. This alienation may result from Belk's (1988 p. 143) assertion that the labour of the individual adheres in the objects they produce and thus they identify them as part of themselves, as with fans who co-produce LFC. This leads to a desire for maintenance and control, something LFC fans on RAWK have claimed to have been

deprived of, especially during the Hicks-Gillett era. Such alienation appears attributable to much fan unrest, boycotting, and exit from the market. Richardson (2011b) also points towards the dangers this has, not just for fans in the UK who are becoming disenfranchised, but also for the Premier League itself, and its clubs, like LFC. This thesis finds LFC to be at the centre of a vast brand community, but one that has encountered many problems during this study. Richardson (ibid) similarly sees a diminishing trend. Richardson (ibid), like this thesis, refers to AFC Liverpool and says that thousands of LFC fans have shifted their interest somewhat, if not completely, towards AFC Liverpool largely as a response to 1) being increasingly priced out of the LFC community by LFC and 2) many fans' feeling that:

> their club is being run by people who don't have the best interests of supporters and the club at heart.

This thesis finds that fans may be interpreted as having acted on their feelings of alienation from LFC by reducing their co-productive engagement with the club in ways that were intentionally damaging to the club itself (e.g. through boycotts). This led to fans directing their co-creative tendencies in other ways elsewhere, beyond the marketed products/services created by LFC (Firat & Dholakia 1998) (e.g. by creating a fan-protest-jersey that would reduce LFC revenue, whilst also spreading the word of fan unhappiness with LFC; or creating AFC Liverpool). In doing this, fans can continue being co-productive, but in ways that they more readily identify with as "authentic" (Richardson 2007; Beverland & Farrelly 2010), rather than continually contributing to an organization that they 1) disagree with (goal incongruity), are 2) unhappy with (emotions), and 3) expect much more of (expectation-experience gap) [abstract goals].

According to Richardson (2011a), some fans of LFC no longer feel they are "involved" or "part of the team". This corroborates with evidence from RAWK. This is the result of many developments within LFC fandom that have created circumstances whereby some fans would rather, or have no other choice than to, create a new football club, AFC Liverpool. This is a problem for the fans themselves who would prefer to be able to afford to watch LFC and have a feeling of connectedness and community with the club. It is also a problem for LFC, given the lost revenue. But, it is importantly a potential problem for the overall product LFC offers to people who are *not* boycotting. This is particularly relevant to LFC's

brand culture and identity, given how fans are co-producers of what is being consumed by LFC fans worldwide (Richardson 2011b):

> When fans tune into the game around the world they are not just watching the football, they are also watching the fans. It's what makes English football unique, it's what makes it so popular around the world. You hear them every match in the stands, but you don't often hear their opinions.

Richardson (ibid) thus sees a necessity to "get the supporter's voice; hear what they are thinking, and hear what they really think about their modern game". This thesis studies this fan voice on RAWK and finds that LFC fans have many goals that have been left unfulfilled through their fandom of LFC in recent years.

LFC could potentially prevent this trend continuing into the future by embracing the management role of becoming 'Collaborative Co-creators' within LFC brand culture, allowing fans to increase their co-production within the club itself and its various decision making structures. It seems fans will continuously engage in co-productive practices that may be seen as "unofficial control" or 'Coincidental Co-creation'. However, in this study, fans have loudly claimed they have experienced a lack of "official control" in recent years. This has led to fans engaging in even more "unofficial"/coincidental co-production, some of which has been at odds with LFC and its goals, given the rise in fan alienation from LFC as a brand (particularly when it was owned by Hicks & Gillett). However, the club has an opportunity now to foster greater fan "official control" under current new ownership. This may be specifically striven towards through manager awareness of the seven consumer roles outlined in this thesis, if they are used as a lens through which to qualitatively understand fan behaviour, fan experiences, and fan motivations. Thus, the club may, in time, return to become something more reflective of what the consumers themselves want; something more reflective of fan goals and expectations through Collaborative Co-creation; thus, something fans will be happier to consume and co-produce and will be less likely to feel alienated from. This could have a mutual benefit for the club and the fans.

4.7   CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter outlines "why" and "how" fans on RAWK are consuming LFC. As the fan main concern, community membership and co-production of the LFC brand community is a pivotally important goal for ongoing fan consumption. Fans want the club to pursue specific goals/concerns congruous with theirs. Fans want to feel positive emotions as a result of their ongoing consumption of LFC. Fans also want their experiences as fans to live up to their expectations. In order for this to happen, fans want the club to be successful on and off the pitch. Fans want the club to be representative of the authentic LFC community identity fans desire (Grossberg 1992; Richardson 2007; Beverland & Farrelly 2010; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010). Fans also aim for a good consultative relationship with the club; one that allows for some element of fan control in club decision making processes and club behaviour. The nature of fan consumer behaviour in pursuit of these specific concerns and abstract fan goals, as mediated through RAWK, is theorized on a *Typology of Consumer Community Cultural Co-creative Roles*.

These roles represent a tool that may be used to help in managing a brand in the transformed marketplace of the early twenty-first century (Firat & Dholakia 1998). According to SDL and CCT, brand management is complex. Even consumers themselves will conflict ("governing" in Schau *et al.* 2009) over what the brand means or should mean ("historian" in Fournier & Lee 2009; see also Grossberg 1992) - their community identity. Smart companies should embrace the conflicts that make communities thrive according to Fournier & Lee (2009 p. 108). They should embrace diversity (Schau *et al.* 2009 p. 41). Particularly in the context of football fandom, there are always "ingroups" and "outgroups"; fans discriminate fiercely (Fiske 1992 p. 34; Grossberg 1992) ("staking" in Schau *et al.* 2009). Varying consumption contexts mean that rival teams' fans will have varying "main concerns" given their "oppositional brand loyalty" (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001 p. 420). Commercial managers should recognise the specific "main concerns" of their team's/brand's community, including its mythology and narratives; what makes it sacred to the fans of that club and not to others (see Richardson 2007).

Specific to LFC, there are features like the traditional club colours (red, white, and yellow) or the songs of the club (You'll Never Walk Alone). This club culture (community identity)

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has been co-created (controlled) by fans over generations. Fans still engage in such co-creative activities (Pongsakornrungsilp 2010) with a continuous flow of new players, managers, stories, songs, and events, being culturally embedded within LFC fandom year-after-year. This study refers to this as 'Coincidental Co-creation'. This process can only marginally be "managed" by the club. So, instead, LFC may attempt to encourage, support, and facilitate this process. This chapter outlines the manager role of Collaborative Co-creator towards this end and how the theoretical lens of the Consumer Role Typology, the Methodological tool of the Grounded Theory Online Ethnographic Process (detailed in Chapter 3), and the various practical implications and empirical observations (e.g. the main concerns) regarding fan consumption of a global sports brand, can all be used to help pursue this managerial role.

For example, marketing activities are not designed in a vacuum. So, they can make use of ongoing fan co-created symbolism (e.g. *twisting*) - that utilises popular stories, players' images, symbols, events, and songs - ones that are congruous with fans'/consumers' "main concerns" and what fans talk positively about - *voice positive*. Brand culture is not fully authored by managers, so investment of resources is required to facilitate other brand authors like fans. This way fans are prompted to continuously *twist* the brand culture in ways they deem valuable, through ongoing bricolage (Levi-Strauss 1968; Füller *et al.* 2007 p. 62), thus potentially encouraging *loyalty* to what fans themselves co-create through ritualistic attachment of meaning to it (Belk 1988; McCracken 1990). This could bring *unofficial control* (Coincidental Co-creation) and *official control*, mentioned earlier, more in tandem. When managers encourage both, the former becomes more *official*. Very relevant is the fact that LFC have, during the writing of this thesis, selected "a new supporter consultation group that it hopes will allow fans to help shape the club's future through regular and constructive dialogue with senior LFC officials" (Liverpool FC 2011). This appears constructive as observation on RAWK shows that the Hicks-Gillett era appears to have created fan alienation rather than loyalty, or satisfaction, and/or identification. Collaborative Co-creation may be one role LFC's new owners could adopt in order to further their apparent inroads towards a more interactive, consultative relationship with fans than the previous ownership regime.

CHAPTER 5   CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1   INTRODUCTION

Most successful businesses understand that, usually, their core purpose is to create customer value (Madden-Hallett & Ho 2011). CCT and SDL authors argue such value is often dependent on relationships existing between customers and the marketing firm and/or between customers themselves (e.g. brand communities) (see Vargo & Lusch 2004; Schau *et al.* 2009; Fisher & Smith 2011). Marketing literature highlights a problem that has developed in recent decades; that the inherent focus on the customer as a direct trading partner has largely disappeared because most marketing personnel have stopped interacting with customers (Webster 1992; Vargo & Lusch 2004 p. 8). This thesis finds the same problem in LFC fandom following observation of RAWK. The major contribution this thesis makes is to highlight the nature of this issue and provide examples of how the problem may be averted in future.

Many football fans are now highly active consumers utilizing new media such as the Internet in order to broaden the means through which they may 'consume' (broadly) their chosen club and thus co-produce its culture, a position that disagrees with technological determinism (see also McQuail 1994; Fisher & Smith 2011). This active consumption or co-production is observable on RAWK. Here, consumers co-create LFC brand culture, and thus value, together (Balmer 2006; Merz *et al.* 2009; Fisher & Smith 2011). This study finds on RAWK and in literature that "people will support what they help to build" (Burke quoted in Meister 2011). However, many fans on RAWK believe LFC has failed to allow fans to "build" facets of their club for much of the period of this study. Some building or brand cultural co-creation online by fans on RAWK can be observed augmenting traditional offline fan value creation. However, the findings here illuminate a predominant fan belief on RAWK that they were never, or are very rarely, consulted, contacted, or listened to, by LFC, either offline or online. Managers may respond to this through management engagement with their potential new role as Collaborative Co-creators, helping create value *with* consumers (Vargo & Lusch 2004; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010; Fisher & Smith 2011).

To do this, managers and researchers may find the method of the current study a useful tool (Chapters 1 & 3). The theoretical typology of consumer roles also provides a lens for

managers or researchers to use in attempting to understand how consumers consume (Chapter 4). This may also help explorations of what drives consumers, why they consume, in both specific (Chapter 3 & 4) and more abstract terms (Chapter 4).

5.2 CONCLUSIONS ABOUT COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP AND CO-CREATION IN FOOTBALL FAN CONSUMPTION

Consumers and marketers have been observed jointly building communities according to marketing and CR literature (e.g. Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; McAlexander *et al.* 2002; Fisher & Smith 2011). This thesis finds the same co-creation of brand communities and thus brand value amongst LFC fans on RAWK (Richardson 2007; Schau *et al.* 2009; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010). But, much of this co-creation is "unofficial", or fan instigated given the centrality of LFC to the fans' community identity (1). A considerable proportion of it does not involve LFC all that much, if at all. Many on RAWK dislike this lack of dialogue/consultation with the club given how it makes them feel they do not have enough control (2) over LFC, whilst still enjoying co-creation with other fans aiming towards the important specific concern of club success (3). LFC management thus has a potential opportunity in the early 21st century to engage moreso in building co-productive relations with its fan community to facilitate more fan co-creation in collaboration with the club, or at least with more evident support from the club, through some form of dialogue, listening (Fisher & Smith 2011), and relationship building (Fournier 1998). This is achievable potentially through the application of SDL approaches to marketing management coupled with a thorough understanding of theory surrounding the contemporary consumer provided by CCT (Vargo & Lusch 2004).

This may be more specifically done through management awareness of this thesis' Typology of Consumer Community Cultural Co-creative Roles. The typology may be used to monitor how fans engage with any or all of these roles and this has potential for LFC to help co-create a better consumption context in which LFC fans can consume. This way, the club can collaboratively (1) identify and outline specific goals/concerns congruous with those of fans, (2) deliver experiences that have a minimal gap with fan expectations, and (3) thus make fans feel more positively emotional. Doing this, given this study's interpretation of these three concepts as very important Abstract Fan Goals on RAWK, will potentially go

some way towards improving the service provided by LFC to its fans.

5.3 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

In CCT & SDL, brand meanings are interpreted (Scott 1994) and culturally produced by many authors/stakeholders, often during identity construction (Elliott 1994a; 2004; Lury 1996; Slater 1997; Fournier 1998; Muniz & O'Guinn 2001; Holt 2002; 2004; Bengtsson, Ostberg, & Kjeldgaard 2005; Bentsson & Ostberg 2006; Merz, He, & Vargo 2009; Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder 2011). This thesis links a CCT perspective, of RAWK, to managerial brand theory (SDL) to show how in-depth understanding of the brand through the consumers' eyes can augment one's understanding of brand management theory and co-creation of brand meaning and hence value (Arnould 2007). SDL promotes a relational, customer-centric, market responsive version of marketing (Vargo & Lusch 2004). CCT theory and methods focus on the complex nature of consumption in contemporary consumer culture. So, combining the two approaches, as stipulated by other consumer researchers such as Arnould (2007), Schau *et al.* (2009), and Pongsakornrungsilp (2010), has proven beneficial in structuring this research study and thesis. The deep understanding of the contextual nature of how and why a particular consumer (group) consumes afforded by a CCT perspective may be very useful to any organization looking to apply an SDL marketing approach that relies on being market-driven through market-sensing processes (Day 1999; Haeckel 1999; Vargo & Lusch 2004 p. 13; Arnould 2007). This could lead to an organization based on interactive learning that continuously pursues the goal of co-producing value with consumers (Wikström 1995); a fundamental element of the main concern of fans on RAWK.

Specific to CCT, this thesis' contribution relates predominantly to three of the four CCT streams outlined by Arnould & Thompson (2005). A major component of this study's interpretation of why fans consume concentrates on it being a form of "consumer identity project" (CCT stream) (Arnould & Thompson 2005) (e.g. Belk 1988). Fans work on and negotiate their identity through fan consumption. This involves fans attaching themselves to "marketplace cultures" (CCT stream) and communities, such as RAWK (e.g. Muniz & O'Guinn 2001). This study thus contributes the main fan concerns, abstracted fan goals, and consumer role typology to CCT to augment the conversational vernacular around these two

streams (consumer identity projects & marketplace cultures) (Rorty 1979; Arnould & Thompson 2007). Also, because RAWK is a form of new media and fans are observed in this study to be interacting and consuming via RAWK in an active, creative way, this thesis also contributes the main concerns, abstract goals, and typology of consumer co-creative roles to the CCT stream "mass mediated ideologies and consumers interpretive strategies" and to broader branding research given how fans can be interpreted as co-producing the culture and meaning surrounding the brand LFC in a way that can affect its value (e.g. Scott 1994; Holt 2002; Balmer 2006).

To the literature field of SDL, this study contributes a contextualised understanding of football fandom that links well to SDL's observation that goods and services in the market are used by consumers in identity provision and communication. Fans are observed co-producing the LFC brand throughout this process. The consumer roles in this thesis provide a typology that has potential relevance to SDL theorists' looking to gain a deeper understanding of how consumers co-produce brand culture and value with one another (e.g. on RAWK) (Vargo & Lusch 2004; Merz *et al.* 2009). SDL theorists also set out various theories of how marketers could help to co-produce value with their network partners (Vargo & Lusch 2004; see also Wikström 1995). Specific to football fandom on RAWK, this study finds a compelling potential need for such managerial approaches, as called for by fans themselves who continuously seek more consultation with the club. So, this thesis has attempted, in Chapter 4, to elaborate how this could possibly be done in the context of LFC using a combination of empirical evidence of why fans consume (what they want [specifically and abstractly]), how they consume, and how SDL theorists posit management may respond in pursuit of what this thesis refers to as the managerial role of Collaborative Co-creator. Three things a manager pursuing this role could benefit from being aware of are the abstracted fan goals relating to 1) goal congruity, 2) positive emotions, and 3) the expectation-experience gap. These are foundational to understanding why fans engage with the fan co-creative/co-productive role typology as they do.

Also, this study contributes the following to knowledge:

5.31　Method:

The Grounded Theory Online Ethnographic Process is a method constructed utilising various methodology literature as outlined in Chapters 1 and 3. It is inductive, exploratory, iterative, and emergent. It is thus ideally suited to a study requiring openness, without clear prior hypotheses, and geared towards understanding the cultural meaning of consumption to any group of consumers, particularly members of brand communities. This helps to answer research question 1.

5.32　Theory:

5.321　Formal Theory:

The Typology of Consumer Community Cultural Co-creative Roles is constructed through adoption of extant consumer behaviour theoretical concepts, used here as "roles", (primarily Hirschman's (1970) exit, voice, and loyalty, and Cova & Cova's (2000) twist). These are then adapted and refined to better reflect the specific empirical context of RAWK through their 'emergent fit' (Glaser 1978). This requires expansion upon each of the four roles through theoretical extensions (e.g. highlighting that voice may be positive or negative). Then, three entirely new roles are added; entry, non-entry, re-entry. The consumer role typology explains how fans consume, answering research question 3. This is detailed in Chapter 4 (see also **Table 4.5** for summary) alongside the three Abstracted Fan Goals. The latter gives a theoretically grounded interpretation of why fans consume that has been derived from RAWK observation. This helps to answer research question 2.

5.322　Substantive theory:

Thick description - In Chapters 3 and 4, this study's explanation of "why" fans on RAWK consume is provided through the substantive theoretical main concern, community membership and co-creation, and its three properties, success, community identity, and control. This provides a thick description of why fans consume as they do, grounded in ethnographic observation and interviewing of/with RAWK members. In detailing this thick description in this study report, various extant literature sources are utilised for comparison and emergent fit (see Chapter 2 & 4). This thick description may be helpful to the organization in question, LFC, if they wish to gain a deeper understanding of what drives LFC fans. This helps to answer research question 2. It may also be helpful to other football clubs and various other businesses if taken as "currently useful generalisations" (Leavy

2011) and if there is emergent fit. This feeds into both the academic and practical implications of this study's findings as follows, which help to answer research question 4.

<u>5.33   Practice</u>

The practical contribution and implications feature in the next section.

5.4   IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE: A SHIFTING PARADIGM FOR BRAND RESEARCH AND MANAGEMENT - FROM COINCIDENTAL CO-CREATION TO COLLABORATIVE CO-CREATION

In terms of any private or public sector policy makers/analysts, managers, or marketing practitioners, a primary implication of this thesis is the identification of both the reasons why fans in this empirical context, RAWK, consume and how. Community membership and co-creation of this community, its identity, success, and controlling aspects of it both culturally and at the specific club-level are integral to fans' substantive motivations to consume and interact via RAWK. Much fan co-creation appears to happen separately from involvement of LFC as a company. This thesis refers to this as 'Coincidental Co-creation'. This study finds scope for much greater proactive engagement between brand managers/marketers and consumers, thus aligning with much CCT and SDL literature. Combining this thesis' substantive understanding of why fans consume (section 5.322 and Chapters 3 & 4), with the abstracted fan goals and consumer role typology (section 5.321 and Chapter 4) allows the contribution of the general managerial role of Collaborative Co-creator (Chapter 4). This provides a potential means for 21st century managers to rise to the challenges provided by the increasing pace of change in consumer culture and global business as a result of postmodern conditions, not least the rise of new media, tribal/communal consumption, and increasingly autonomous, empowered, and controlling consumers. This helps to answer research question 4.

Thus, this thesis points towards ways firms and brand managers/marketers may attempt to foster and build stronger company-community relations (Fournier 1998; Fournier & Lee 2009) through increased dialogue, consultation, and collaboration through the manager role of Collaborative Co-creator, which can be moved towards with increased awareness of the

seven consumer cultural co-creative roles outlined in Chapter 4. The roles are summarized on **Table 4.5**, along with their managerial implications on **Table 4.6**. An awareness of these consumer roles and their implications provides a potential gateway towards greater firm knowledge of consumers. This is useful given the foundational premise of SDL that stipulates that knowledge is a fundamental source of competitive advantage (Vargo & Lusch 2004 p. 9). Another key facet of SDL is that the normative goal of marketing should be customer responsiveness (Vargo & Lusch 2004 p. 11). Hence, the role typology provides a potential toolkit managers may use to co-create value with consumers through co-production of brand culture in ways consumers agree with and are positively emotional about given the potentially small or narrowing gap between what consumers expect and what consumers experience. This requires that the firm becomes customer-centric (Wikström 1995; Sheth, Sisodia, & Sharma 2000; Vargo & Lusch 2004). Learning from consumers, who may be viewed as operant firm resources, may open up new channels through which the firm may tap into skills, knowledge, and ideas that originate amongst consumers themselves, and are thus likely to be valued by consumers as potential sources for organizational improvement, product/service innovation, and ultimately brand value (Wikström 1995; Vargo & Lusch 2004; Merz *et al.* 2009; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010; Fisher & Smith 2011). This could be viewed as a form of "bottom-up", flexible, open brand management, as opposed to the traditional "top-down" management-controlling approaches of classical marketing (Fisher & Smith 2011).

This could possibly be done through leveraging research tools and new sources of data (Marketing Science Institute 2010). The changing business landscape combined with emergent new technologies like the Internet is leading to new kinds of consumer behaviour and measurement (Firat & Dholakia 1998; Marketing Science Institute 2010). RAWK is one example of this new way of consuming. This paper presents the Grounded Theory Online Ethnographic Process as one means of pursuing an understanding/measurement of consumer culture in a specific context, such as RAWK, through inductive open-ended discovery of consumers' "main concerns" or driving goals (positive & negative), which fans pursue through engagement with co-creative roles that this thesis locates on a typology. Analysis of a specific consumption context utilising this typology as theoretical lens and

the aforementioned methods as research design will provide a potential tool to generate an interpretive understanding of consumer behaviour and consumer goals.

According to SDL, every business is an information business and how well a business embraces a marketing philosophy centred around knowledge, consumer understanding, and relationship building, will dictate how well the firm does, more often than not (Dickson 1992; Evans & Wurster 1997; Vargo & Lusch 2004 p. 10). An open willingness to learn from consumers could provide knowledge and information that facilitates delivering greater demonstrable value for consumers (Quinn, Doorley, & Paquette 1990; Vargo & Lusch 2004 p. 9). This value can be effectively created through coproduction with the customer (Wikström 1995; Vargo & Lusch 2004); what this thesis calls Collaborative Co-creation. This relies on the notion of the LFC brand itself being seen as a network, a means consumers use to experience connection with others (Fisher & Smith 2011).

5.5   LIMITATIONS

There is potential for this study to contribute to "exploitation" of the consumer, or finding ways towards "free labour", by/for the co-creating firm, according to Zwick *et al.* (2008), as mentioned in Chapter 4. This is avoided, as discussed in Chapter 4, through this thesis' recommendation that managers take on the role of Collaborative Co-creators to create mutually congruous goals, positive emotions for the consumer, and a minimization of the gap between what the consumer expects and what the consumer experiences. If this approach to co-creation is followed, it would appear that management could avoid exploiting consumers by conversely providing a better product/service to the customer that better fulfils their requirements, because it is borne out of a process grounded in a dialogical consultative frame, somewhat reflective of the ideal of the dialogic community which is all about each community member understanding the other (e.g. the club and its fans as one community) (Arnold & Fischer 1994), which contributes to its co-production.

The combination of SDL and CCT is promoted by some consumer researchers (e.g. Arnould 2007; Schau *et al.* 2009; Pongsakornrungsilp 2010). However, it is not the norm to do so. So, the intention of doing this within this thesis is to contribute to the enlargement of human discourse, a key aim of anthropology (Geertz 1973), in that, the combination here is

provided as a catalyst to further debate within marketing, management, and CR, on this issue. Even proponents of the combination like Arnould (2007 p. 58) mention that some CCT theorists may not share SDL's strategic interests. Nevertheless, Arnould (ibid) says CCT is a natural resource for SDL theorists given the parallelisms between the two areas. For some current discussions surrounding SDL, some linkages with CCT literature, and topics relevant to co-creation see the recent special issue of *Marketing Theory*, 'Critical Perspectives on Co-creation', (2011, vol. 11, issue 3).

It could be argued that just carrying out this research online misses some of the offline context including non-verbal cues and real-world ritualistic aspects of fandom. However, time constraints, geographical location (the researcher lives in Ireland, not the UK), financial limitations, and potential real-world access difficulties were issues that were considered when choosing an online context as most suitable here. The resulting study has thus allowed a research project to be carried out online, which would most likely have been impossible offline, given research resource constraints, and the findings have a relevance to fan interaction online and offline given the interaction between fans' consumption offline and online (e.g. they organised offline protests online). It could also be said that not all fans have access to the Internet possibly because of a digital divide. However, this study sought to focus on the fans who do have access, and who use that access to join RAWK in order to augment their offline consumption. Future research may help to add to the findings of this study also, if carried out offline.

This study only focuses on English speaking fans. However, a future study may augment these findings if carried out via other languages. The first language of the researcher here is English.

This thesis' findings are not absolute objective truths. They are provided as interpretations of football fandom on RAWK, thus adding to the overall conversational vernacular within CCT. They are open to revision, extension, and correction. They are context and time dependent. While they are grounded in observations of fandom, they are not a 'finished' theory. They are continuously in process and are presented only at a point in development. They are always modifiable (Glaser 1978 p. 4; Lowe & Kuusisto 1999 p, 173). This tallies

with GT, much CCT, and philosophical hermeneutics with its fusion of horizons (Gadamer 1960).

5.6   FUTURE RESEARCH

This study's findings focus on implications for consumers and managers. There is potential to extend the findings in future research by bringing in a broader stakeholder orientation (Freeman 1984). The customer-centric customer-supplier value co-creation sought by fans of LFC and thus implied by this thesis' managerial implications has the potential to improve football club brand marketing from the point of view of the fans. But, a broader stakeholder approach could embrace all parties affected by, or who can affect, the operations of a firm (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2011). This could be explored further.

It may be possible to carry out a similar study to the one reported in this thesis in an offline context to see if findings are different and thus incorporate these findings into the theory.

Also, this study could be replicated, online, at another club with that club's fans, to find similarities and differences across the two contexts. Another sport altogether could be explored to see if its fans hold any similarities to the ones observed following LFC.

To further refine this study's findings regarding specifically LFC fans, this study's method could be replicated on another web forum for LFC to potentially compare the two sets of data, findings, and theory.

Any further research on the substantive issues or theoretical insights contained in this thesis could also be done using other methods, including qualitative and quantitative ones, and in offline and online contexts; e.g. focus groups, structured interviews.

As an alternative to the customer perspective, a future study could carry out research at LFC or another club to get the organizational perspective and potentially expand upon the management role of Collaborative Co-creator using empirical evidenced gathered in a managerial real world context. It is possible that some management activities already show signs of increasing collaborative co-creation, as mentioned in Chapter 4 regarding LFC's

new ownership specifically. This can be tested for formally with a further study. It would require organizational access for data collection.

Considering the fact that LFC ownership changed in October 2010, during the latter stages of writing up this study report, and this thesis' finding that fans on RAWK display various behaviours as a direct response to their dislike of previous ownership (Hicks & Gillett), it may be apposite to re-investigate this consumption context. This may allow deeper understanding of why and how fans consume, given the apparently fundamental changes to the context, given new ownership.

There is potential to connect this study and its findings with other areas of literature, such as that in new product development, supply chain management, and innovation in strategy and management literature.

RAWK members' feelings of a lack of control over LFC affairs, particularly regarding decision making within the club as a business may be further elaborated upon in future research as a struggle over resources for agentic consumption. This struggle may be taking place between fans who want to, for example, make managerial decisions regarding ticket prices, and management and owners of LFC themselves who are powerful agents within this process. Potentially, there is a power battle underway here for scarce resources that could be explored and related to extant literature (e.g. Kozinets *et al.* 2004; Parmentier & Fischer 2007; Shankar *et al.* 2009).

The issues surrounding the potential for co-creative tendencies amongst consumers being viewed as potential sources of exploitative free-labour by some marketers, as highlighted by Zwick *et al.* (2008), show that there are ethical implications of football fans becoming more active and participative in their consumption and concurrent co-production of their brand community culture, or even being simply viewed as such. So, these ethical implications could be explored in more detail in future (see also Arvidsson 2011; Cova *et al.* 2011).

Fisher & Smith (2011), in a similar study of Indiana Jones fandom, find that there are similarities between online fan community co-creation and the "ideal speech situation". This is a topic that could be further investigated on RAWK.

Given that the domain of this research is online consumer interaction and how this relates to brands, it would seem possible that the theory here could be applied and related to literature on e-commerce and digital marketing, which focuses on more sales oriented interactions between sellers, their websites, and consumers (Barwise *et al.* 2006; Solomon *et al.* 2006).

5.7   CONCLUDING REMARKS

Glaser (1978 pp. 4, 39) presents four criteria for good GT as 'fit', 'workability', 'modifiability', and 'relevance'. The contribution of this thesis has 'fit' to the context of football fandom on RAWK because the findings are inductively grounded in the setting (Glaser 1978 pp. 4, 39; Connell & Lowe 1997 p. 172). The findings 'work' (Glaser 1978 pp. 4, 39) in explaining what is happening through breaking the consumption world of LFC fandom on RAWK down to understand why fans consume as they do (specifically/substantively [main concerns] and more generally [abstract fan goals]) and how fans consume (typology of consumer roles). The interpretive findings in this thesis are expressly open to change also. They are 'modifiable' (Glaser 1978 pp. 4; Lowe & Kuusisto 1999 p. 173), not presented as immutable objective truths or laws. Instead, they represent discursive contributions (McDonagh 1998 p. 602) to the overall body of theory surrounding consumer culture (CCT), its conversational vernacular. So, this thesis' findings are presented in a way that has sympathies with the approach of philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer (1960), Heidegger (1962), and Arnould & Fischer (1994), given how argumentation has been used to find what the present author believes is his best interpretation, but these findings are still only presented as a contribution to the overall rhetoric of consumer behaviour research, as opposed to espousing some immutable 'truth'. However, the findings are 'relevant' (Glaser 1978 pp. 4, 39) to the action of the area, LFC fandom, given how the approach in this thesis inductively resisted prior hypotheses, instead focussing on the fans' own words as the launch-pad for understanding, theory building, and insight generation. Hence, these customer perspectives are relevant to consumer

researchers, marketing researchers generally (e.g. SDL given it customer centric focus), and marketing practitioners who are interested in understanding why and how consumers consume in order to build more valuable relationships for both the firm and the customers.

From both a practical and an academic point of view, this thesis' findings also have potential relevance to football fans, football club management and marketers, football researchers outside of marketing, fan groups (such as RAWK, SOS, Supporters Direct), public policy makers in the area of sport, sportswear manufacturers, sport sponsors, football club suppliers, media (e.g. television rights deals, news journalists), football's governing bodies (e.g. The Premier League, The Football Association of England, UEFA, FIFA) and anyone interested in gaining insight into the culture of one of the largest, most established online fan groups of one of the most famous, admired, and successful football clubs in the world.

The ownership of LFC by Hicks and Gillett was a turbulent time for LFC. This period created much fan unrest, leading to protests, marches, rallies, unions such as SOS, a fan organization that aimed to take over LFC (ShareLFC), email campaigns against the owners, and even the creation of products, by fans and for fans, to be sold in direct competition to the official LFC products. This may be perceived as a negative motivation amongst LFC fans towards the club. However, fans saw this as action towards the exact opposite end; positive motivation. Fans want LFC as a club to do well and to be successful both on and off the pitch:

> Many fans…felt it a necessary step in order to help get the point across that we are not just customers of the club, we are what makes it successful, we are the ones that pay the players and staff wages, the ones that keep things ticking over, the owners are there to make sure the money paid [by fans] is money spent on improving the club as a whole (Xavier, fieldquote no. 138).

However, fans believed that the greatest obstacle to LFC's success (commercially and in football terms) was, in fact, the owners, Hicks and Gillett. As Xavier says (fieldquote no. 138):

[The fan protests and the Standards Corrupted jersey were not aimed towards damaging LFC] Not at all, everyone knew that it was a step that needed to be made in order to hurt Hicks and Gillett [where] it mattered, in the pocket.

To Xavier, the fan motivation throughout the period of protests, strikes, and alternative jerseys, under Hicks and Gillett, was always positive towards LFC, but became increasingly negative towards LFC's owners. Yeti carries a similar argument (fieldquote no. 139):

Think it became very clear that H&G thought of the club's money as their own…it highlights the difference between football as a business and football as a community asset….So yes I didn't put any money in to the club [LFC, during the latter period of Hicks and Gillett's ownership], but was happy to buy the [Standards Corrupted] shirt and [other protest] t-shirts and fund some of the [protest] flags, donate time to exploring ideas [to oust the owners] etc. It certainly increased my awareness of the commercial exploitation that's rampant in the game in general.

It may be argued that fans' poor experiences with LFC during the Hicks-Gillett ownership tenure may damage fans' willingness to spend money on official merchandise such as LFC jerseys, now that they have begun to produce fan alternatives. However, fans themselves point out how these fan alternatives were a protest against the owners, not against LFC as a community cultural entity:

As long as we see the money [raised through fan revenue] is going back into the club [LFC] as opposed to paying off the owners debt then no-one had a problem buying official merchandise, in fact some people first thing they did when [Hicks & Gillett] were ousted was go to the club shop [to buy official merchandise] ☺. [The fans did not have a problem with LFC making money or profits] It was that the club's profits were all going to service the [owners'] debt. Which was £110k per day in interest, basically a top players weekly wage every 24 hours [if the money was to be spent on football instead of debt] (Aqua, fieldquote no. 141).

Hence, as soon as new owners arrived in October 2010 (FSG), fans were happy to return to normality, where they could buy jerseys, attend matches, and so forth:

Many fans also couldn't wait to be able to purchase merchandise and tickets once the strike was over [when Hicks and Gillett were bought out] (Xavier, fieldquote no. 138).

FSG have promised to plough the money [raised through fan revenue] back into the club [LFC (unlike Hicks and Gillett did, according to fans' perception)], as far as I can see they have [reinvested revenue in LFC, rather than taking it for themselves, or to be used in paying off leveraged buy-out debts] – that being the case I've been happy to renew my membership [official LFC club fancard membership], go to games, buy kits for relatives etc (Yeti, fieldquote no. 139).

Another fan makes a strict differentiation between the previous owners (Hicks & Gillett) and the current ones, stating that the previous ownership's ways are entirely separate and unrelated to the new owners. Hence, most fans have been engaging once again with LFC since the new owners, FSG, took over:

It's important to remember that the owners are different people and just because one set of owners were bad, it doesn't have any bearing on the new ones (Zed, fieldquote no. 140).

Aside from purely financial, revenue generating interaction, this thesis also finds that fans consume in many ways that do not directly involve market transactions. Many of these involve co-creation (e.g. atmosphere co-creation). The ownership period of Hicks and Gillett saw fans becoming more and more disenchanted with how LFC was being owned and hence managed. Fans perceived a lack of consultation and engagement (co-creation) with LFC and blamed the owners for this. When the club's on the pitch performances deteriorated from 2009 onwards, fans increasingly engaged in actions such as protests and the Standards Corrupted jersey that were designed to starve LFC of revenue. This saw fans co-creating with one another (Coincidental Co-creation), but not with LFC, often through boycotts for example. It may be argued that Collaborative Co-creation between LFC ownership/management and LFC fans is now impossible, or at least more difficult, as a result of fans' recent protest activity, designed to starve LFC of revenue, when owned by Hicks and Gillett. However, fans themselves state that this is not the case. A reason fans wanted a change of ownership was because of the lack of what this thesis calls Collaborative Co-creation. Hence, new ownership's potential to engage with fans in a

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Collaboratively Co-creative way may well be *enhanced* rather than damaged as a result of fans' previously poor experiences, relatively. This thesis gives fans the last word on this:

> For me probably the opposite in fact – if FSG wanted greater fan engagement then I think they'd get it in droves – the exercise they ran for their fan committee was heavily subscribed…[Hicks and Gillett's ownership and the subsequent protest movement] has energised and made some fans more politically aware than before…When I try to think about the game logically I should walk away – I don't like the way it is or the way its going – but there is a ridiculous emotional attachment both for the club and the ties with friends and family that it creates that transcends those concerns – I would hope that the game becomes what I want [it] to be than give up on it – so at the moment I'm hoping for fan representation on the [LFC Board of Directors] and fully support SOS's objective for that (Yeti, fieldquote no. 139).

> Communication between the board and fans has always been an issue, not just at Liverpool but at most other clubs aswell, this is why fan ownership has such a strong backing and also why fan representation was wanted at board level…to [propose] ideas and recommendations from those that mattered [fans]. When FSG took over, one of the first things they did was seekout fan groups to get the basic gist of what it is that's needed to improve the club, they seemingly listened to the fans and also implemented certain measures that would improve the club such as increase commercialisation, however most important was that every fan group told them [FSG] to back and support the [football team] manager [financially, so he can buy quality players who are more likely to bring success], something which was [clearly] done during the first two transfer windows (Xavier, fieldquote no. 138).

> There has been a huge amount of damage done by G&H [Gillett and Hicks]. As a result, fans want their input to help safeguard what remains [of LFC] and hopefully repair what is damaged…In short, [Hicks & Gillett's ownership, and the resultant fan protest movement designed to starve LFC of revenue] hasn't changed my willingness to interact [with LFC in a collaborative way], because I think it's a good thing (Zed, fieldquote no. 140).

[Already, under FSG, the new owners] we do have some sort of fan engagement at the moment; my cousin…is chairperson of the Supporters Committee and there are a few members of Spirit of Shankly on the committee, as well as [my cousin] who's patron of SOS. If anything SOS and the fans in general want MORE of a contribution, with a lot of people feeling the committee isn't enough and simply paying lip service to the fans. [My cousin] tells me she believes in it though and that the owners appear to be genuine, and I trust her judgement, of course anyone can be duped but she wouldn't put her name to anything she didn't think was a genuine benefit to the fans.

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Publications and Call for Papers

Journal of Business Research

Special issue on

Virtual Dialogue: New Relationship Realities and Consequences

(Guest editor(s): Niels Kornum and Hans Mühlbacher)

In line with the tradition of conceptualizing marketing management as the attempt to manage a market according to the intentions of the company´s top management most of the literature focuses on methods of one-directional manipulation from the manager´s point of view.

The development of Web 2.0 provides innumerable opportunities for individuals and business organizations to communicate with each other in real time. While customers and other stakeholders spread news and heavily influence each other as well as business success, little is known about how virtual stakeholder dialogue changes marketing research, communication and relationship management practices.

Thus, this JBR Special Issue has several objectives including: (1) providing insights on which stakeholders may play what roles with what impact in Web 2.0 company- or brand-related communication and co-creation; (2) presenting and discussing findings of investigations into potential roles of marketers in that virtual interaction and (3) drawing conclusion for necessary changes in marketing management philosophy, communication paradigm, marketing research processes, and managerial practices.

Topics for the JBR special issue focus on, but are not limited to, the following:

- Marketing communication in virtual stakeholder dialogue

- Communicating with angry stakeholders in Web 2.0

- Multi-stakeholder co-creation of brand meaning

- Power relationships in virtual stakeholder dialogue

- Sophistication and complexity of multi-way brand-related communication

- Relational co-creation with stakeholders in virtual media

- Impact of Web 2.0 on stakeholder theory

- Network theory and virtual stakeholder dialogue

- Ethical issues in virtual dialogues with and among stakeholders.

Scholars seeking consideration of their papers for publication in this special JBR issue should communicate such intention to the JBR Guest Co-Editors: Niels Kornum, Department of Marketing Copenhagen Business School, Solbjerg Plads 3, 2000 Frederiksberg C, Tel: +45 3815 2876, Fax:+45 3815 2101 (nk.marktg@cbs.dk) and Hans Muehlbacher, Innsbruck University School of Management, Dept. of Strategic Management, Marketing and Tourism, Universitaetsstrasse 15, A-6020 Innsbruck, Austria (hans.muehlbacher@uibk.ac.at), Tel: +43 512 507 7200, Fax: +43 512 507 2842. Authors should submit their papers for the JBR special issue to Professors Kornum and Muehlbacher by 15 December 2010.

Deadline for submissions: 15 Dec 2010

Notification to authors: 15 March 2011

Deadline for revisions: 15 June 2011

Publication: July 2011

For more information: marketing@uibk.ac.at

APPENDIX B:

A similar call for this type of contribution is made in a call for papers in the *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* (see <http://ama-academics.communityzero.com/elmar?go=2367119>):

> Journal of Consumer Behaviour Special Issue: "Consumer-generated, Co-created & Shared Content Through Social Media: Challenges for Consumer Researchers."
> This issue will explore a wide range of topics related to consumer behavior through a social media enabled environment. Papers examining consumer participation and engagement in social media, consumer action and interaction through social media, and consumer creation and co-creation of content will be particularly appropriate.

Another call for this type of research appears from the *Review of Marketing Research* special issue *toward a better understanding of the role of value in markets and marketing* (http://ama-academics.communityzero.com/elmar?go=2370536) that aims "to bring focused attention to the topic of value (including value co-creation) in markets and marketing".

Similarly a call for papers for an upcoming special issue of *Industrial Marketing Management (*see http://ama-academics.communityzero.com/elmar?go=2371288) on value in business and marketing looks for holes/gaps to be filled in our understanding of the concept of *value* in marketing linking it to experiential marketing literature (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982). The call for papers welcomes research on the "involvement of supplier and customer in co-creation of value".

APPENDIX C:

Welcome to the **Red and White Kop** website.

Please take a couple of minutes to read about what this site is, and what it is not - it will give you ideas on how to get most from the site.

What this site is NOT.

1. Official. This site has neither official nor formal connection with Liverpool Football Club and Athletic Grounds plc.

2. A Business. We are not part of any media conglomeration; we do not have a constitution; we do not exist as a company, formal partnership, nor other business. We don't have a bank account. We're not trying to sell you anything. No-one is paid for their input to the site. We do not carry adverts.

3. A Pressure Group. The site hosts a lot of opinions on issues concerning the practicalities of being a Liverpool fan. There are some organised pressure groups and constituted organisations campaigning on the issues which may be discussed from time to time but this site is not the website of any such group. To be very clear: this is not the website of **ILSA** (The Independent Liverpool Supporters Association), Anfield Forever, **Free Michael Shields** nor the **Hillsborough Justice Campaign**, although many of the contributors to this site are members and committed supporters of those campaigns.

4. The News. Red and White Kop (or RAWK as we're often known) does not set out to be a news site on Liverpool FC; there are dozens of sites that do that, and we provide you with a full clickable index of their latest headlines in the Latest News section of the site. For breaking news we recommend you to look in that section and check the latest news stories.

5. Polite. You will find the whole spectrum of match-going vernacular here. (Eh ? You wha' ? The articles and features may contain swearing, mother. You best go make the tea.)

6. Very Serious. We have been told that the format of the site may make it look serious at first glance. We're not - remember that !

7. Censorious. You can say what you like how you like. The editorial policy will not impinge on what you say unless you're abusive, a racist, a homophobe, or promoting illegal activity.

What This Site IS.

1. About Liverpool Fans. All the contributions here are from Liverpool fans. All contributions are welcome.

2. Dedicated. An observation: the contributors to the site, the forums and the chatroom are passionate supporters from all over the world who pride themselves on supporting the team, and try not to whinge and criticise at the first setback because they think that their skill at playing Championship Manager makes them more knowledgeable than the manager. Whingers be warned!

3. Opinionated. Whilst this site is not primarily a news site, it will on occasions be a source of opinion on the news concerning the club and football in general.

4. Concerned with fan issues. Whilst we are by far the most successful club in English football history, we still have a ticket office which exasperates at the best of times; a lack of consultation with fans by the club; are witnessing an increasing role for corporate partners with agendas of their own within the club set-up and branding, and are witnessing ever greater disruption of our footballing patterns to meet the schedules of broadcasters. Apparently we used to play at 3pm on a Saturday. This site is a platform for outspoken and sometimes irreverent opinion on these issues, and will from time to time intervene on behalf of fans to gain

clarification of arrangements, etc.

5. A Huge Resource. Amongst the features the site contains:

- the Liverpool **Song Archive**, the biggest collection of Liverpool football songs ever published;
- the **Links Database**, a list of the best LFC sites on the net;
- the **Ticket Exchange**, a place for the face value exchange of match tickets between members;

6. A lively community. The site was launched by several people who were amongst the voluntary moderators of the hugely popular chat facility on the official website of Liverpool FC prior to the relaunch of the site in conjunction with Granada Media (at which point they were all dispensed with but were offered a nice scarf. Well, quite nice. Which some accepted.) Also some of the "launchees" were contributors to fanzines such as Red All Over the Land. So even though the site was only launched at the end of May 2001, it began with a small element of a pre-existing community. This perhaps explains why the **forums** and the **chatroom** are busy and vibrant!

7. Easy To Contribute To. RAWK offers lots of opportunities for you to add your opinions, comments and anecdotes. You can:

- Send a comment to any and every article. See the "Send Your Comment" button on the right hand menu on each article page.
- Submit an article. Either post your article in the LFC Forum and inform a moderator that you wish it to be considered for an article, or email your article to editor@redandwhitekop.net
- Use the forums and the chatroom.
- Express your views in occasional polls posted on the front page of the site.

We ask you to register before posting comments, articles and on the forums.

The data you supply here remains strictly confidential. It is not, and never will be, passed onto any third party, nor used for any commercial purposes. You will not receive junk mail from this site, although we may mail you to inform you of changes of url, and we may send you an email in the event of exceptional fan-related news.

All submissions are copyright of the contributor. In submitting materials to the site you are publishing them yourself, and you are responsible for the information contained in your submissions. They are your property.

Red and White Kop People

Everyone using this website is welcome to be involved and contribute. You will quickly discover some great articles from the likes of Alan Edge, Paul Tomkins, john_mac, Wooltonian, Garstonite, Pete Evo, Homesick, Kopiteno8 and others ...

Webmaster : Ben Scott - quite simply does all the hard work keeping the website up and running and, maybe most importantly, remembers to pay the hosting company on time!

If you have any technical questions email webmaster@redandwhitekop.net

Editorial: Steve Davies (Rushian) - Editor as he was the first to work out how to use the spellchecker. Once read First Aid to Grammar at school. Bob Kurac - Editor at Large (or is it largesse?) - the guiding hand on the tiller of the site's direction.

If you have any editorial questions, or want to submit an article or suggestion, email editor@redandwhitekop.net

RAWK "Governing Body": Dave W, Steve M, Gareth, Spartacus, Sair37, Lee J, Pheeny, Armin, Michael_A, Barney_Rubble, Graeme, Barrettski - moderate the forums, help decide on RAWK policy, prop

up bars on European trips and generally ensure RAWK runs smoothly.

Spyin' Kop: Contributed by anyone and everyone. Your chance to grill opposition fans on behalf of RAWK ahead of our matches. Pop along to the LFC forum and volunteer.

Away Ground Guide: Collated and written by Andy Roper, a guide to all of the 19 grounds we visit in the Premier League. Suggestions before/feedback after the Reds visit is always encouraged: The Away Ground Guide

Reserves and Academy Reports: Andy Philip, editor of the excellent **Liverweb** keeps us up to date with all that's happening at The Academy with his U18s match reports. AdamS takes the long trip to Wrexham's Racecourse Ground to see Rafa's fledglings tear up the Northern Division of the FA Premiership Reserves League.

Design and Graphics: In March 2004 the site was kindly redesigned by Paul Rogers from **onesparx**.

Appendix C: About RAWK

Source: **http://www.redandwhitekop.com/about.php**

APPENDIX D:

Table of English speaking LFC forums / virtual communities (VCs) on 15 July 2011

NAME	WEB ADDRESS	NUMBER OF MEMBERS	STATUS
Anfield Chat	http://www.anfieldchat.co.nr/	169	Independent
Anfield Index	http://www.anfieldindex.com/forum/	2,434	Independent
Anfield Road	http://www.anfieldroad.com	21	Independent
Anfield's 12th	http://www.anfield.org.hk/forum/	Unknown	Independent
Est 1892	http://www.est1892.co.uk	4,932	Independent
Famous Kopites	http://famouskopites.proboards.com/index.cgi?	Unknown	Unknown
Irish Anfield	http://irishanfield.netboards.org/	215	Independent
Irish Kop	http://www.irishkop.com/	4,254	Independent
Kopites.co.uk	http://online-nation.net/kopites/	Unknown	Independent
KopTalk	http://www.koptalk.com/	Unknown	Independent
Kopworld	http://kopworld.net/	1,544	Independent
Kuyt Fan Central	http://xxdirkkuytfanxx.proboards.com/index.cgi?	23	Independent
LFC Boston	http://www.lfcboston.com/	367	Officially affiliated to LFC
LFC London	http://www.lfclondon.co.uk	1,760	Officially affiliated to LFC
LFC Online	http://www.lfconline.com/	Unknown	Independent
LFC Reds	http://www.lfcreds.com	15,608	Independent
LFC Talk	http://lfctalk.com	439	Independent
Liverpool - Xtratime community	http://www.xtratime.org/forum/forumdisplay.php?f=26	Unknown	Independent
Liverpool FC 4eva Forum	http://liverpool4eva.proboards.com/index.cgi	44	Independent
Liverpool FC Discussion Forum	http://www.liverpoolfc-newkit.co.uk/	55,282	Independent
Liverpool FC Footy Forum	http://lfcfooty.forumotion.com/	523	Independent
Liverpool FC Forum	http://www.liverpoolfcforum.com/	3	Independent
Liverpool FC Official Forum	http://www.liverpoolfc.tv	192,570	Official LFC forum
Liverpool FC South African Supporters	http://liverpoolfc.co.za	Unknown	Unknown
Liverpool FC Supporters Club New York	http://www.lfcny.org/	1,027	Independent
Mighty Reds	http://www.thefootballnetwork.net/boards/list/s386.htm?734	Unknown	Independent
North American Reds	http://www.northamericanreds.net/	118	Independent
On The Kop	http://onthekop.com	1,834	Independent
RedAndWhiteKop	http://www.redandwhitekop.com/	35,946	Independent
Reds & Blues	http://www.relegation.co.uk/	247	Independent
Shankly Gates	http://www.shanklygates.co.uk/	493	Independent
Six Crazy Minutes	http://www.sixcrazyminutes.com	Unknown	Independent
The 13th Man	http://scouse.forum-gratuiti.com/f1-liverpool-fc	Unknown	Independent
The bOOTroom	http://www.bootroom.org	1,685	Independent
The L Files	http://www.liverpoolfc.com.au	442	Independent
The Liverpool Way	http://www.liverpoolway.co.uk/	2,214	Independent
The Rattle (RedAllOverTheLand)	http://www.raotl.co.uk/	1,823	Independent

The Road End	http://www.theroadend.co.uk	1,769	Independent
TheLFCForum	http://www.phpbb88.com/thelfcforum/index.php?mforum=thelfcforum/	71	Independent
This Is Anfield	http://www.thisisanfield.com/	15,398	Independent
This is Not Anfield	http://pentralcerk.omgforum.net/login	Unknown	Unknown
USLFC.com	http://www.uslfc.com	6	Unknown
Vital Liverpool	http://www.liverpool.vitalfootball.co.uk	Unknown	Independent
YNWA.tv	http://www.ynwa.tv	2,323	Independent

APPENDIX E:

Email to 'gatekeeper' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007) for the purposes of gaining permission for access to RAWK forum for data collection:

from	GatekeeperRAWK
to	Researcher
date	16 July 2008 16:25
subject	Re: RAWK Observer

Hi Jason,

We're supportive of requests from the world of academia on Rawk and we'll be happy to help.

You've certainly selected a contentious topic! Particularly from a Liverpool perspective. In part due to the takeover and rapid increases in ticket costs. Tensions between local and 'OOTers' or Out of town fans has been a regular topic on Rawk since I joined but each year the increasing scarcity of tickets and success and popularity of the side has made it ever more incendiary. It might be an idea for you to inform the staff before starting a research topic so that we can establish the ground rules and prevent it escalating into an uninformative tit for tat. You'll certainly not be short on responses and I'd advise you to invite submissions via email or PM whenever possible in order to get the responses as honest as possible.

Alternatively we have an archive of fan responses to exactly these issues which goes back 7 or more years. It may be interesting to track it alongside data concerning ticket access and pricing or the relative success of the side. Rawk draws its membership from a very wide spectrum and it's a useful resource for analysing ongoing conflicts and trends within the supporter base.

If you have specific questions or I can help further don't hesistate to ask.

Regards,

GatekeeperRAWK

The above email from 'GatekeeperRAWK' was a response to my email for permission, below:

Researcher wrote:
Hi GatekeeperRAWK

My name is Jason Healy. I am a researcher in Ireland. I support Liverpool and I am currently writing a thesis about football. My topic is to look at conflicts between clubs and fans (e.g. ticket prices, merchandise prices) and also between fan groups themselves (e.g. certain local fans who are opposed to fans who do not come from the locality).

I was wondering if I could use this web forum as a tool to gather opinion on such issues, mainly through observation of what others write? Anonymity is guaranteed.

The point of the exercise is basically to describe the problems with football from the fans point of view.
If you could help me with this I would be very grateful

Thank you
Jason Healy
Postgraduate Research Scholar
Dublin City University
email: jason.healy25@mail.dcu.ie

APPENDIX F:

Details of each of the 94 codes at coding phase 1:

39th game
Richard Scudamore, Chief Executive of the Premier League, proposed an increase in the number of games played by each team from 38 to 39. Many fans dislike this idea. The proposed extra game would be played abroad.

Access to Tickets
It is difficult to get tickets to many matches due to high demand. Various solutions put forward include loyalty schemes and an increase in the size of the stadium. Touts are an issue affecting access. Fans also dislike paying for loyalty cards.

AFC Liverpool
AFC Liverpool was set up to create a new club that would play grassroots football and allow attendance from those who cannot afford to watch Liverpool FC due to low ticket prices; adults are £5 and about £3 for children.

Affordability of travel to games
When fans discuss the cost of attending matches they usually mention a variety of factors including the cost of travel. Fans support the SOS travel arrangement schemes. This is a fan attempt to make travel more affordable.

Ageism
Occasionally, disputes between members on RAWK will show evidence of a minority of ageism, particularly from older fans who have condescending views towards younger fans who post on RAWK. This is very rare.

Andy @ Allerton (A@A)
Refers to a fan who attends games but only spends on the match-ticket and little else. It is neither a strictly positive nor derogatory label but many fans express fears that they are unwanted by the club given their low game-by-game spend.

Anti American
Discussions regarding whether or not it matters to fans if club owners are American, or even foreigners *per se*.

Approach to opposing ownership
Concerns how fans are discussing ways that the 'ownership problem' (Hicks & Gillett) may be remedied.

Approach to opposing ticket prices
Some, not all, fans believe ticket prices are too high. Those who *do* see prices as too high discuss various ways to tackle the problem, to show opposition; e.g. boycott games, or seek consultations with LFC management/owners.

Atmosphere
Fans discuss many ingredients that 'make' the match-day atmosphere; e.g., the sights, sounds, smells, flags, banners, and songs. The general RAWK consensus is the atmosphere at Anfield is not what it used to be.

Authenticity
Linked heavily to the code 'Real Fans.' Fans refer to the 'authentic' fan and fan-experience. They discuss how an authentic matchday has particular sights, sounds, smells, noise, flags and banners, all of which create an authentic atmosphere. Many fans have opinions on how LFC should be operated also, if it is to live up to their "authentic" LFC.

Big spenders vs Small spenders
Some fans see a divide between two types of supporters; wealthy and not so wealthy. Some believe LFC is not interested in less well off fans, favouring fans who can pay higher prices.

Boycott games
Some fans claim to be boycotting attending matches primarily for two reasons: high prices, and ownership problems.

Boycott merchandise
Some fans choose not to buy official club merchandise for various reasons: e.g., it represents rampant commercialism; it contributed to Hicks & Gillett's revenue.

Branding
In the majority of posts fans see selling the 'brand' to provide revenue streams for the club as a good thing. They tend to believe this to be a matter of quantity though; wanting the club to find more sources of revenue rather than exploiting existing sources (e.g. global marketing). Many do not want to see tickets prices rise. They do not tend to 'switch brands'.

Broughton
Martin Broughton, temporary Chairman (2010) put in place to oversee the sale of LFC from Hicks & Gillett to new buyers, eventually NESV, October 2010. Greeted with suspicion at first, Broughton left the club as a hero to many.

Charity
Whether or not the club is charitable receives some attention with most stories being favourable.

Club affairs out of fan control
Many fans voice concerns that the club is more concerned with commercial realities and big business than with grassroots supporters and how they feel about things. Many fans see protests or dialogue as tools fans may use for greater control.

Club Chief Executive
Rick Parry at time of majority of data collection (Christian Purslow from June 2009-2010; Ian Ayre 2010-present). There are a variety of discussions about the role of the CEO, and whether or not the job is being done satisfactorily. Fans view the CEO's role as making him responsible for providing a strong commercial side to operations to support the team.

Club Debts
From the time that Hicks & Gillett bought LFC, fans increasingly expressed concerns over the club's debt level and whether it would serve to bankrupt the club, given the leveraged buy-out arrangement.

Club Ownership
Hicks & Gillett for much of this study (NESV/FSG from October 2010). Hicks & Gillett were despised by most fans for various reasons including the leveraged buy-out, lack of new stadium, lack of investment in the team, poor relationship with the team manager.

Club PR Dept
Most fans see the need for LFC to have a good public image, with regard to a variety of issues. This touches on issues such as dealing with charities and local community schemes in a generous way.

Club relationship 'material' vs 'spiritual'
Fans often mention that football clubs operate on two distinct planes: the 'material' and the 'spiritual'. Fans see the spiritual aspects of club and fandom as related to notions of community, pride, passion, tradition, family, love, and religiosity or the 'sacred'. They often mention that the spiritual side of football is being despoiled by materialism.

Club reputation
Fans see the history and tradition of the club as a vital part of its make-up. Many consider the recent problems a stain on that history; with the ownership regime of Hicks & Gillett being the primary culprit.

Club website
Fans like the club website because it provides them with information directly from the club. But, some are critical of the price of the extra-features section, named the E-Season ticket at £5 per month.

Commercialisation of football
Broad issue, mainly referring to the variety of activities whereby the club directly 'makes money' or creates revenue streams. All activities outside of those directly related to developing a team to play matches. Some fans claim the club is becoming too commercial. Others claim this commercial awareness is necessary in modern football to compete.

Community
Discussions about the fan community and its importance.

Corporates
Discussions about how the club deals with corporate affiliates; e.g. sponsors, corporate fans. Some see such activities as betrayal of the 'traditional' average fan as his/her needs are not the priority. Others see the need for such corporate involvement in football given the large economic challenges and opportunities in the modern industry.

Disabled Fans
There are discussions about access to Anfield for disabled fans.

Expenses
Many fans believe that Hicks & Gillett being paid millions in expenses simply for owning the club was wrong.

Families
Fans often mention how family history has influenced their decision to support the club. Many fans point out how difficult this scenario is for families now given how expensive tickets and merchandise are.

Fan consultation
Fans broadly believe they deserve to be consulted on club issues large and small. Unfortunately, many fans believe they are ignored and most are supportive of responses such as SOS and ShareLFC that seek to address this.

Fan Hostility
Fan disagreements on a variety of issues may turn hostile. Sometimes this leads to moderators having to ban members.

Fan Representation on the Board
Many fans and fan organizations (e.g., SOS, ShareLFC) promote the idea of having a fan on the board of directors.

Fans patronized by the club
During the Hicks-Gillett era, many fans said they felt patronised by the club, that fan opinions appeared irrelevant to the club. Fans say they were not listened to and that there was no interface for supporter representation.

Fixtures
The fixtures list receives lots of attention as it lists forthcoming matches.

Freedom of speech on forums
During more heated discussions on RAWK, some fans claim their views are trampled upon by others, or are censored by moderators, thus questioning whether RAWK offers free speech to members.

Future
Mainly covers discussions relating to the potential for future success commercially and, primarily, on the pitch; e.g. transfer activity, club debts, aptitude of current players/manager. Fans believe they play a part in building the club of the future in many cases.

Government intervention
Fans see potential for government and/or regulatory intervention in football as a means to create their desired change in particular areas; e.g., ticket prices, ownership.

Hillsborough
96 Liverpool fans died as a result of a football match in 1989. This is a very prominent issue for fans, who regularly discuss topics surrounding respecting the dead, especially through their efforts towards justice via pursuing government inquiries into lies that were spread in various UK media outlets, subsequently shown as untruths in the Taylor Report.

Internal squabbles
Ongoing public squabbles between the former owners Hicks & Gillett; Hicks & Gillett and the CEO; Hicks & Gillett and the manager Rafa Benitez; between CEO (Parry at the time) and manager (Benitez). Fans believed the squabbles would have a negative impact on the club generally and on the performances of the team.

Kaka
The rumoured but failed deal for Brazilian player Kaka to move from AC Milan to Man City for £100million.

Kick off times
Kick off times were traditionally on Saturdays at 3pm but this has been changing, largely to allow for more games to be televised. Many fans dislike the disruption this causes.

Kop
Traditionally, the Kop end of Anfield was a standing terrace. While now it is all seated, The Kop is a big part of the history of Liverpool with the noise and colour it generates on matchday famous around the world.

Liverpool Manager
The team manager is continuously the subject of discussion with his performance under close scrutiny.

Liverpool Players
Fans discuss both past and present players for various reasons, often celebrating or castigating a player for his level of playing performance or his off the pitch behaviour.

Local community
Various posters believe rising ticket prices and extra costs such as the membership card scheme are pricing out local fans from being able to attend matches, particularly the working class from Liverpool City. Discussions also cover the need for the area around Anfield to be redeveloped.

Low income earners
Many fans, not all, fear that increasing ticket prices and the new membership scheme (£29 per year to access tickets) are pricing out low income earners. Fans believe that they are a captive market, so no matter how much the club charges, fans cannot just decide to switch 'brands'. To many it is similar to exploitation in a monopolistic system.

Media Interpretation of the club
Fans continuously discuss media reports about LFC and/or its fans. Ideally, they like these stories to be positive. They are sometimes sceptical of media reports, with a prime example being the lies about Hillsborough.

Membership
The new membership card scheme at £29 per season (started in 2009) brings a lot of debate on what the card means. Many see the scheme as a tax on loyalty. Others see it as a necessary part of top level commercial football.

Modern football
Fans are often nostalgic; many hark back to how football was historically to point out how things 'used to be better' in a variety of ways; e.g., player behaviour, club success, fan treatment, less commercialization, fan behaviour, prices.

Moores
A previous LFC owner. Fans tend to say he was a good owner, but his decision to sell to Hicks & Gillett was poor.

Nationalism
Posters tend to dislike comments that are perceived as nationalistic. Some posters claim to put club before country. However, there are some signs of what could be termed nationalism, given regular calls for more British players.

Newbies
Forum members with low post counts or who are only members a short period of time or both are often referred to as 'newbies'. Sometimes when posters are discussing a topic they may be reluctant to listen to or talk to new posters for reasons of lack of trust. But, this is incredibly rare, and tends to only occur with posters of single digit post-counts.

Official Liverpool Supporters Club (OLSC)
The scheme no longer exists but is very similar to the current official LFC membership. It received a lot of attention when the new membership scheme was launched as fans sought to understand the differences.

Ooters
An ooter is a fan not from Liverpool City or its vicinity. Most fans see ooters as a necessity in the increasingly globalized and commercialized football world. But, a minority take issue with ooters who are perceived to be taking tickets away from traditional local fans.

Opposition fans
Majority of discussion about other fans is positive. There are also 'guests' on RAWK who are openly supporters of opposition clubs. They are rare. RAWK members tend to seem interested in speaking to other supporters to gain their insights resulting from experiences supporting other clubs. Some discussions portray opposition fans negatively.

Opposition managers
Many discussions that refer to opposition managers tend to be negative. There are rare compliments though.

Opposition players
Fans are normally negative in how they discuss opposition players, but are positive sometimes.

Opposition teams
Fans often discuss which opposition teams they hate more and why. Occasionally, fans are complimentary. At other times, fans will size up opponents' good and bad points regarding football ability.

Players' wages
Fans tend to believe players' wages are too high, but, see a direct relationship between wages paid and quality of players. Hence, many fans worry that lower wages at LFC will mean lower quality unless all clubs' wages are lowered.

Prediction of results
Fans often discuss upcoming games attempting to predict the outcome; e.g., scoreline, scorers.

Premier League
Fans sometimes discuss what the Premier League has brought to the game of football, positive or negative.

Privacy
Sometimes fans claim their privacy is being invaded; e.g., many fans say the new membership card will be used by the club to track the spending habits of supporters on tickets and at the club store.

Private Matters
On rare occasions, fans are not willing to post details about something because they want it to be kept secret. The main time this happened during observation was when SOS were organising a street protest at Anfield, using the private messaging (PM) facility provided by the website as a tool to spread the word of the event only to trusted fans.

Profit Vs On-Pitch Success
Primary aim of fans is for LFC to win competitions/trophies. The commercial/financial imperatives surrounding such on pitch success are seen as a means to an end but a vital means nonetheless in modern football. It is a balancing act. Financial imperatives must not supersede football objectives, but they must not be ignored either; a thin line.

Real fans
Linked to 'authenticity'. Some define a particular fan as 'authentic', or not, based on various criteria e.g. embracing the commercial side of the club or not, protesting against the owners or not, agreeing or disagreeing on important issues.

Reclaim the Kop (RTK)
It is a fan group set up in 2006 as a response to a perceived reduction in the quality of matchday atmosphere at Anfield. They aim to regenerate this, often choosing to sit together with other RTK members (one group is Section 306).

Referees
Most comments about referees are that fans dislike them. They will often bring up poor-decisions made by referees in the past. Assistant referees receive the same treatment.

Reserve games
All discussions referring to the reserve team.

Revenue methods
Many fans believe LFC must generate lots of revenue if it is to compete on the pitch. However, many fans discuss whether revenue-raised is used with the ultimate goal being on-pitch success or, for example, if it is used to service debts leveraged onto the club by owners, as was perceived by fans during the Hicks-Gillett era.

Sandon
The Sandon is a popular bar beside Anfield.

Scabs
Term used in similar sense as it is during union work strikes; a pejorative term. Fans sometimes call other fans scabs for buying tickets in a climate of mass boycott, or if they are wealthier fans, who are sometimes perceived to be able to afford highly priced tickets that less well-off fans cannot.

Season Tickets
Season ticket holders are those who buy a ticket to attend all home matches in one season on a rolling basis. Various issues such as waiting lists for tickets and ticket prices are commonly discussed.

ShareLFC initiative
A group set up to gather registered signatories who will agree to pay a set amount each in order to buy LFC collectively, so taking it into fan ownership. It has taken a back seat for now with SOS coming to the fore in an alliance.

Singing
Singing songs on match days is an integral part of the fan experience. It is linked to the culture and tradition of the club with famous events and people being features of such songs; the most famous LFC song is 'You'll Never Walk Alone'. Some fans believe fans nowadays do not create as good an atmosphere as in the past.

Spirit of Shankly Supporters' Group (SOS)
Fan group set up to oppose the Hicks-Gillett regime and ultimately promote fan-ownership. It arranges protests and strives to act as a fan-voice in consultation with the club regarding issues important to fans.

Sponsorship
Fans see sponsorship (e.g. Standard Chartered) as a vital source of revenue for the commercial side of the club.

Style of play
Some fans discuss the importance of playing with an attractive style of play.

Sun Newspaper
There has been a fan boycott of the Sun newspaper since they printed inaccurate and offensive reports following the Hillsborough disaster that incorrectly blamed Liverpool fans for the terrace crush and subsequent loss of life.

Switching clubs
Posters do not contemplate switching to other clubs. They say it is impossible. They compare their support to a religion.

Team selection
Discussions before and after matches about which players should/should not start.

Terracing
Since the Taylor Report, standing in British football stadia to watch matches has been banned. The topic still comes up.

The Stadium
Anfield is LFC's home stadium. Much discussion covers fans' love for the stadium and its history. But, they also see the need to increase its capacity from 45,362 to comparable clubs' level (Manchester Utd 76,212; Arsenal 60,355).

Ticket Prices to attend matches
Prices are too high according to most fans. This prices many fans out of being able to afford to attend.

Traditions
LFC was established in 1892. It has won 18 league titles, 5 European cups, as well as super cups, FA cups, League Cups, UEFA Cups, Charity Shields, and various other trophies. This success is integral to LFC's history. Fans celebrate this through discussing former glories, players, managers, events, myths, or other aspects of their shared cultural traditions.

Transfers
Most fans perceive a direct correlation between quality of players in the team and the amount of success the team has. So, buying and selling of players is closely monitored by fans and they often propose players to buy or sell.

TV Deals
Fans see the revenue earned by the club as part of the Premier League collective television rights deals with broadcasters as a vital source of income when considering the commercial side of the club.

UEFA
Fans sometimes discuss the European football governance body and its President Michel Platini.

We 'are' the club/ Being the club
Many fans detail how they feel a sense of 'being' LFC. Many have a sense of ownership for various reasons, including having invested time and money over years/decades. The bond fans feel with LFC tends to operate on a deeply emotional and sentimental level.

What other clubs do
Fans continually bring up other clubs' operations in order to benchmark against LFC in various ways; e.g., commercial operations, ownership structure, on pitch success, treatment of fans, player and manager quality.

WUM
Acronym for Wind Up Merchant. It is generally used (WUM) as a derogatory term for someone who says something the others find offensive, unintelligent, or not agreeable with their opinions.

Young fans
Much discussion surrounds the status of young fans; e.g. whether they can afford to support LFC, whether they would choose LFC based on criteria such as success.

Youth development
Development of young talent at LFC's academy facilities is commonly discussed

APPENDIX G:

tickets at all unless the membership fee is increased by at least twentyfold - I'm sure they'd rather have each AIB member enroll directly in the new scheme. I've no doubt that if this were to happen (or even rumors of it doing so) would get even more people on board with where SOS are coming from.

Besides, what I think is most galling here are two things: not the money-grubbing so much (as most have said, who didn't see it coming) but just no headsup whatsoever and then the mealymouthing explanations of what exactly is happening and where it's headed. But most importantly, for these "initiatives" to be going into place *while still at Anfield* is a complete joke. It's well and good to say Arsenal or the Mancs are already doing it but it's apples and oranges. One thing to build/expand the ground to add corporate seats - another altogether to take away existing ones in some sort of farcical redistribution!

This sort of crap is happening all over of course but I've rarely ever heard of something *quite* like this, especially when it feels like the need to do any of it in the first place is supposedly so we can get a bigger stadium! >:(

Title: **Re: S.O.S - "BELONG" LFC Membership Scheme and Tickets for Corporates**
Post by: ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ on **July 9, 2008, 06:39:05 PM**

Dont think as many people would be arsed if everyone thought that this extra revenue would be given to Rafa or for the better of the club, but i think most have an idea of where it will really be going. Ill pay it but only because ill have to next year.
It was going to come sooner or later but it doesnt help that the 2 highwaymen convieniently have large sums to make up for.

Title: **Re: S.O.S - "BELONG" LFC Membership Scheme and Tickets for Corporates**
Post by: ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ on **July 9, 2008, 07:01:30 PM**

I think the reason that this is causing so much unhappiness lies in the fact that this new scheme, in essence, is a tax on your average Liverpool supporter.

I expected price rises, I think anyone with half a brain cell did, however I expected them to occur steadily and annually, rising to their highest point when we finally got into Stanley Park.

I think the majority of people expected rises in ticket prices, merchandise, programmes and Stadium Tours.

But to bring a completely new, more expensive and untested scheme in to replace an the fan card, which is compulosry if you wish to buy a ticket in any given season, will shock people. And it's clear that that shock is turning to Anger.

Appendix G: Example of open coding to hard-copy print out, without reader-labels

APPENDIX H:

Example of Turner's category card (1981):

Appendix H: Turner's Category Card

Source: Turner's (1981 p. 234)

APPENDIX I:

Future Post 5 P.189, 195, 197, 206

Post 6 P.1, 5, 9, 14, 15, 20, 22
24, 25, 29, 31, 32, 33
52, 53, 55, 70

Post 8 P.5, 7, 8, 10, 15, 26
32, 42

Post 11 P.24, 26, 33, 40, 43, 51
57, 58, 65, 68, 73, 75, 89
92

Post 13 P.13

Post 14 P.5, 15, 29, 74, 91, 101
157, 158

Post 15 P.3, 6, 11

Post 21 P.45, 63, 70

Appendix I: Hand Written Coding Card reference record without reader-labels

APPENDIX J:

(handwritten memo)

Memo   15 April 2010

Why Liverpool?

> its success
> its wide fan appeal (globally)
> personal knowledge + experience familiarised case of "cultural niche"

Why Rank?

> stats
> Google / Bing / Yahoo

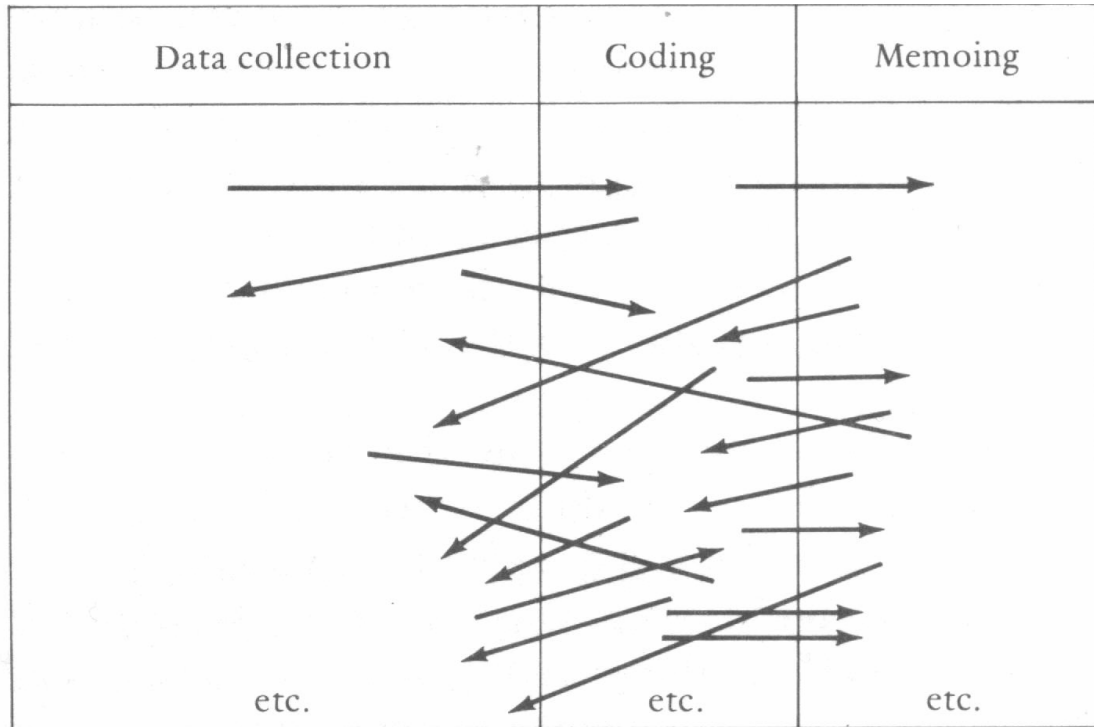In the "Data Collection" section make sure to (somehow) highlight + discuss the "participant observation" of Netnography + also the interviews, of "member-checking"

This must be discussed also → using either AM or PM to interview

— find some literature on it

Appendix J: MEMO EXAMPLE

APPENDIX K:

Data collection	Coding	Memoing
etc.	etc.	etc.

Appendix K: Coding Paradigm

Source: Strauss 1987 p. 19

APPENDIX L:

You'll Never Walk Alone by R. Rodgers & O. Hammerstein II

When you walk through the storm

Hold your head up high

And don't be afraid of the dark

At the end of the storm

There's a golden sky

And the sweet silver song of the lark

Walk on, through the wind

Walk on, through the rain

Though your dreams be tossed and blown

Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart

And you'll never walk alone

You'll never walk alone

Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart

And you'll never walk alone

You'll never walk alone

APPENDIX M:

To view the official LFC jersey, visit [http://www.liverpoolfc.tv/news/latest-news/new-kit-revealed]. Retrieved on 2011-05-09.

APPENDIX N:

AFC Liverpool official website: [http://afcliverpool.org.uk/go/].