



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI ROMA "FORO ITALICO"

Ph.D. program in Human Movement and Sport Sciences

XXXVI cycle

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A social identity approach to Italian football fanship, fandom, emotional attachment, and well-being.

Scientific Disciplinary Sector SECS-P/08

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Academic year 2020/2023

Table of Contents

Abstract	5
Chapter 1. General introduction	7
1.1 From sports consumers to sports fans: the role of identification and emotions. 7	
1.2 Social identity approach, fanship and fandom.....	8
1.3 Emotional attachment, fanship and fandom.	12
1.4 Social identities and subjective well-being	15
1.5 The live attendance effect.....	17
1.6 Identification and emotional attachment to team brand	18
1.7 General aims	20
Chapter 2. Exploring the identities of sports fans: A multidisciplinary systematic literature review on fan and team identification research	23
2.1 Introduction and research questions.....	23
2.2 Methodology.....	25
2.2.1 Review protocols	25
2.2.4 Search Terms	26
2.2.5 Search databases.....	28
2.2.6 Screen search outcomes.....	28
2.2.7 Extract literature	29
2.3 Results.....	31
2.4 Future avenues of research	38
2.5 Limitations	40
2.6 Conclusions	41

2.7 References.....	44
2.8 Appendix A.....	62
Chapter 3. Unveiling the emotional edge: An investigation of how fans' emotional attachment influences the relationships between fanship, fandom, subjective well-being, and attitudinal loyalty.....	95
3.1 Introduction and hypotheses	95
3.2 Methodology.....	105
3.2.1 Participants and procedures	105
3.2.2 Measures.....	107
3.2.3 Back translation	108
3.3 Analysis and Results	108
3.3.1 Measurement model	108
3.3.2 Structural model.....	109
3.4 Discussion	115
3.4.1 Theoretical implications	116
3.4.2 Practical implications	119
3.5 Limitations and future research.....	120
3.6 Conclusions	121
3.7 References.....	123
3.8 Appendix B.....	133
Chapter 4. Exploring sports fanship, fandom, emotional attachment and subjective well-being: A social identity approach to Italian football consumer-brand identification ..	141
4.1 Introduction and research questions.....	141

4.2 Methodology	148
4.2.1 Sampling and participant	148
4.2.2 Interview instrument	150
4.2.3 Content analysis	151
4.3 Results	152
4.3.1 Data analysis and findings	152
4.3.2 Results on Fanship and Fandom and Discussion	153
4.2.4 Results on Emotional Attachment and Discussion	160
4.2.5 Results on Subjective Well-Being and Discussion	166
4.4 Implications, limitations and future research	171
4.4.1 Theoretical implications	171
4.4.2 Managerial implications	173
4.4.3 Limitations and future research	175
4.5 References	177
4.5.1 Websites	182
Chapter 5. General discussion and future research	183
Chapter 6. Thesis conclusions	188
Chapter 7. General references	190
7.1 Websites bibliography	200

Abstract

The way sports consumers feel connected to their beloved consumptive objects is a key and strategic element in modern sports marketing and management. In particular, the degree of sports fans' identification with a team has captured significant academic and professional attention in the last thirty years. Emotions are crucial components in team identification and understanding how to interpret, monitor and address this emotional side can be a strategic lever for supply-side operators in the sports industry. In line with existing literature, this thesis supports and extends the distinction between the way fans identify with the team (i.e., fanship) and the way they identify with fellow fans and the surrounding fan community (i.e., fandom). Adopting the social identity approach (SIA) as a theoretical framework, this thesis aims at exploring the how fanship and fandom. Empirical data were collected from fans of two Italian Serie A football teams, namely S.S. Lazio and A.S. Roma. The proposed model highlights that fanship and fandom differ in terms of outcome variables. When fanship and fandom are high, elevated emotional attachment to the team has a negative moderating influence in the relationships between fanship and subjective well-being as well as fandom and attitudinal loyalty. Furthermore, when describing emotions raised by fanship and fandom, sports fans often underline negative, hurtful sensations as painful sporting episodes that have forged their own identification. In addition, this thesis underlines the peculiarities of live game attendance; the latter appears to foster the negative emotional attachment effects in the model and a focal element of fans' emotionality when fanship and fandom are investigated. This thesis has several elements of theoretical originality including: (a) advancing academic knowledge concerning fanship, fandom and emotional attachment to the team, proposing a structural model and first-ever qualitative investigation; (b) highlighting the importance of emotions and the centrality of subjective well-being when live game attendance is

explored; (c) a first-ever systematic literature review concerning fan and team identification research is here presented; (d) fanship and fandom research is here advanced in terms of Italian football industry peculiarities. From a managerial perspective, this thesis frames team fans as emotional stakeholders of sports organisations, thus highlighting how being able to anticipate, monitor and address the emotional sensitivity and needs is strategic to enhance core organisational objectives.

Chapter 1. General introduction

1.1 From sports consumers to sports fans: the role of identification and emotions.

Sports consumers are at the core of the broader sports industry, being simultaneously the principal agents of the demand side and the ultimate target for the supply side. Willingness to purchase sports-industry related services and products for satisfying is an essential characteristic of sports consumers. What distinguishes consumers from sports fans is open to debate. Generally, fans can be defined as those “individuals who are interested in and follow a sport, team and/or athlete” (Wann et al., 2001 p.2). However, for the purpose of this thesis, sports consumers experiencing stable and elevated levels of identification (Lock et al., 2014) and emotional bonds with a specific sporting object (Dwyer et al., 2015; Ladhari et al., 2022) should be considered sports fans. Indeed, when referring to team sports, a fan can be defined as “a human being who identifies with a particular sport club on a cognitive, affective and behaviour-specific level” (Bühler and Nufer, 2010 p. 65). According to Sashi (2012), sports fans are those consumers experiencing developed emotional bonds and relational exchange (i.e., fidelity and loyalty) towards a brand, thus producing sustained customer engagement. Accordingly, this thesis focuses on sports fans’ identification processes adopting the social identity approach (SIA) (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and their emotional attachment (Bowlby, 1982; Dwyer et al., 2015; Ladhari et al., 2022) in order to advance existing knowledge concerning sports fans. Indeed, identification and attachment are considered complementary constructs to disentangle complex consumers research (Sen et al., 2015). Furthermore, sports fans are key stakeholders for supply-side organisations and institutions (Senaux, 2008); as a stakeholders, sports fans are characterized by intense (a) power, (b) legitimacy, and (c) urgency (Senaux, 2008). While power consists in the

capacity to strongly affect decision-making, legitimacy relates to consensus-based capacity to ‘talk for’ and make claims for clubs, athletes or events (Mitchell et al., 1997). Urgency refers to the degree of prompt consideration required by the involved actors, including time sensitivity and evaluation of the demand criticality (Senaux, 2008). Given fans’ cruciality for the market survival and development of organisations, understanding, targeting and managing fans’ identification and emotional bonds with the beloved sporting consumptive objects is highly strategic. Indeed, this thesis supports the conceptualization of fans as emotional stakeholders of sports organisations, brands and athletes (Zagnoli and Radicchi, 2010).

1.2 Social identity approach, fanship and fandom.

Drawing from both self-categorization and social identity theory (Abrams and Hogg, 1990; Tajfel and Turner, 1979), the SIA assumes that individuals internally aim for their self-concept to be favourable. While personal and social identities coexist within one’s self-concept, groups are crucial social platform for this aspiration; more precisely, the self-concept is shaped and enriched by social identities emerging from memberships in groups in which individuals feel and desire to belong to (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). According to the SIA, social identity is defined as “that part of the individuals’ self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group/s together with the value and emotional significance of that membership” (Tajfel, 1981 p. 255). This traditional description evokes (a) the cognitive, (b) the evaluative, and (c) the emotional dimension of social identification.

Groups (or categories) exist and are distinguishable if four criteria are met: (a) a common identity is perceived to be shared; (b) a perception of being part of the same collective is shared as well; (c) interchangeability with other members is perceived; (d) two or more individuals are in line with the previous points (Turner et al., 1987). This process of *self-*

categorization makes shared identity possible for members (Turner et al., 1987). Activating a specific identity, group membership, participation and activities enhance the possibility for members to distinguish from out-group individuals and stimulating the creation of ‘us’ and ‘them’ identification divide.

In the sport management and marketing fields, the SIA has already been used as a theoretical framework to explore team identification and other fans’ identities (Lock and Heere, 2017). For example, Reysen and Branscombe (2010) distinguished between fanship and fandom (Reysen et al., 2017, 2022a, 2022b). Based on a traditionalistic understanding of team identification, *fanship* is defined as "the extent that a fan feels psychologically connected to a team" (Wann, 1996, p.331). The current thesis is going to consistently use the term fanship when referencing to all authors and previous works focusing on this vertical fan-team relationship. Conversely, *fandom* refers to the connection people establish with the broader fan group and other fellow fans (horizontal fan-to-fan relationship). It mirrors the traditional definition of social identity presented above and encompassing the cognitive, evaluative and affective dimensions (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010; Tajfel, 1981). In more simplistic terms, according to this perspective, fanship refers to the individual connection to the team or club (i.e., personal identity). Meanwhile, fandom expresses one’s sense of fellowship with other fans and the broader fan community of the favourite team (i.e., social identity) (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010). While this thesis draws and extends this line of research (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010; Reysen et al., 2017, 2022a, 2022b), this manuscript offers additional theoretical contributions to further develop existing conceptualization of fanship and fandom distinction.

Since fanship mirrors the traditional conceptualization of team identification, it stands as a highly researched theoretical construct (Delia and James, 2018; Reysen and

Branscombe, 2010; Reysen et al., 2012, 2022b). On the contrary, fans' social identification with the broader fan community has started being explored only more recently, under different labels such as fan community identity (Gordon et al., 2021; Yoshida et al. 2015a, 2015b), sense of community (Yoshida et al., 2018), fan community attachment (Yoshida et al., 2015c), and fandom (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010; Reysen et al., 2017, 2022a, 2022b). Consistent with Reysen's work, this thesis retains the label 'fandom' to refer to individuals' social identification with their team's fan community.

Adopting social identity theory and comparing samples of fans of various interests including sports, music, media, and hobbies, Reysen and Branscombe (2010) demonstrated a correlation between fanship and fandom regardless of interest categories and provided a specific measure for fanship. Moreover, these authors tested fanship and fandom distinction and they observed that constructs' items fitted perfectly in two distinct factors (study 4). Researchers investigated fanship and fandom in terms of their associations with fans' well-being (e.g., psychological, self-esteem, happiness); however, the results of these investigations are equivocal (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010; Reysen et al., 2017, 2022a, 2022b). While Reysen and Branscombe (2010) found that both fanship and fandom were positively correlated with happiness perceptions, more recent research by Reysen et al. (2022b) has found only fandom to display a significant association with well-being through the mediation of friendship volume (study 1) and participating social activities (study 2, 3).

Focusing on the strength and importance of a specific identity within the self-concept, Shuv-Ami and Toder Alon (2023) conceptualized and validated the Fan Social–Personal Identity Salience (FSPIS) scale based on the SIA. The FSPIS is an instrument capturing the mixed and simultaneous magnitudes between personal and social identity strength. Shuv-Ami and Toder Alon (2023) found a moderate correlation between the measures of

personal and social identities, highlighting the statistically significant relationship between the two constructs. In the context of professional Israeli football, Toder Alon and colleagues (2022) investigated the discrepancies between personal and social identity strength in predicting positive and negative aspects of being a fan. Their findings underlined that social identity strength was indicative of both positive (e.g. loyalty) and negative sides (e.g. perception of fan aggression appropriateness), while personal identity strength was associated with less negative outcomes (Toder Alon et al., 2022).

When individuals identify with a group, they are expected to express and exhibit consistent group loyalty, particularly under perceived external menaces to the group's social identity (Ellemers et al., 2002; Van Vugt and Hart, 2004). The SIA posits that in the face of identity threats—whether they are status, moral, or distinctiveness-based (Barreto and Ellemers, 2002; Ellemers et al., 2002) or arise from negative group outcomes (Turner et al., 1984)—high identifiers express high levels of group cohesiveness, attraction and ultimately loyalty.

At the individual level, previous research has highlighted the stability and persistence of fanship as the psychological connection with the beloved team (Lock et al., 2014) and its positive association with attitudinal loyalty (Matsuoka et al., 2003; Stevens and Rosenberger, 2012). Investigating Australian rugby league fans, Stevens and Rosenberg (2012) observed fan identification to be a better predictor of team loyalty (interpreted in both behavioural and attitudinal contents) than following sport and team involvement.

Ellemers and colleagues (2002) argued that high identifiers with a group facing the fear of being excluded (or potentially excluded in the future) are expected to react by (a) perceiving higher ingroup homogeneity, (b) accepting (or not accepting) a more peripheral group position, and (c) display group prototypical behaviours, particularly in social occasions. This last consideration relates to the existence of a tacit 'non

abandonment' rule "which conveys that once people become involved in a group, they must show their loyalty, especially when the group most needs it—in the presence of an attractive exit" (Van Vugt and Hart, 2004, p. 588). As groups hold normative attributes, the SIA posits individuals who strongly identify with those groups are more influenced by group-induced norms than low-identifiers (Smith et al., 2007; Terry and Hogg, 1996). More often, high identifiers remain loyal to their groups as they are more positively and favourably biased towards fellow ingroup members with respect to potential advantageous alternatives – group-perception hypothesis (Van Vugt and Hart, 2004). Relationship marketing research revealed that fanship predicts loyal intentions towards the team – in this case, attending future games - and in this relationship high identifiers with the team are less affected by satisfaction with (a) game score, (b) performance quality and (c) contest excellence than low identifiers (Matsuoka et al., 2003). Thus, even in the potential lacking conditions of satisfaction, high identifiers with a team are expected to remain loyal to the team (Matsuoka et al., 2003).

1.3 Emotional attachment, fanship and fandom.

The SIA posits emotions and emotional values are elements of group identities (Tajfel, 1981, 1982). In some empirical cases (Hinkle et al., 1989; Karasawa, 1991), the affective dimension of identity was found to be more influential than its cognitive counterpart in strengthening group identification; this phenomenon appears to occur when the group membership is meaningful to a person and deeply rooted in the self (Tajfel, 1982). Researchers have investigated the relationship between team identification and discrete emotions (Biscaia et al., 2012; Prayag et al., 2020), emotional support (Inoue et al., 2015, 2019, 2022; Katz et al., 2020), positive and negative emotions (Madrigal, 1995). However, although SIA-based conceptualisations and studies concerning emotional attachment have been provided (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000; Paxton and Moody, 2003),

prior team identification research has not investigated how emotional attachment is linked with fanship and fandom. Focusing on this relationship is intended to extend research exploration of the affective side of fan identification.

Indeed, in consumer research, it has been argued that while identification exhibits cognitive and evaluative connotations before encompassing the related affective meanings (Tajfel, 1982), attachment tends to capture the degree of emotional bond consumers have with consumptive objects and organizations (Sen et al., 2015). Thus, identification and attachment are deemed as complementary constructs to understand complex consumer-organization connections (Sen et al., 2015). This thesis focuses on individual-level emotional attachment which remains unresearched notwithstanding previous calls for further research on this construct in connection with identification (Dwyer et al., 2015). At the individual level, emotional attachment to a team refers to the sum of what fans cognitively invest in terms of bonding and passion (i.e., investment) and the corresponding emotional volume perceived as being received from the team. It consists of energization, happiness, delight, and emotionality (i.e., dividend) (Dwyer et al., 2015; Ladhari et al., 2022).

Although it has been underlined that general consumers may identify with a brand without really creating emotional bonds with it (Sen et al., 2015), team fans form relatively stable and persistent identification (Lock et al., 2014) as well as long-lasting emotional attachment with the team (Dwyer et al., 2015; Sen et al., 2015). Specifically, through long term direct experience, fans who individually identify with a team create an emotional attachment towards the team (Dwyer et al., 2015) which eventually affects perceived satisfaction (Paxton and Moody, 2003). As team-oriented cognitive investment and emotional dividend increase their magnitude, identified fans perceive a sense of protection and security from team-induced positive emotions (Sen et al., 2015; Thomson

et al., 2005) and higher satisfaction with the club (Ladhari et al., 2022); eventually, emotional attachment to the team has the capacity to strengthen the relationship between personal identification with the team and the relative psychological benefits (Lee et al., 2002; Sato et al., 2023). Building on this evidence, emotional attachment is expected to strengthen the relationship between fanship and SWB.

Recent empirical research on football fans highlighted that sports fans' emotional attachment to a team brand positively predicts loyal attitudes (Park et al., 2010) and resistance to change (Lehmann et al., 2008). Hallberg (2003) observed that emotional attachment was a significant predictor of brand loyalty. Similar results have emerged in a recent investigation of Canadian hockey fans' emotional attachment to the supported team brand (Ladhari et al., 2022).

At the social level, when ingroup members feel high emotional attachment towards the group the relationship between fandom and perceived well-being is expected to be strengthened. This argument appears in line with SIA-based conceptualizations of social identities which entail emotional components in their definition and total value (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). As emotional values and meanings in group membership rise, group membership-induced self-esteem is also expected to rise (Abrams and Hogg, 1990; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Accordingly, the higher the emotional bonding a fan has with fellow fans, the stronger we would expect the relationship between fandom and subjective well-being.

Furthermore, the SIA posits that when high identifiers perceive significant emotional attachment to the group, they are expected to further engage in group participation and activities, thus fostering loyal attitudes (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000). Indeed, "in-group favouritism provides opportunities for members to express their emotions and direct their action tendencies in a way reinforcing the positive affect associated with membership"

(Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000 p. 563). The sense of belonging and the emotions attached to this cognition (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000; Paxton and Moody, 2003) are deemed to strengthen and positively moderate the relationship between identification with ingroup members (i.e., fandom) and loyal attitudes.

1.4 Social identities and subjective well-being

In order to explain the link between fanship, fandom and subjective well-being (SWB) this thesis draws from literature based on SIA to health and well-being (Haslam et al., 2009; Inoue et al., 2022; Jetten et al., 2014, 2017). SWB is defined as “people’s evaluations of their lives—evaluations that are both affective and cognitive” (Diener 2000, p.34). A significant volume of research has confirmed that, when social identity is salient (i.e., active) in the operational self-concept, being a member of a social group provides individuals with self-esteem enhancement (Tajfel, 1982), purpose in life, control, and efficacy (Jetten et al., 2017). Moreover, Haslam and colleagues (2009) argued that salient social identities can help people gain access to: (a) coping resources in the face of mental or physical stress; and (b) social support via interaction with other members of the group. Simply put, social groups with which one identifies with have the potential to perform as ‘social cures’ via ingroup interconnectedness which promotes well-being (Inoue et al., 2022; Jetten et al., 2014, 2017).

Researchers proposed that identifying with a team positively correlates with various well-being outcomes (Branscombe and Wann, 1991; Inoue et al., 2015, 2017, 2022; Wann, 2006; Wann et al., 2017). Branscombe and Wann (1991) initially found that fanship stimulated feelings of belongingness and heightened self-esteem. Subsequent investigations confirmed these results, highlighting fanship’s capacity to positively predict psychological (eudaimonic) and social well-being and positive emotional (hedonic) states (Inoue et al., 2015; Wann et al., 1999; Wann and Pierce, 2005).

In line with positive social identity-induced health advantages (Haslam et al., 2009; Jetten et al., 2014, 2017), existing literature supports a positive association between fandom and fans' SWB (Reysen et al., 2017, 2022a, 2022b). In addition, when both fandom and fanship were investigated as predictors of fans' SWB, fandom displayed a stronger relationship with well-being than fanship (Reysen et al., 2022b). Indeed, while fanship alone is not deemed to be positively associated with socio-psychological well-being and needs the fundamental role of social connections and activities to strengthen this relationship (Inoue et al., 2015, 2017, 2019; Wann, 2006), fandom directly captures social interconnectedness. (Reysen et al., 2022b).

The interaction effects between fanship and perceived satisfaction with identified organizations appear to predict loyalty more intensively than solely through fanship (Matsuoka et al., 2003). Bodet and Bernache-Assollant (2011) provided empirical support for a model in which satisfaction with a team brand positively predicts fanship which in turn positively and directly affects loyal attitudes towards the team. Importantly, satisfaction with services' and products' experiences is considered an essential part in the overall consumer well-being (Lee et al., 2002).

Furthermore, as expressed by SIA research on health and well-being, high ingroup identifiers are expected to receive positive feelings from group membership which in turn is deemed to enhance additional psychological resources for coping with eventual stressing or disadvantageous situations (Haslam et al., 2009; Inoue et al., 2022; Jetten et al., 2017). At the same, health-oriented group norms are expected to influence more high identifiers stimulated to preserve group membership and continue engaging in group activities (Jetten et al., 2017). In the occurrence of identity threats or negative group outcomes (Turner et al., 1984), group membership has the potential to foster individual

well-being which in turn might positively affect identified fans' loyal attitudes towards the team (Jetten et al., 2017).

1.5 The live attendance effect

Live sports spectatorship provides fans with experiential opportunities to: (a) express their personal identification with the supported team and social identification with fellow fans, (b) foster personal development through social interactions, and (c) gain psychological resources to cope with disadvantages situations (Inoue et al., 2017; Reysen et al., 2017, 2022b; Wann, 2006). Live game attendance appears to enable behavioural and psychological engagement with the team and fellow fans, thus stimulating well-being perceptions (Inoue et al., 2017, 2019; Pawlowski et al., 2014; Reysen, et al.2022b).

Indeed, it has been argued that social interactions and activities strengthen the relationship between fanship and psychological well-being (Wann, 2006). In addition, the relationships between fandom and different forms of well-being were shown to become strengthened through participation in social connections (Reysen et al., 2017) and event attendance (Reysen et al., 2022b). Thus, through the experience of both interpersonal and intergroups social interactions, fans who are at a live game is expected to display stronger relationships between fanship, fandom and SWB than non-attendants.

Moreover, during sport games, fans—especially those who are high identifiers—tend to perceive enhanced emotional exchanges with other fans (Doyle et al., 2016) and express intense emotional responses (Cialdini et al., 1976). Indeed, at the individual level, identified fans' direct experience with the supported club (e.g., stadium attendance) was found to enhance the emotional attachment to the organization itself (Ladhari et al., 2022). Attending game appointments can: (a) materially stimulate and express the feelings of being bonded and attached to the team (Dwyer et al., 2015); (b) foster fans' feelings of joy (Biscaia et al., 2012), happiness and love (Prayag et al., 2020) which are

elements of the emotional divided of fans (Dwyer et al., 2015; Thomson et al., 2005). In-group interactions and activities are expected not only to activate relative social identities but also to significantly raise in-group members' emotional attachment to the group (Bergami and Bagozzi, 1999).

1.6 Identification and emotional attachment to team brand

Drawing from the SIA and brand community perspective, in the last fifteen years, researchers explored not only sports fans' (personal) vertical ties with the supported brand, but—more relevant to the current study—the (social) horizontal ties among fans (Katz and Heere, 2013; Yoshida et al., 2015a). In the beginning, this research stream focused on the effects of multiple associated group identities on fanship and consequential behavioural outcomes (Heere et al., 2011; Heere and James, 2007). Furthermore, there is another line of work that has explored antecedents and consequences of fan community identification (Gordon et al., 2021; Yoshida et al. 2015a; Yoshida et al., 2015b). In the contexts of Japanese professional football and baseball, fan community identification had a significant association with team brand equity and four behavioural consequences: positive word-of mouth, fan community engagement, member responsibility, and customized product use (Yoshida et al., 2015a).

Bauer and colleagues (2005; 2008) found that football club fanship stands as most significant symbolic brand benefit predicting loyal attitudes toward the team brand (2005). Stadium attendance, news media consumption, club-related merchandise purchasing and wearing club colours appeared to be the most consistent loyal among football fans (2008). Moreover, the specific emotions connected to football brands need to be considered as key experiential benefits (Bauer 2005; 2008).

Rooted in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982), brand attachment has been conceptualized and investigated as “an emotion-laden target-specific bond” between a consumer and a

brand (Thomson et al., 2005 p. 78). Previous studies identified a strengthening effect of emotional attachment to the brand in the relationship between brand identification and customer loyalty (Hallberg, 2003). In particular, conditions of high cognitive investment with a club are expected to positively influence consistent behavioural loyalty suggesting an irrational, sacrifice-like engagement to the team (Dwyer et al., 2015; Ladhari et al., 2015).

Loyal behaviours of consumers were found to be predicted by the interaction between consumers' identification with the brand and satisfaction with the sports products and services (Bodet and Bernache-Assollant, 2011; Matsuoka et al., 2003). Satisfied consumers tend to witness high level of consumer well-being (Lee et al., 2002) and, in turn, engage more with the brand. Being spectatorship fundamentally based on experiential products and services, these last considerations are heavily amplified among identified fans. Indeed, Sato and colleagues (2023) recently investigated the relationship between football fans' identification with the supported brands and perceived happiness. Findings underlined a positive association particularly through direct event experience (Sato et al., 2023). Similarly, a study focusing on football fans in Portuguese La Liga reported a positive direct association between feelings of joy and advantageous behavioural intentions towards the team (Biscaia et al., 2012); satisfaction and loyal behaviours were found positively associated as well (Biscaia et al., 2012). Furthermore, Lee and colleagues (2018) provided a multidimensional scale encompassing 24 emotions that sports fans may recall when referring to a particular sporting brand. Connectedness, elation, competitiveness, surprise, anger, unhappiness, and worry are the seven dimensions recognized by the related scale (Lee et al., 2018)

This thesis draws from football brand identification and brand fan community literatures in combination of fanship and fandom research: this perspective is used to explore identified fans' emotional attachment to the team (brand) and well-being perceptions.

1.7 General aims

Since traditional team identification research does not distinguish between fanship and fandom and this element has been recognized as a significant research gap in the field (Reysen et al., 2022b), the broad purpose of this thesis is extending the exploration of these two constructs. Moreover, the current manuscript introduces emotional attachment to the team in team identification research responding to previous scientific calls for further investigation (Dwyer et al., 2015); specifically, the main aim of this thesis is exploring the interactions and complementary dynamics between fanship, fandom and emotional attachment and how these constructs relate to perceived well-being among sports fans. Starting from this general aim, different subordinated research objectives are targeted in the following chapters. To begin, this thesis considers crucial the understanding of actual research gaps and trends in a developed area of scientific investigation such as team and fan identification research; accordingly, a systematic literature review of the existing scientific production is here presented and discussed. This study aims at providing relevant information concerning empirical findings, theoretical backgrounds, methodological and sports contexts of sampled references as well as outlining future research avenues.

Secondly, this thesis aims at investigating the influence of emotional attachment on the relationship between fanship, fandom and subjective well-being. In order to fulfil this aim, the second study proposes and tests a hierarchical structural model enabling also a between-groups analysis to control the moderating effect of live attendance on the tested hypotheses.

Furthermore, research on fanship, fandom and emotional attachment appears to lack a qualitative understanding of these constructs; this thesis aims at filling this gap through an interview-based study encompassing a content analysis of fans' considerations concerning the key constructs researched in this thesis and a frequency analysis of the specific emotions that fans' attach to team brands. Accordingly, the rationale behind the third study is not only to deliver an original qualitative exploration of the key constructs presented in the current thesis but also an in-depth investigation concerning the relationship between emotional attachment perceptions and brand identification.

Finally, a residual and minor aim of this thesis is to explore Italian football context in terms of the involved constructs. Italy is a football-centric sports system counting just over 24 million fans (Stage Up/Ipsos, 2023) who tend to be passionate concerning their own team. However, to date, there is a lack of scientific knowledge relatively to Italian football fans for what concerns their different degrees of identification, emotional attachment and well-being perceptions. Although different studies have been investigating team identification in similar European sociocultural contexts (e.g., Spain, Greece) (Palau-Saumell et al., 2022; Theodorakis et al., 2010), Italy displays a peculiar national culture whose characteristics have been found to be different from other European counterparts (Cucchi, 2010; Girlando et al., 2004; Milosevic, 2019; Morris and Waldman, 2011). In terms of Hofstede's cultural dimensions (2001), Italian nationality has been found to express (a) elevated masculinity, (b) high individualism, (c) uncertainty avoidance, (d) ordinary citizens' low acceptance of power imbalances (Girlando et al., 2004; Milosevic 2019). In a comparative study based on Hofstede's model (2001), Milosevic (2019) reported that Italy is the most individualistic country with respect to Germany and Serbia. Accordingly, given the elevated degree of individualism Italy might hold highly interesting cultural features affecting fanship and fandom research (Reysen

and Branscombe, 2010; Reysen et al., 2022b); thus, the empirical studies presented in this thesis are going to focus on this sociocultural context.

Chapter 2. Exploring the identities of sports fans: A multidisciplinary systematic literature review on fan and team identification research

Portaluri, G., Vicentini, F., Mura, R. and Mason, M. (submitted in April 2024), *Journal of Management*.

2.1 Introduction and research questions

Fans and supporters are crucial stakeholders for the existence and development of the broader sports industry. Whether labelled as supporters or fans, they are sports consumers feeling a connection with specific sports products or services (Wann et al., 2001); thus, they experience both personal and social psychological dynamics possibly anticipating consumptive behaviours and well-being patterns.

Since the early 1990s, sports consumers identification has become a highly researched way for segmenting and targeting sports fans and has been coming to the fore as a ‘hot topic’ in sports marketing and management academic fields ever since (Lock and Heere, 2017). Scholars from these but also from contiguous research areas – including sports psychology, communication, - have been exploring antecedents and consequences of sports consumers’ identification; originally, this research area observed how the degree of identification with a team or a sport could influence fans’ different consumption behaviours, including also willingness to pay (Wann and Branscombe, 1993) and match attendance (Wakefield and Sloan, 1995). More recently, the identification of fans has been linked to various forms of well-being - e.g., psychological (Wann, 2006) and subjective (Inoue et al., 2017) - as well as social interaction effects (Inoue et al., 2017; Reysen et al. 2022; Wann, 2006).

In a theoretical review and framework development analysis, Lock and Heere (2017) underlined the theoretical unclarity as well as the overlapping use of terminologies – e.g., team identity and fan identity - and measures in sports fan identification research; importantly, the authors underlined the distinct peculiarities of the two dominant, most

adopted theories in sports consumers identity research, namely identity theory (IT) and social identity theory (SIT). In line with the theoretical framework outlined by Lock and Heere (2017), this study consists in the very first systematic literature review (SLR) concerning sports consumers' identification. To the current date, any SLR appears to exist when it comes to this research topic, notwithstanding the decades-old research field and, most importantly, the previously- highlighted theoretical and terminological blurriness within it (Lock and Heere, 2017; Delia and James, 2018).

Accordingly, this SLR aims at understanding how sports fan and team identification research has been developing through the theoretical lenses of SIT and IT; specifically, this paper is going to highlight sub-topics, terminologies, methodologies, and results featuring existing literature. Eventually, the aim of this SLR is to underlined research gaps and possible future avenues for research which in turn can help scholars and practitioners in addressing forthcoming studies. Consequently, this manuscript proceeds by strongly setting the specific goals, structural steps and the review process protocol identified in order to carry out this SLR; clarity in methodological sections is a fundamental and necessary aspect in SLR (Tranfield et al., 2003; Snyder, 2019) and the specific process flow diagram, in PRISMA form, is included. Furthermore, extracted data concerning set research questions are presented and described here below graphically and verbally. A final conceptual framework integrative of result synthesis, takeaways as well as both theoretical and practical propositions for future research will be outlined. Among various forms of literature reviews, the SLR consists in a process characterized by scientificity, transparency, and reproducibility (Tranfield et al., 2003); SLR entails setting specific goals, structural unambiguity, biases minimization, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria and provides strong scientific support for authors' decisions and conclusions (Tranfield et al., 2003; Linnenluecke et al., 2020). SLR has been said to be

highly functional in the business and management research areas and has become a frequent tool accordingly (Tranfield et al., 2003; Linnenluecke et al., 2020).

In the last decade, although SLR has emerged as useful tool in sports management field, the latter still appears quite limited in terms of. The current SLR is performed following the methodology outlined by Snyder (2019); structural steps in this process include (a) design, (b) conduct, (c) data abstraction and analysis, and finally (d) structuring and writing the review (Snyder, 2019).

In line with its purpose, the current SLR aims at answering the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: Which are the main topics developed in sports fan and team identification research adopting SIT and IT?

RQ2: What are the research methodologies used and results highlighted?

RQ3: What are the geographical and sport-related characteristics of sample analysed?

RQ4: What are the evidenced research gaps and potential future directions?

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Review protocols

Figure 2.1 represents the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) flowchart of this SLR. This PRISMA has been here adapted from previous SLR works in the sports management field (Thomson et al., 2023). Literature research comprised published references from 1990 up to 2023. Table 2.1 shows the adopted criteria for reference inclusion and exclusion. Only peer-reviewed scientific articles adopting SIT and/or IT – even in combination with other theoretical frameworks or models (e.g., social identity approach, self-categorization theory) - were included. Criterion C was due necessary being this study a very first SLR on the selected topic which, in turn, is consistently researched in the mentioned fields, adjoining to sports management and marketing;

accordingly, including documents from other fields was thought to be a strength of this review. In addition to inclusion criteria (see Table 2.1), reference exclusion was mainly based on the lack of research focus on sports team identity and identification – criterion E.

Table 2.1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria	Content
Criterion A		Adoption of SIT or/and IT.
Criterion B		Peer-reviewed scientific journal articles or review articles.
Criterion C		Academic sources from Sports Business and Management, Sports Communication, Sports Psychology, Sports Sociology.
Criterion D		English language-written articles.
	Criterion E	Lack of research focus on sports team identity and identification

Source: Authors' own elaboration

2.2.4 Search Terms

Since no previous SLR focused on the researched topic could be found, the authors could not use pre-used, referential keywords in this research. Thus, before proceeding to the Boolean research, key terms and research strings were discussed and agreed upon by all the authors (Creswell and Creswell, 2018); although providing a profound explanation of all keywords is out of the scope of this SLR, a clear outline of this terminology appears needed and is presented in Table 2.2. Accordingly, in all databases, we searched for nine strings within titles, abstracts and keywords as follows: (("identity theory") AND ("sport fanship identity" OR "sport fandom identity" OR "team fanship identification" OR "team fandom

identification” OR “team supporter identity” OR “team supporter identification” OR “sport fan identity” OR “sport fan identification”). We used ‘identity theory’ as a proxy of social identity. Researched strings contained three words; although this practice might lead to a widened researched area and extremely diverse records, this result appears in line with the endorsed approach of the current SLR.

Table 2.2. Definition of research key terms.

Terms	Definition
Social Identity Theory (SIT)	Broad framework emerging from social psychology and its social constructivist nature (Tajfel, 1982). At the original core of this theory sits the focus on (a) the conditions under which intergroup conflict occurs and (b) how people attach specific meanings and values to group membership. According to SIT, people aspire to group membership since the latter enhances peoples’ self-esteem and multiples social, group identities coexist together with personal identities within self-concepts (Tajfel, 1982; Abrams and Hogg, 1990).
Identity theory (IT)	A symbolic interactionist approach which stresses that through social structures in which they live, individuals identify with multiple roles and situations (Stryker, 1968; Serpe, 1987); values, expectations and meanings are attached to social roles and situations, thus leading peoples’ behaviours in the social context (Stets and Burke, 2014).
Sports fan/supporter	“Individuals who are interested in and follow a sport, team and/or athlete” (Wann et al., 2001 p.2).
Identity	Framed as one of the parts of the self. IT scholars refer to meaningful roles while SIT posits the distinction between social and personal identities.
Identification	Process through which fans perceived to be connected to and identify with sports products, services or groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Wann and Branscombe, 1993).
Fanship	Personal connection with a sports object. In different SIT-based works, this term has been used to refer to the personal identity of sports fans

	(Reysen et al., 2022; Reysen and Branscombe, 2010).
Fandom	Previously framed as the social identification with other fans of the same sports object and the surrounding fanbase community (Reysen et al., 2022; Reysen and Branscombe, 2010).
Sport	“All forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, are aimed at maintaining or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels”. (Art.2.1, Council of Europe, 2021).
Team	In sports consumer identity research, it has been found to be composed by three macro-level dimensions: (a) scalar and different geographical and socio-cultural understandings of place attachment, (b) past memories, glories, iconic individuals; (c) present players, coaches, managers, rituals, facilities (Delia and James, 2018).

Source: Authors’ own elaboration.

2.2.5 Search databases

A systematic retrieving approach was adopted with respect to three well-established, electronic databases, namely Web of Science by Clarivate Analytics, Scopus by Elsevier and SportDiscuss in EBSCOhost. Search literature resulted in 318 documents from Web of Science, 198 from Scopus and 61 from SportDiscuss.

2.2.6 Screen search outcomes

Full record files were downloaded from the three search databases and uploaded to Covidence online software; the latter was used to collect, remove duplicates, screen, filter, and export references throughout all the review procedure. Initial 578 references were imported for initial title and abstract screening. At this first, gathering stage, 359 duplicates were automatically removed by the software and one additional duplicate was removed manually. Relatively to title and abstract screening (Stage 3), authors divided sampled references equally and

independently reviewed them; before moving to the next phase, authors reviewed double checked the removed articles together in order to maximize the control on whether these references actually fell off the inclusion/exclusion criteria. Thus, the decision-making process was thoroughly shared. At this stage, 218 studies were screened and accepted, while 90 studies were excluded. The majority of excluded records did not meet criterion A or did not encompass a key focus on sports fan identity/identification (Criterion C). Accordingly, 128 studies were assessed for full text eligibility (Stage 4). Among these papers, 13 additional references were excluded for either failing inclusion/exclusion criteria or being residual duplicates.

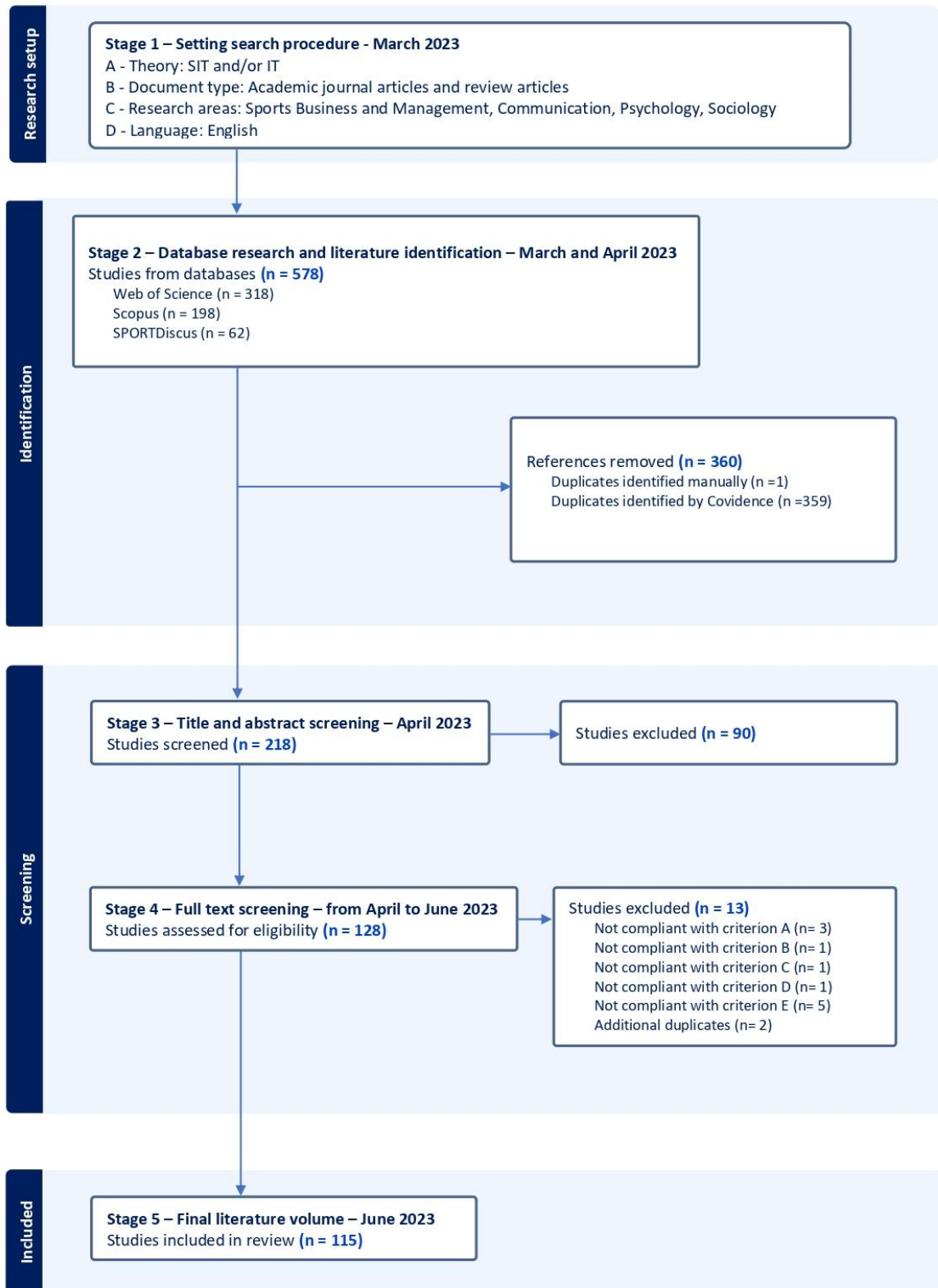
Eventually, 115 references were included in the final literature bulk (Stage 5). Review quality standards were guaranteed by both the continuous personal monitoring and sharing between the four reviewers; minimal controversial judgements were discussed, agreed upon and solved in unanimity, eventually.

2.2.7 Extract literature

Covidence software was also used to systematically extract bibliometric, descriptive, and analytical data from the 115 articles. The latter were parcelled out equally between the three reviewers. All the information concerned with the 4 RQs of SLR were extracted. Eventually, a standardized spreadsheet could be downloaded from Covidence; the same file was uploaded to IBM SPSS Statistics version 28. Simultaneously, BibTeX files including the final reference volume were exported from the sampled databases; these files included all the accessible information concerning the references and were uploaded to Biblioshiny, an add-on system of R's Bibliometrix platform. IBM SPSS Statistics and Biblioshiny were chose to carry out statistical and analysis respectively.

Figure 2.1. PRISMA summary of systematic review process.

Fan and team identification



Source: Authors' own elaboration on Covidence

2.3 Results

In line with inclusion criteria C, Table 2.3 represents the distribution of the 115 sampled articles across the four areas of research. Almost 60% of the final selection belongs to Sports Business, Management and Marketing research area.

Table 2.3. Sports-related research areas distribution.

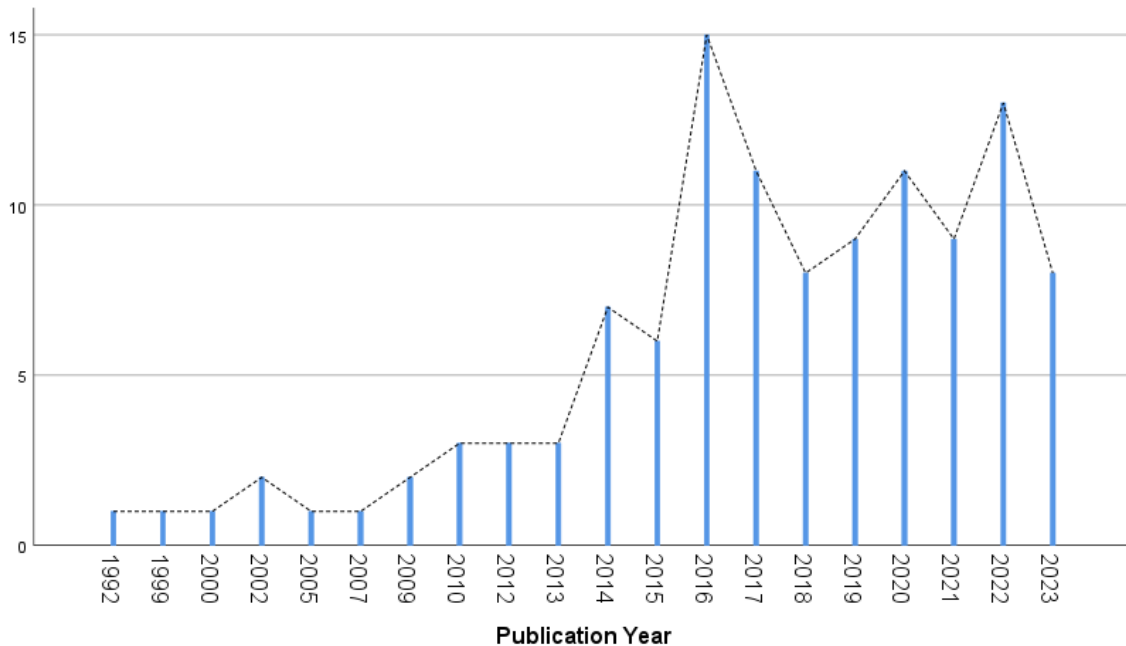
Research area	Frequency	%
Business, Management and Marketing	67	58.3
Communication	24	20.9
Psychology	13	11.3
Sociology	11	9.6
Total	115	100

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

A total of 45 academic publishing sources were contemplated across the final sample. Publishing sources were clustered in terms of their Scientific Journal Ranking (SJR) scores and the distribution between the five categories was calculated accordingly: 19 sources are Q1 journals (highest scores) representing 42.2% of the sample, 9 were Q2s (21.4% of the sample), 8 are Q3s (17.8%), 6 were Q4s (lowest scores) (13.3%). 3 sources were not classified in the SJR system (see Table 2.4, Appendix A). Although various SLRs tend to assess publishing sources quality by filtering journals for the highest indexes, limiting publishing sources was deemed to be out of this research aim and efficacy; attempting to deliver a first SLR concerning SIA- and IT-based team identification research, this study was oriented and designed to reach the broadest possible literature volume. As mentioned previously, Stage 2 of the SLR was performed in March and April 2023; accordingly, the final reference sample included articles from 1992 up to the early 2023. Figure 2.2 shows the

evident as well as increasing publication trend in the last three decades. Since 2014, this positive path has been maintaining steadily above 5 publication per year.

Figure 2.2. Publishing years across sampled literature



Source: Authors’ own elaboration on Biblioshiny.

Sampled references are featured by the U.S.-based academic production which has been skyrocketing with respect to the other top 6 countries (i.e., Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, United Kingdom) in the last decade (see Figure 2.3). Scientific production is here calculated in terms of authors’ academic affiliations and in cumulative terms.

In order to answer to RQ1 and RQ2, a synthesis of themes, theoretical and methodological frameworks as well as relative identity-related findings was produced (see Table 2.5, Appendix A). A total of 19 themes are here recognized, and every theme include at least two references.

The largest share of studies belongs to categories concerned with: (a) sports fans’ interactions and usage of social media (11 articles); (b) displaced and distant fans (10 articles); (c) identity

change and maintenance strategies (10 articles); and (d) derogatory and aggressive behaviours (9 articles).

Despite being one of the dominant theories in sports fan identification research (Lock and Heere, 2017), only slightly over 5% of the final sample resulted adopting IT (Biscaia et al., 2018; Carter, 2016; Hyatt et al., 2018; Mansfield, 2020; Mansfield et al., 2022; Osborne and Coombs, 2013). One theoretical article adopted both frameworks (Lock and Heere, 2017). The remaining 108 articles adopted SIT. 37% of the SIT-based articles have used and combined additional theoretical perspectives while most of the references consistently adopted only SIT (see Table 2.6, Appendix A). In previous works terminological overlapping and unclarity has been underlined a distinct peculiarity of sports consumer identification research stream (Swanson and Kent, 2015; Lock and Heere, 2017; Delia and James, 2018). It must be underlined that a wide share of studies used multiple and diverse lexicon within the same text. Team identification was used by 40% of the works particularly when controlling for SIT-oriented research. In line with recent theoretical considerations concerning the separation of SIT- and IT-oriented vocabularies (Lock and Heere, 2017) and the recent appropriateness of the term 'team identification' in SIT-based research (Swanson and Kent, 2015), results show fan identification appears in a limited number of SIT-based studies (6 articles). In line with SIT, social identity has been employed in several studies (10 articles). IT-based articles displayed the use of fan identity (2 articles) and fandom (3 articles). Figure 2.4 (Appendix A) represents highest frequencies of keywords per year of publications across sampled references.

Concerning methodologies, it must be underlined that a significant majority of studies are based on quantitative research strongly featuring survey designs, either online or in presence. Indeed, 80 references belonged to the quantitative research methodology category; within the latter, surveys counted for almost the totality of research designs (76 cases, 95%). Qualitative

research category observed significantly lower frequency, counting for 25 articles. Among the latter, 3 articles were IT-based. Interviews counted as the most prominent qualitative design category (10 cases) while online qualitative research, including netnographies and Social Network System data analysis, observed 5 aggregate cases. Again, mixed-method research category (5 cases) was characterized by consistent presence of surveys. Furthermore, 5 theoretical studies - 3 reviews and 2 theoretical framework conceptualisations – were identified. Reviews divided equally between the three theoretical categories, namely SIT-, IT- and both SIT and IT- based references. Since surveys were the highest used research design across the collected sample, specific attention must be posited on how authors have been measuring team identification (see Table 2.7); previously, team identification measurement has been underlined as fundamental lieu of theoretical distinction between SIT and IT orientations and scales were recognized to be more appropriate to both perspectives (Lock and Heere, 2017). In line with argumentations from Lock and Heere (2017), the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) (Wann and Branscombe, 1993) resulted in the most used psychometric tool to capture team identification in SIT-based research; indeed, 25 articles integrated this measure in their related surveys. This significant presence of SSIS measure appears influenced by the vast majority of SIT-based references. Conversely, although it has been suggested that the unidimensional Team Identification Index (TII) (Trail and James, 2001) has emerged from an IT-based approach (Lock and Heere, 2017), this scale appeared in 6 SIT-based works. Other well-established measures like the Points of Attachment Index (PAI) (Robinson and Trail, 2005) and the multidimensional Team*ID scale (Heere and James, 2007) were observed in rather limited number, respectively 7 and 3 times.

Relatively to RQ4, the 115 articles were screened in terms of their sport-specific features. Given their theoretical review and development purpose, five references (Heere and James, 2007; Osborne and Coombs, 2013; Pradhan, 2016; Lock and Heere, 2017; Asada and Ko, 2019) were considered and thus were removed at this stage of analysis. The significant majority of sampled studies focus on professional sports contexts while slightly less than 20% of sampled references (see Table 2.8, Appendix A).

Table 2.7. Frequencies of the most utilised psychometric scales in SIT and IT.

Scales	SIT	IT	Sources
Sport spectator identification scale	25		Wann and Branscombe, 1993
Team identification index	6		Trail and James, 2001
Points of attachment index	7		Robinson and Trail, 2005
Sport spectator identification scale – revised	3		James et al., 2019
Team*ID scale	3		Heere and James, 2007
Fan role identity		1	Siebert and Siebert, 2005
Team identification scale		1	Ross et al., 2008

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

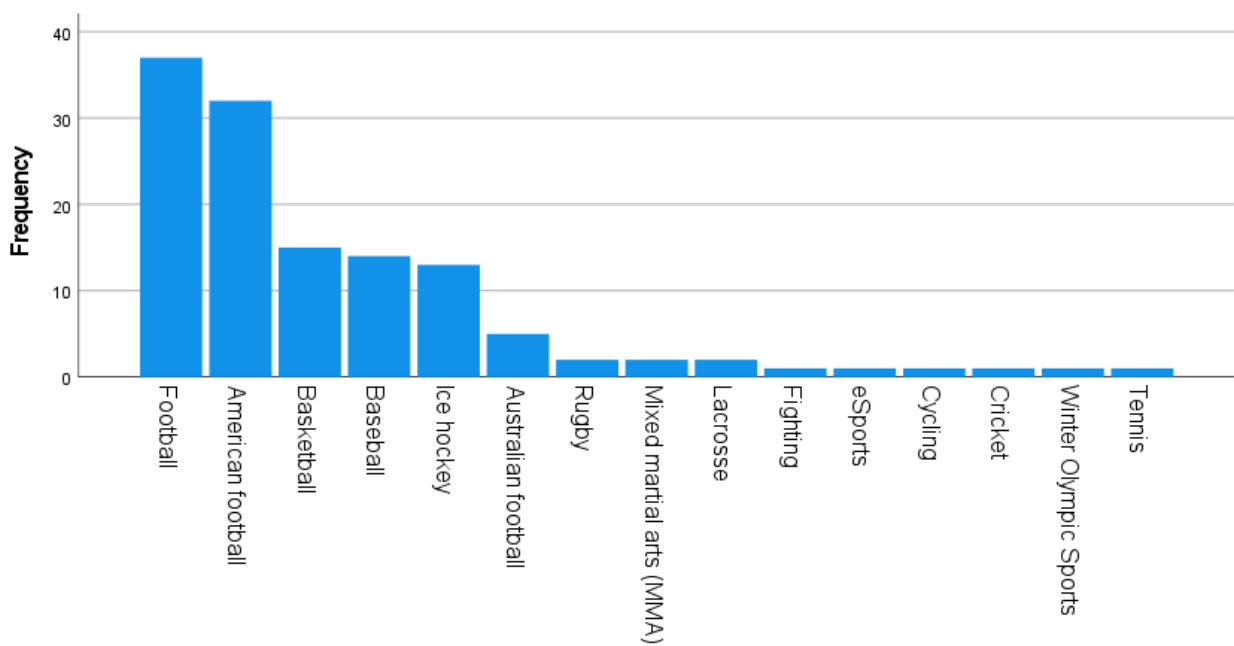
Only 4 studies compare both professional and amateur settings (End et al., 2002; Dwyer et al., 2016; Kwak and Pradhan, 2021; Statz et al., 2022). Almost 70% of studies focused on single sporting contexts and 10% of them were integrating data and/or comparing results between multiple contexts. Although most of the U.S.-based research production and the expected of American traditional sports, football remains the most researched sporting practice in fan and team identification academic research (see Figure 2.5). Indeed, almost one third of sampled references focus on football as a research context (32.2 %); the 2014 and 2018 editions of FIFA World Cup were evident platforms of investigation while the most researched football leagues appeared to be the German Bundesliga and the English Premier

League. In addition to these leagues, it must be underlined that football accounted for the highest geographical distribution across nations including Brazil (Brasileao); France (Ligue 2); Spain (La Liga); the U.S. (Major League Soccer); Australia and New Zealand (A-League); the Netherlands (Eredivise); Japan (J-League); and Portugal (Liga Portugal). Nevertheless, in line with predictions, U.S. traditional sports – including American football, baseball, basketball and ice hockey – represent the largest share in the overall distribution. Aggregate data from these four sports have been utilised in a tremendous volume of studies, particularly when refereed to collegiate amateur sports. Indeed, almost 20% of total sampled studies has conducted research on fans (and university students) National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). In addition to U.S.-based studies, baseball was investigated in South Korea (KBO) (Lee et al., 2020; Kim and Manoli, 2023), Japan (NPB) (Yoshida et al., 2018; Nakagawa et al., 2022) and China (CPBL) (Wu et al., 2012). Given the significant production developed by Australian-affiliated authors, Australian football appeared more represented (Platow et al., 1999; Dimmock and Grove, 2005; Lock et al., 2014; Doyle et al., 2017; Inoue et al., 2017) than other more globally diffused sports like rugby (Prayag et al., 2020; Kinoshita and Matsuoka, 2023), mixed martial arts (MMA) (Brown et al., 2013; Kirkwood et al., 2021), cycling (Close Scheinbaum et al., 2019) or tennis (Ambrose and Schnitzlein, 2017).

From a more specific geographical perspective, as easily conceivable, the U.S.A. were the most researched national context in terms of researched samples and participants, as they appeared in more than 50% of sample references (see Figure 2.6). On aggregate, national sampling setting distribution mirrored the geographical distribution of global scientific production (see Figure 2.7, Appendix A); although counting for less than 10% in the overall distribution, Canada, the U.K., Australia, and Germany appear among the most present national research settings in sampled literature. Three samples in Brazil, Greece and South

Korea were investigated. Moreover, 87% of the articles investigated single national setting while 10 articles (8.7%) integrated a cross-country comparative approach either in their data gathering or analysis. When exploring multiple national settings, Canada and the U.S. were the two most frequent setting combination appearing in 5 articles (Amiot et al., 2013, 2014, 2017; Hyatt et al., 2018; Brown-Devlin et al., 2021).

Figure 2.5. Breakdown of analysed sports in sampled references.

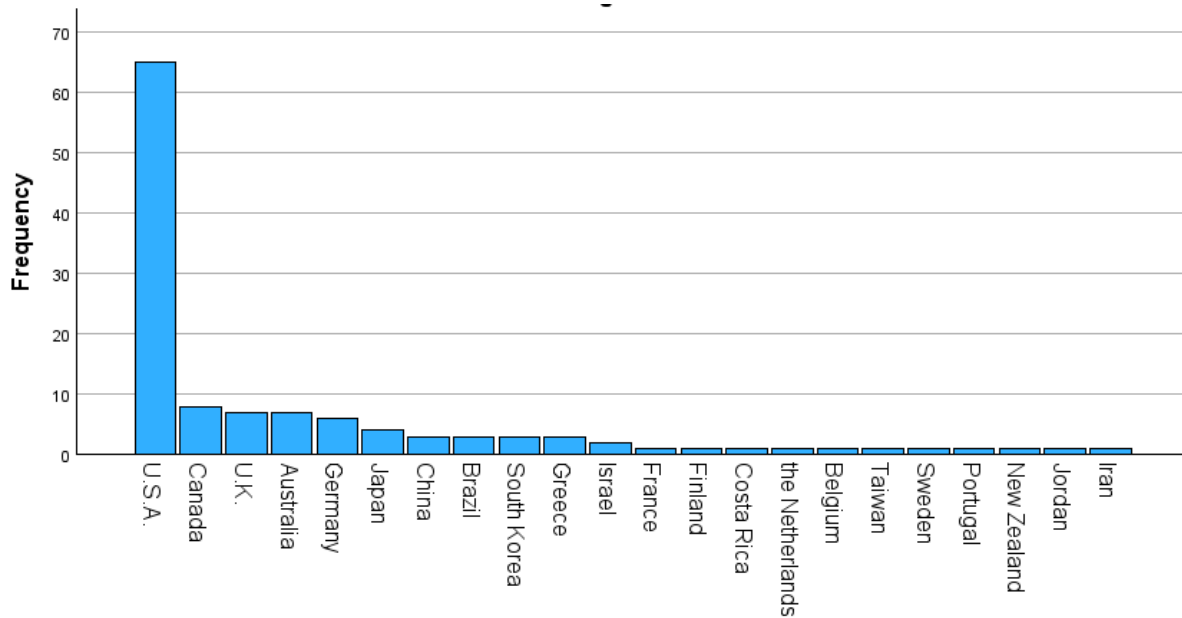


Source: Authors' own elaboration

Samples of football supporters in the United Kingdom were compared with German counterparts for what concerns fans' satisfaction with Video Assistant Refereeing (VAR) technologies (Winand et al., 2021) and with Dutch fans focusing on verbal irony (Burgers et al., 2015). Inoue and colleagues (2017) provided an Australia- and U.S.-based investigation of how sport spectatorship enhances life satisfaction. Fans and non-fans in France and Belgium were compared in terms of sponsorship communication influence over their behaviours towards supporting sponsors' stores (Herrmann et al., 2016). Only one article

included more than 2 countries in their methodological setting, comprising Canada, China, Germany, Japan, Sweden and the U.S.A. (Brown-Devlin et al., 2021).

Figure 2.6. Breakdown of research sampling national contexts.



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

2.4 Future avenues of research

From a theoretical perspective, this SLR draws from SIT- and IT- based studies concerning team and fan identification research. The current work expands existing knowledge in sports marketing and management by benefiting from a multidisciplinary approach to SLR. References from sports sociology, psychology and communication were here collected and reviewed in order to provide multifaceted literature elements and highly diverse findings. This approach was here considered appropriate given this work's individuality and newness, being the first ever SLR concerning team and fan identification. The current review draws and expands considerations concerning the need for theoretical, lexical, and psychometric distinction between SIT and IT when investigating respectively team and fan identification

(Lock and Heere, 2017). Current findings highlight that the team and fan identification research is in an expansive multidisciplinary development stage. The massive presence of social identity theory underlines the high congruence and appropriateness of this theoretical framework when it comes to sports consumer identification topics. From terminological point of view, team identification stands as a group identity-oriented reference term for referring to fans' connection with teams in collective sports. Future research concerning role-identity of sports fans might adopt IT and refer to fan identity/identification (Lock and Heere, 2017) (see Table 2.9).

To identify recurrent focus themes across the 115 sampled references, the four authors independently performed a cross-check thematical analysis; in a further step, authors' self-interpretations were discussed altogether, and overall agreements emerged where eventual discrepancies had emerged. Eventually, 19 recurrent themes were recognized (see Table 2.9). Under researched themes relate to gender issues, identification-induced emotions and betting behaviours. According to SIT, emotional values and meanings are crucial parts of group identities (Tajfel, 1982; Abrams and Hogg, 1990). Team and fan identification research is strongly oriented towards quantitative research methodology; scholars might think of scientifically invest in in-depth qualitative research in future occasions while Social Network System-based analysis appear ever more present. Rather limited knowledge concerning fan and team identification is available beyond professional football and traditional U.S. sports (i.e., American football, baseball, basketball, ice hockey). Particularly, a significant share of existing literature remains limited to university and collegiate environments – almost 20% of sampled references; while these contexts are today institutionalized and accepted as appropriate research settings – particularly in the U.S. sports system - they may also limit overall knowledge concerning fan and team identification also due to the low mean age of study participants. Future research settings might favour: (a) investigations of unexplored

sports fans' cultures and social environments; (b) comparisons between professional and amateur contexts, different sports and/or national environments; (c) individual sports which appear here under researched. Beyond FIFA World Cups and Super Bowls, fan and team identification research in specific event circumstances needs further exploration. Indeed, comparative studies appear rather limited in existing fan and team identification research. Managers, marketers, and organisations can benefit from the findings highlighted in this review, particularly when considering particular sports, events or leagues. In addition, key psychometric instruments capturing team and fan identification are above recognized and discussed.

2.5 Limitations

Limitations of the present SLR are known to authors and are here outlined appropriately. To begin, while enlarging the number of research areas enables a wider variety of results and providing a cross-disciplinary properties, this might also bias review results; as this study is not based solely on sports management and business references, articles from other research areas might have influenced overall results in addition to preventing the setting of more specific research questions. From a methodological perspective, this SLR did not extensively perform a cross-reference check as the concerned literature volume appeared rather comprehensive in order to answer the research questions. Furthermore, including research strings composed of three words might provoke the cons of widening the research area and integrating records which might not be entirely focused on the review subject. Moreover, although cross-reference check process has been frequently performed in previous works (Thomson *et al.*, 2023) and mentioned as an additional reviewing strategy (Snyder, 2019), it might be underlined that “this is not appropriate when using the systematic review method as this requires a more strict protocol” (Snyder, 2019 p. 337). The distribution between IT- and SIT-oriented articles is strongly skewed in favour of the second theoretical framework, thus

partially limiting IT representation. Concerning publishing sources, no quality limitations and filters was set in this study, thus comprehending a very wide spectrum of academic journals. Given the high variety of sub-topics involved and the different research areas considered, specific research questions concerning results as well as antecedents and outcomes of sports consumers identification were not arranged. Indeed, these questions fell out of the design of this SLR and together with other limitations might be considered useful suggestions for further reviewing opportunities.

2.6 Conclusions

Sports consumer identification research are well-established topics in sports management and marketing fields. After a thirty-years scientific development, a review of existing literature is deemed necessary. Accordingly, this study represents the very first SLR concerning fan and team identification research and its main purpose was to analyse the bibliometric, theoretical, methodological, and sport-specific properties of the research stream. Authors decided to comprise studies adopting SIT and IT, since these have been framed as the most prominent theoretical perspectives in the field (Lock and Heere, 2017). Resulting as a first ever SLR, studies from four different sports-related research areas were comprised in the review including: (a) Business, Marketing and Management; (b) Communication; (c) Psychology; and (d) Sociology. Through the outlined systematic approach to the existing literature, 115 articles were retrieved. SIT dominated the sampled volume of literature whose majority of studies belonged to Business and Management research areas. In SIT-oriented research, the term 'team identification' was confirmed as the most appropriate and used term throughout literature. Analysing the methodological properties, survey-based quantitative research featured as the prominent methodological stream and frequencies of various sports consumer identification measurement scales were presented. Football and team-based popular sports

Table 2.9. Conceptual framework for future research avenues.

RQ-based elements	Findings	Future research avenues
Theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SIT as the dominant theoretical framework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IT adoption for fans' role-identities. SIT adoption for group-oriented identities.
Terminologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team identification and social identity in SIT-adopting studies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SIT-oriented works using team identification or social identity. IT-based studies using fan identification.
Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 19 sub-themes are here highlighted. Betting; Derogatory and aggressive behaviours; Displaced and distant fans; Doping and scandals; Emotions; Fan community; Gender; Identity change and maintenance strategies; Identity transmission; Innovations and emerging sports realities; Media and commentators; Nationalism and ethnicity; Points of identification; Rivalry; SocialMedia; Sponsorship, Stakeholders and Endorsements; Stadia and attendance; Theorizing fans, teams and scales; Wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender, Emotions and Betting attitudes and behaviours themes appear still under researched.
Methodologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fan and team identification research is heavily based on quantitative research. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative research and SNS-based investigation.
Settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional football and U.S. typical sports as the dominant research environments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparative opportunities. Individualistic sports fans in collective. Event settings.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

in the U.S. (i.e., American football, baseball, basketball, ice hockey) captured the greatest academic attention; moreover, sampled literature demonstrated a rather limited geographical comprehension of sports consumer identification as the U.S. together with a limited group of other countries were the most researched country setting. Eventually, considerations concerning literature gaps and future research possible venues were identified together limitations of this study.

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2.8 Appendix A

Table 2.4. Publishing sources and SJR classification

SJR classes	Journal	N. of articles
Q1	Journal of Sport Management	19
	European Sport Management Quarterly	9
	Sport Management Review	7
	Communication and Sport	6
	European Journal of Marketing	3
	Journal of Business Research	3
	Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly	2
	Psychology of Sport and Exercise	2
	Electronic Commerce Research and Application	1
	European Journal of Social Psychology	1
	Human Communication Research	1
	International Review for the Sociology of Sport	1
	Journal of Applied Social Psychology	1
	Journal of Applied Sport Psychology	1
	Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media	1
	Journal of Leisure Research	1
	Journal of Personality and Social Psychology	1
	Journal of Sport and Social Issues	1
	Psychology and Marketing	1
	Total	62
Q2	International Journal of Sport Communication	9
	International Journal of Sports Marketing and Management	9
	Sport, Business and Management	3
	Online Information Review	2
	Communication Quarterly	1

	Group Dynamics	1
	Howard Journal of Communications	1
	International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology	1
	Journal of China Tourism Research	1
	Total	28
	Sport in Society	3
	Brazilian Administration Review	1
	Event Management	1
	Hellenic Journal of Psychology	1
Q3	Innovative Marketing	1
	International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing	1
	Leisure/Loisir	1
	Sociology of Sport Journal	1
	Total	10
	Sports Marketing Quarterly	7
	International Journal of Sport and Society	1
	International Journal of Sport Psychology	1
Q4	Journal of Cultural Marketing Strategy	1
	Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities	1
	Rivista Iberoamericana de Psicologia del Ejercicio y el Deporte	1
	Total	12
	International Journal of Sport Management, Recreation and Tourism	1
Not classified	International Sports Journal	1
	Journal of Sport Behavior	1
	Total	3

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Table 2.5. Themes, terms, approach and findings.

Themes	Reference	Terms	Approach	Methods	Identification-related findings
Betting	Agha and Tyler (2017)	Fandom	Mixed methods	Survey + Focus groups	Fandom does not predict BAFTing but it positively predicts HAFFing
	Na <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Fan identity	Quantitative	Online survey	Fan identity predicting game result prediction accuracy.
Derogatory and aggressive behaviours	Amiot <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Social identity	Quantitative	Survey	Participating in derogatory behaviours positively predicts social identity
	Amiot <i>et al.</i> (2014)	Social identity	Quantitative	Online survey	Social identity positively predicts perceptions of norms concerning outgroup derogation and relative engagement
	Amiot <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Social identity	Quantitative	Online survey	Social identity positively predicts derogatory behaviours
	Billings <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Sport identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Sport identification positively predicts violent extremism and correlates with religious and political identifications.
	Burgers <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Group identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Group identification positively predicts irony appropriateness
	Dimmock and Grove (2005)	Fan identification	Quantitative	Survey	Fan identification does not predict positive attitudes toward aggression, subjective norms on aggression, and behavioural control at games
	Harker and Jensen (2020)	Team identity	Quantitative	Online survey	Team identity positively predicts blasting rivalry fan behaviour
	Kabiri <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Team identification	Quantitative	Survey	Team identification positively predicts hostile and instrumental aggression in unsuccessful and subordination conditions
Toder Alon <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Personal and social identity saliences	Quantitative	Online survey	Social identity salience positively predicts not only loyalty, love, but also attitudes	

toward fan aggression and fans' hatred, game attendance. Personal identity salience positively predicts game attendance and negatively predicts attitudes toward fan aggression and fans' hatred

Displaced and distant fans	Al Ganideh and Good (2015)	Fandom	Quantitative	Survey	Fandom positively predicts feeling of escaping from life problems, stress levels and higher incomes. Openness to other cultures and feelings of animosity had no influences on fandom.
	Andrijiw and Hyatt (2009)	Team identity	Qualitative	Interviews	Team identification with nonlocal franchises enhances fans' opportunities to perceive uniqueness and belongingness.
	Burton <i>et al.</i> (2019)	National team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	National team identification positively predicts national identification.
	Collins and Heere (2018)	Social identity	Qualitative	Ethnography	Social identity degrees vary through group development stages
	Collins <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Team identification	Quantitative	Survey	Team identification of displaced fans is positively predicted by social media engagement, Internet streaming and hometown identification. Geographical proximity with another franchise is not a predictor of team identification.
	Lianopoulos <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Team identification positively and partially predict collective and personal self-esteem through BIRGing behaviours and social connections.
	Lintumaeki and Koll (2024)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Team identification is positively predicted by team distinctiveness but not by perceived team prestige. Local and

					displaced identify with a team on the grounds of congruence between team and individual personalities.
	Sidani <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Fandom	Qualitative	Interviews	Fandom is influenced by geographical proximity, affordability, attitudes toward United States, and fan culture.
	Taylor <i>et al.</i> (2014)	Group identity	Qualitative	Ethnography	Socializing needs is one of the prominent reasons to join groups, in addition to belongingness needs and self-actualization. Group membership positively predicts consumption of specific brands.
	Weng (2022)	Team identification	Qualitative	Interviews	From a practical point of view, team identification is enhanced through history and tradition, physical facility, group experience and rituals. Geographical distance influences distant fans' identification with respect to local ones. Distant fans attach to team stadium through team identification.
Doping and scandals	Cranmer <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Fandom	Qualitative	SNS-analysis	Fandom influences of fans' Twitter comments on official posts.
	Dietz-Uhler <i>et al.</i> (2002)	Team identification	Quantitative	Survey	Team identification positively predicts support to law-breaking team players in their favourite teams more than integral rival team players or even players from their team.
	Fink <i>et al.</i> (2009)	Team identity	Quantitative	Survey	Off-field derogatory acts by athletes and weak leadership responses negatively predict team identification.
	Lee <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Athlete identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Fan identification is associated with low

					negative moral emotions' experience and high personal moral disengagement dynamics.
	Seaton <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Fandom	Qualitative	SNS-analysis	Fandom positively predicts supportive attitudes towards activist content.
	Sun <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Team identification positively predicts backing up the scandalized team.
Emotions	Ballouli <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Endowment effect is positively moderated by emotions and team identification.
	Katz <i>et al.</i> (2020b)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	In-presence, face-to-face sport spectatorship positively predicts emotional support which is activated by fans' ties with networks and other fans. Team identification positively predicts perceived emotional support from surrounding fans.
	Prayag <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Happiness and love positively moderate the relationship between team identification and team attachment.
Fan community	Burns (2014)	Social identity	Qualitative	Secondary data	Social identification persists through sport and social hard times. Team successes are perceived as a city success. Identification positively predicts belief.
	Katz <i>et al.</i> (2020a)	Team and supporter club identifications	Quantitative	Survey Online Survey	+ Team and supporter club identifications are distinct and are associated with different effects. Private evaluation dimension in team identification and cognitive awareness in supporter club identification positively predict consumer behaviours. Behavioural involvement and private evaluation in supporter club identity negatively predict consumption.

	Katz <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Both team identification and tie centrality appeared to positively predict attendance. Team identification and tie central tendency positively correlate and they positively predict event attendance.
	Nakagawa <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Social identity	Quantitative	Experiment	In not-expected reciprocity conditions, group membership influenced contribution more than shared social category. No relation was found between social identity and contribution. Group cooperation is predicted by reciprocal relationship expectations with game partner.
	Platow <i>et al.</i> (1999)	Fan social identity	Quantitative	Experiment	Charity workers' team identification towards either group appeared to positively predict higher contributions' frequency by both fanbases. Unidentified charity workers negatively predicted contributions' frequency. Game result is associated with donations more in after match conditions than before match conditions.
	Statz <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Team identification	Qualitative	Interviews Online survey	+ Religious identification holds higher salience with respect to team identification.
Gender	Dietz <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Fan identification	Quantitative	Survey	Gender is not a significant predictor of fan identification. Fan identification is positively associated with gender-based differences in fan behaviours.
	Bell <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Spectator identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Female announcers are perceived as credible except for presumed outgroup members and are accepted by high

Identity change and maintenance strategies	Carter (2016)*	Fan identity	Qualitative	Ethnography	identifiers, even in traditionally male events. Fans self-perceiving identity constraints experience identity shift and a new framework of goals and values based on new identities.
	Delia (2015)	Team identification	Qualitative	Interviews Focus groups	+ Multiple group identities coexist and are inclusive. Game events activate fan identity salience. BIRGing behaviours are positively predicted by belongingness and distinctiveness.
	Doyle <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Team identification	Qualitative	Interviews	In hard times, social creativity and mobility strategies maintain in-group identity. Being a foundation fan holds high significance within recently emerged teams performing poorly.
	End <i>et al.</i> (2002)	Fan identification	Quantitative	Survey	BIRGing is the most dominant behavioural tendency across fans. Fan preferences in picking a team and team successes positively correlate.
	Fan <i>et al.</i> (2020)	National identification	team Qualitative	Netnography	BIRGing theory works for national team too; leading or victorious peaks predicts higher degree of team identification, national identification and sentiment. Machine learning confirms BIRGing and CORFing peaks during matches. Defeats provoked BIRGing nevertheless.
	Gantz and Lewis (2023)	Fanship	Quantitative	Online survey	Lifetime has effects over sports fanship. Fanship is negatively predicted by lack of time, shifting priorities, and perceived maturity levels. Conversely, fanship is

Hirt <i>et al.</i> (1992)	Fanhsip	Qualitative	Survey	<p>positively predicted by strong connection to teams and opportunities to spend family- and friend-time. Males tend to experience fanhsip reductions more often than females across lifetime.</p> <p>Teams' and fans' personal futures are thought more positively in the winning condition than in the losing one. Team and personal outcomes similarly predict fans' self-perception.</p>
Kwak and Pradhan (2021)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	<p>Team identification is not associated with identity threat perceptions. Team identification positively predicts shame but not pride and pleasance. Identification is positively associated with social media engagement intentions, attitudes and sponsor fit after defeats in key games.</p>
Lock <i>et al.</i> (2014)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	<p>Dimensional stability in team identification occurs. Public and private evaluation remained stable across bad performances. Cognitive awareness positively predicts public evaluation. Both private and public evaluations are positively associated with behavioural commitment in the following season.</p>
Lock <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Team identification	Qualitative	Interviews	<p>In the first year of team existence, internal meaning and external action are the prominent areas of team identification development. Almost all the interviewees confirm higher identity salience. Partial identification with athletes and coaching staff is highlighted.</p>

	Mansfield <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Team identification	Qualitative	Interviews	Social and team identities are perceived as distinct. Social creativity and social competition are the most present coping strategies towards identity threat. Time development of identity threat is featured by impacts on personal identity meanings, threat's salience and duration.
Identity transmission	Hyatt <i>et al.</i> (2018)*	Fandom	Qualitative	Interviews	Reverse socialization dynamics (i.e., parents identifying with children's teams) occur when developing new fandom, adding a new fandom or changing attitudes concerning extant fandom.
	Kaiser <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Social identity	Mixed methods	Survey	Fan identification is positively associated with aggressive attitudes in unsuccessful or subordination conditions.
	Mansfield (2020)*	Fandom	Qualitative	Interviews	Most of parents interviewed do not perceive the need for team identification reduction in order to adjust to parenting goals. Fandom modifiers perceive other identities as more salient.
Innovation and emerging sports realities	Dwyer <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Needs for uniqueness lead niche-sport fans to attach to those sports as much as mainstream-sports fans do with their sporting practices. EFANgical behaviours resulted higher in mainstream-sports than in niche-ones, and with individuals expressing higher degree of needs for uniqueness than individuals feeling lower ones.
	Katz and Heere (2016)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Except for interdependence feeling dimension, all other team identification

McClung and Rynarzewska (2015)	Fan identity	Quantitative	Online survey	<p>dimensions appeared to grow from year 1 to year 2, particularly behavioural involvement and cognitive awareness. Private evaluation was the most evident dimension in identification starting phase but held the lowest growing slope throughout the first year. Over multiple year period, team identity change explains significant increases in university identification dimensions.</p> <p>Fan identity is positively predicted by attitudes and beliefs about the importance of a new university football program. Fan identification positively predicts intentions to engage in team support and this relationship is partially mediated by loyalty to the university.</p>
Monaghan and Read (2022)	Team identification	Mixed methods	Online survey	<p>Domain identification, fandom continuity, vicarious achievement, game attendance in London and team playing style are all predicting factors of team identification.</p>
Navarro-Picado <i>et al.</i> (2022)	National fandom	Quantitative	Survey	<p>National fandom positively predicts multimedia consumption intention, official merchandise consumption intention, innovativeness perceived organizational legitimacy. Normative interpersonal influence positively moderates all these relationships.</p>
Winand <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	<p>Most fans support VAR's accuracy, effectiveness, and fairness. Team identification negatively predicts fans' satisfaction with VAR.</p>

Media and commentators	Lewis and Hirt (2019)	Fan identification	Quantitative	Experiment + Online survey	Fan identification negatively predicts moral cleansing responses and positively predicts team support intentions. Importance and commitment as identification dimensions positively predict support intentions.
	Nichols <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Team identification positively moderated the relationship between perceived sincerity and support of the cause in cause-related marketing campaign.
	Phua (2010)	Fan identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Media use for searching team news positively moderates the positive association between fan identification and group self-esteem. Media use (online media more than mobile phones, broadcast and print media) is a positive predictor of both self-esteem and fan identification.
	Sadri (2014)	Fan identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Team identification positively predicts web sites credibility and negatively predicts mainstream sources' credibility. Articles as communication medium has no credibility effect across high and low identifiers.
Nationalism and ethnicity	Devlin and Billings (2016)	National team identification	Quantitative	Survey	National team identification positively predicts nationalism dimensions as well as TV usage during the World Cup. Competitive results and perception of winning chance influence fan identification which in turn may decrease nationalist feelings.

	Devlin <i>et al.</i> (2017)	National identification	team	Quantitative	Survey	Nationalism, internationalism, and smugness positively predict national team identification, patriotism is not.
	Harrolle <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Team identity		Quantitative	Online survey	Team identity is positively associated with self-esteem responses in both Latino and Non-Latino fans
	Kerr and Morgan (2022)	Fan identification		Quantitative	Survey	Experienced fandom length positively predicts national team identification. Gender and age are not factors of national team identification.
	Lang (2020)	Fandom		Quantitative	Survey	Analysing Cleveland Indians' logo, team identification positively predicts perception of offenses.
	Shin <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Fanship		Qualitative	Interviews	Ethnicity, particularly ethnical minority status, positively influence fans to a particular player and indirectly to a team. Perceived connection with motherland positively predicts fandom maintenance.
Points of identification	Brown <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Sport and identification	athlete	Quantitative	Online survey	Sport identification is more represented among men (particularly between 18 and 24 years old) while athlete identification appears to be a more female attitude. Identification positively predicts attending, consuming, and purchasing intention.
	Hakim (2021)	Team and fanship	athlete	Quantitative	Online survey	Team fanship, athlete fanship and media consumption are positively correlated. Athlete fanship positively predicts both team fanship and media consumption

	Hoegel <i>et al.</i> (2014)	Team and organizational identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Team identification is positively predicted by athletes perceived as superstars. Club tenure of 'superstar' players has no influence on fans' team identification.
	Lee <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Team identification	Quantitative	Survey	Team identification positively predicts game attending intention, regardless place identification. Place identification positively predicts attendance intentions through team identification mediation.
	Mudrick and Fink (2022)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Team identification positively moderates the relationship between perceived coach-program congruence and attachment to a coach.
	Wu <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Team identification	Quantitative	Survey	Team identification is positively predicted by trust and positively predicts fans' repatronage intention. Player identification has an indirect effect on repatronage intention through team.
Rivalry	Ambrose and Schnitzlein, (2017)	Social identity	Qualitative	Secondary data	The way fans identify with athletes is part of peer dimension of rivalry. Fans identify with individual players through star power or preferences for playing styles.
	de Amorim and de Almeida (2015)	Team identification	Quantitative	Survey	Team identification positively predicts sponsor's brand equity both directly and indirectly through sponsor-team fit. Experience with the sponsor positively moderates the direct relationship.
	Grohs <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Team identification	Quantitative	Survey Online survey	+ Team identification negatively predicts perceptions of rival team and rival sponsors. The higher team identification the lower the perceptions of rival team and

sponsors.

	Havard (2014)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Team identification positively predicts higher rivalry feelings and negative thoughts concerning rivals than gaming participation or attendance. Esports and team identification together predicted positive estimations of rival brands and rivals.
	Tyler and Cobbs (2017)	Collective identity	Quantitative	Online survey	Rivalries are perceived as nonexclusive, continuous in scale and bidirectional. Fan identification positively predicts feeling of menaces from multiple outgroups.
	Watanabe <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Group identity	Quantitative	SNS-analysis	Sport-related social media communities enlarge social identity size, social identity magnitude and group interaction-induced meanings, thus emphasizing rivalry perceptions.
Social media	Brown-Devlin <i>et al.</i> (2021)	National identification and fandom	Quantitative	Online survey	The degree of national team identification and Winter Olympics fandom are positively predicted by increased measures of social presence, social capital, and perceived sociability which in turn is predicted by social TV use.
	Havard <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Fandom	Quantitative	Online survey	Fan identification positively and better predicts rivalry feelings and negative thoughts concerning rivals than gaming participation or attendance.
	Herrera <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Fan identity	Mixed methods	SNS-analysis	Expressing identification-related online behaviours like BIRGing and CORFing is predicted by fans' perceived team performance.

Hull <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Fan ethnic identity	Qualitative	SNS-analysis	Fan ethnic identity positively predicts higher social media engagement when ethnicity-related contents and players are showcased.
Kim and Manoli (2023)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Online community identification positively predicts team identification, WOM and game attendance intentions. The relationship between online community identification and attendance intentions is partially and positive by team identification.
Kirkwood <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Sport fandom	Qualitative	Netnography	Online communities as platforms to share, express and virtually demonstrate sports or athlete fandom. Promotion of camaraderie, solidarity and esteem are key dynamics within online communities which enables fans' identities' conservation and development. Members can modify and transit their roles within the online community. Time enables a natural evolution from novice to expert and from self- to group-oriented.
Mendenhall (2016)	Fan identification	Quantitative	SNS-analysis	Online fan communities reproduce a team tone or vibe that is align with ingroup and can be quantified through words and sentiments.
Phua <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Team identification is a positive mediator between game outcome/location conditions and brand attitude, not purchasing intention.
Popp <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Fan identity	Qualitative	Netnography	Fan identification polarizes fans in either sympathetically supporting or heavily

criticizing sponsors.

	Yang <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Fanship	Qualitative	SNS-analysis	Fanship positively predicts positive valence when commenting World Cup. Fanship influences discussed themes and news concerning the events itself, thus stimulating in-group identification.
	Yoshida <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Online brand community identification is positively predicted by self-reporting as an opinion seeker and perceiving social media as entertainment. Team identification positively predicts behavioural brand loyalty.
Sponsorship, stakeholders and endorsements	Biscaia <i>et al.</i> (2018)*	Fan identity	Quantitative	Online survey	Fan identification conceptualisation in terms of stakeholder characteristics. Power and internal legitimacy are positively associated with intentions to attend games and to purchase merchandise. Internal legitimacy is positively associated with intentions to recommend games to others.
	Brown-Devlin <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Identification is positively associated with sponsor benefits and positive behavioural attitudes toward the sponsoring brand, including purchasing intentions.
	Carlson and Donovan, (2017)	Social identity	Quantitative	Online survey	Identification with the sponsor endorser positively predicts community identification, team-related intention and it positively influences outcomes even poor-fitting endorsement.
	Close Scheinbaum <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Fan identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Sport identification positively predicts event social responsibility and motivation

					to attend the event moderates this relation
	Gillooly <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Team identity	Qualitative	Quasi-ethnography	Fans' reactions to stadium naming sponsorship are influenced by geographic, image and functional dimensions of team-sponsor fit. Reactions are dependent also on sponsor's prior involvement with the club, perceived sponsorship investment, and the newness/traditionality of the stadium.
	Herrmann <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Consumer affiliation	Quantitative	Survey	Consumer identification positively predicts developing behaviours supporting the sponsor (and not sponsorship awareness) when a direct mailing communication concerning sponsorship is provided.
	Joo <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Team identification positively moderates the relationship between perceived CRM altruism and consumers' attitudinal change. Consumers' attitude towards the campaign positively mediates this moderation.
	Parker and Fink (2010)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Team identification positively predicts positive attitudes concerning team sponsors.
Stadia and attendance	Karakaya <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Social identity	Quantitative	Survey	Football game attendance is supported by three dominant motivations, namely, emotional excitement, socialization, and football atmospherics. Being ardent or rational football fans conditions are key factors of identity salience.

	Kinoshita and Matsuoka (2023)	Team identification	Quantitative	Survey	In post-match conditions, team identification positively predicts fans' vitality but not game satisfaction. COVID-19 risk perceptions positively moderated team identification-vitality link, only when social risk perceptions hold high values.
	Laverie and Arnett (2000)	Fan identity salience	Quantitative	Survey	Attachment, situational and enduring involvement positively predict identity salience. Attendance frequency is positively predicted by identity salience and satisfaction.
	Reysen <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Team identification	Quantitative	Survey	Changing stadium name positively predicts anger and threat to team's distinctiveness perception and this relation is significantly and positively moderated by fan identification.
	Rocha and Fleury (2017)	Team identification	Quantitative	Online survey	Team identification positively predicts game attendance intentions. This relationship is negatively and partially mediated by perceived constraints.
Theorizing fans, teams and scales	Asada and Ko (2019)	Team identification	Theoretical	Framework	Sport socialization process is moderated by the relative size and entitativity of a sports fan community.
	Heere and James (2007)	Team identity	Theoretical	Framework review and development	Teams represents group identity but also external group identities, connected with larger communities. Sports franchises limit the power of external group identities.
	Lock and (2017)**	Team and fan identification	Theoretical	Framework review and	SIT and IT are hypothesized in a complementary broad framework with

				development	two separate fans' research focuses, namely fan as a role, individual identification (IT) and fan as a member of a group, social identification (SIT). Complementary scales are underlined.
	Osborne and Coombs (2013)*	Fandom	Theoretical	Framework review and development	Proposing Performative Sport Fandom and framework to expand Identity Theory research in the realm of fan identity
	Pradhan (2016)	Fan identity	Theoretical	Framework review and development	Fans' norms and reactions concerning substance usage. Calling for future research concerning how fans perceive doping conditions.
	Shuv-Ami and Alon (2023)	Toder Identity salience	Theoretical	Framework review and development	Validation of the bidimensional Fan Social–Personal Identity Salience scale. Correlation and distinction between personal and social identity saliences. The scale positively predicts involvement both directly and indirectly through fan optimism and satisfaction mediation.
	Tsigilis <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Team identification	Theoretical	Scale development	Validation of a unidimensional 10-item Sport Team Identification Scale, which explained 47.4% variance BIRGing behaviours and 69.8% variance of game attendance intentions.
Well-being	Inoue <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Team identification	Quantitative	Scale development	Team identification positively predicts perceived emotional support from fellow fans which in turn positively predicts fans' life.
	Kim <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Sport fanship	Quantitative	Survey	Sport fanship positively moderates the relationship between eudaimonic need fulfilment and sport game-induced well-

Mansfield <i>et al.</i> (2022)*	Fandom	Quantitative	Online survey	being. Health consciousness congruence and fan identification positively predict identity conflict.
Robinson <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Social identity	Quantitative	Survey	Social identity positively moderates the relationship between changes from expectations to achievements and satisfaction.

Notes. BAFTing = betting against their favourite team; BIRGing = basking in reflected glory; CORFing = cutting off reflected failure; CRM = customer resource management; HAFFing = hedging against future failure; SNS= social network system; WOM = word-of-mouth; * adopting identity theory; **adopting both identity and social identity theory.
Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Table 2.6. Crosstabulations between SIT, IT and other theories.

Other theories	SIT	IT	SIT and IT
Only SIT and/or IT	68	4	1
Network theory	3		
Balance theory	3		
Optimal distinctiveness theory	2		
Self-determination theory	2		
Social identity complexity	2		
Appraisal theory	1		
Associative network theories	1		
Attachment theory	1		
Bounded generalised reciprocity hypothesis	1		
Brand community theory	1		
Cultural transmission theory	1		
Expectancy violation theory	1		
Excitation transfer theory	1		
Framing theory	1		
Identity threat management	1		
Image and affect transfer	1		
Meaning transfer theory	1		
Moral foundations theory	1		
Moral psychology	1		
Prospect theory	1		
Performative gender theory		1	
Reasoned action theory	1		
Rivalry theory	1		
Schema theory	1		
Self-esteem theory	1		
System justification theory	1		
Socioemotional selectivity theory	1		

Socialization theory	1		
Social capital theory	1		
Social judgement theories	1		
Social presence theory	1		
Stakeholder theory		1	
Superstar economics	1		
Theory of planned behaviour	1		
<i>Total</i>	<i>108</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>1</i>

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Table 2.8. Breakdown of sampling contexts, sports, focus events and levels across recognized themes.

Themes	Reference	Sampling context	Sports	League/Association/Event (Country)	Level
Betting	Agha and Tyler (2017)	U.S.A.	American football	NCAA (U.S.A.)	Amateur
	Na <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Germany	Football	Bundesliga, 2, 3, 4 (Germany)	Professional
Derogatory and aggressive behaviours	Amiot <i>et al.</i> (2013)	U.S.A. and Canada	Ice hockey	NHL (Canada and U.S.A.)	Professional
	Amiot <i>et al.</i> (2014)	U.S.A. and Canada	Ice hockey	NHL (Canada and U.S.A.)	Professional
	Amiot <i>et al.</i> (2017)	U.S.A. and Canada	Ice hockey	NHL (Canada and U.S.A.)	Professional
	Billings <i>et al.</i> (2023)	U.S.A	Multiple team sports	/	/
	Burgers <i>et al.</i> (2015)	the Netherlands and U.K.	Football	Eredivise (the Netherlands) and Premier League (England)	Professional
	Dimmock and Grove (2005)	Australia	Australian football, Basketball and Football	4 Australian teams	Professional
	Harker and Jensen (2020)	U.S.A.	American football	NFL (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Kabiri <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Iran	Football	Persian Gulf Pro League (Iran)	Professional
Toder Alon <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Israel	Football	/	Professional	
Displaced and distant fans	Al Ganideh and Good (2015)	Jordan	Football	La Liga (Spain)	Professional
	Andrijiw and Hyatt (2009)	Canada	Ice hockey	NHL (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Burton <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Canada	Football	2014 FIFA WC (Brazil)	Professional

	Collins and Heere (2018)	U.S.A.	American football	NFL (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Collins <i>et al.</i> (2016)	U.S.A.	American football	NFL (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Lianopoulos <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Greece	Football	Greek and International teams (Germany, Spain, other).	Amateur and Professional
	Lintumaeki and Koll (2024)	Finland	Ice hockey	Liiga (Finland)	Professional
	Sidani <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Canada	Ice hockey	NHL (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Taylor <i>et al.</i> (2014)	U.S.A.	Football	Premier League (England)	Professional
	Weng (2022)	China	Football	Bundesliga (Germany), La Liga (Spain) and Premier League (England)	Professional
Doping and scandals	Cranmer <i>et al.</i> (2023)	U.S.A.	American football	NCAA (U.S.A.)	Amateur
	Dietz-Uhler <i>et al.</i> (2002)	U.S.A.	American football	/	/
	Fink <i>et al.</i> (2009)	U.S.A.	/	University team	Amateur
	Lee <i>et al.</i> (2016)	U.S.A.	American football	NFL (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Seaton <i>et al.</i> (2022)	U.S.A.	American football	NFL (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Sun <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Australia	Football	Premier League (England)	Professional
Emotions	Ballouli <i>et al.</i> (2017)	U.S.A.	American football	NCAA (U.S.A.)	Amateur
	Katz <i>et al.</i> (2020b)	U.S.A.	American football	NFL (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Prayag <i>et al.</i> (2020)	New Zealand	Rugby	2015 RWC (U.K.)	Professional
Fan community	Burns (2014)	U.S.A.	American football	NFL	Professional

	Katz <i>et al.</i> (2020a)	U.S.A.	Football	European team	Professional
	Katz <i>et al.</i> (2018)	U.S.A.	Ice hockey	NCAA (U.S.A.)	Amateur
	Nakagawa <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Japan	Baseball	NPB (Japan)	Professional
	Platow <i>et al.</i> (1999)	Australia	Australian football	AFL (Australia)	Professional
	Statz <i>et al.</i> (2022)	U.S.A.	American football, Baseball, Fighting, Football, Ice hockey and Lacrosse	MLB, NCAA, NFL and NHL (U.S.A.)	Amateur and Professional
Gender	Dietz <i>et al.</i> (2021)	U.S.A.	/	/	/
	Bell <i>et al.</i> (2022)	U.S.A.	American football	NFL (U.S.A.)	Professional
Identity change and maintenance strategies	Carter (2016)*	U.S.A.	Basketball	NBA (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Delia (2015)	U.S.A.	American football	NCAA (U.S.A.)	Amateur
	Doyle <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Australia	Australian football	AFL	Professional
	End <i>et al.</i> (2002)	U.S.A.	Multiple sports	Multiple sports teams	Amateur and Professional
	Fan <i>et al.</i> (2020)	U.K.	Football	2018 FIFA WC (Russia)	Professional
	Gantz and Lewis (2023)	U.S.A.	American football	NFL (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Hirt <i>et al.</i> (1992)	U.S.A.	Basketball	NCAA (U.S.A.)	Amateur
	Kwak and Pradhan (2021)	U.S.A.	American football, Baseball, Basketball, Football, Ice hockey	MLB, MLS, NBA, NCAA, NFL and NHL (U.S.A.)	Amateur and Professional

	Lock <i>et al.</i> (2014)	Australia	Australian football	AFL (Australia)	Professional
	Lock <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Australia	Football	A-League (Australia and New Zealand)	Professional
	Mansfield <i>et al.</i> (2020)	U.S.A.	American football	NFL (U.S.A.)	Professional
Identity transmission	Hyatt <i>et al.</i> (2018)*	Canada and U.S.A.	American football, Baseball, Basketball and Ice hockey	CFL, MLB, NBA, NFL and NHL (Canada and U.S.A.)	Professional
	Kaiser <i>et al.</i> (2016)	U.S.A.	American football	NFL (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Mansfield (2020)*	U.S.A.	American football, Baseball, Basketball and Ice hockey	MLB, NBA, NCAA, NFL and NHL (U.S.A.)	Amateur and Professional
Innovation and emerging sports realities	Dwyer <i>et al.</i> (2016)	U.S.A.	Multiple sports	/	Amateur and Professional
	Katz and Heere (2016)	U.S.A.	American football	NCAA (U.S.A.)	Amateur
	McClung and Rynarzewska (2015)	U.S.A.	American football	NCAA (U.S.A.)	Amateur
	Monaghan and Read (2022)	U.K.	American football	NFL (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Navarro-Picado <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Costa Rica	Football	National Football Federation (Costa Rica)	Professional
	Winand <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Germany and U.K.	Football	/	Professional
Media and commentators	Lewis and Hirt (2019)	U.S.A.	Basketball	NCAA (U.S.A.)	Amateur
	Nichols <i>et al.</i> (2016)	U.S.A.	American football	NFL (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Phua (2010)	U.S.A.	American football	NCAA (U.S.A.)	Amateur

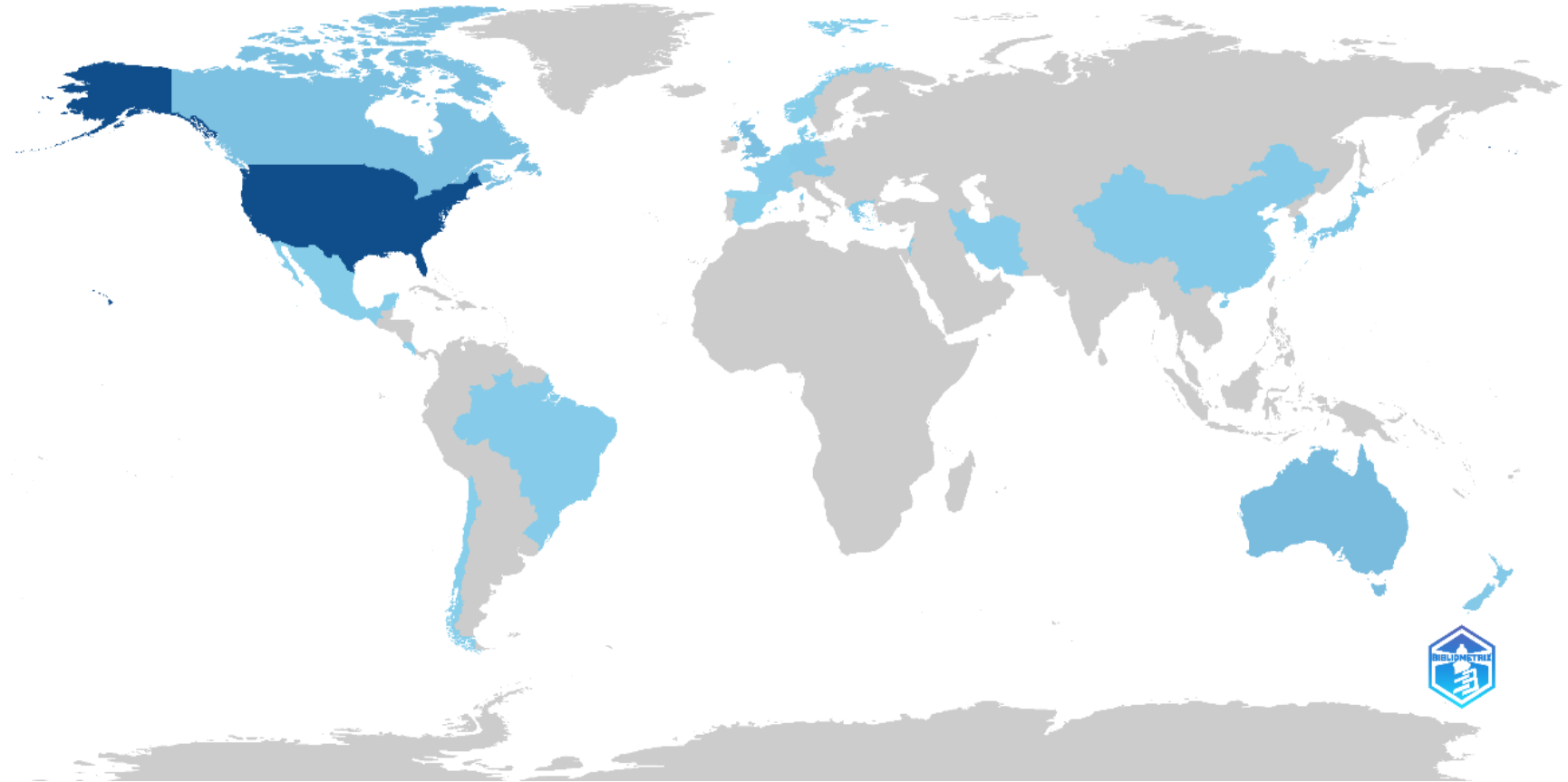
	Sadri (2014)	U.S.A.	Basketball	NCAA (U.S.A.)	Amateur
Nationalism and ethnicity	Devlin and Billings (2016)	U.S.A.	Football	2014 FIFA WC (Brazil)	Professional
	Devlin <i>et al.</i> (2017)	U.S.A.	Football	2014 FIFA WC (Brazil)	Professional
	Harrolle <i>et al.</i> (2010)	U.S.A.	Baseball	MLB (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Kerr and Morgan (2022)	Brazil and Other	Football	2014 FIFA WC (Brazil)	Professional
	Lang (2020)	U.S.A.	American football and Baseball	MLB and NFL (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Shin <i>et al.</i> (2019)	U.S.A.	Basketball	NBA (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Points of identification	Brown <i>et al.</i> (2013)	International	Mixed Martial Arts	UFC (U.S.A.)
Hakim (2021)		U.S.A.	Lacrosse	Premier League Lacrosse (U.S.A.)	Professional
Hoegele <i>et al.</i> (2014)		Germany	Football	Bundesliga (Germany)	Professional
Lee <i>et al.</i> (2020)		South Korea	Baseball	KBO (South Korea)	Professional
Mudrick and Fink (2022)		U.S.A.	Football	(U.S.A.)	Amateur
Wu <i>et al.</i> (2012)		Taiwan	Baseball	CPBL (Taiwan)	Professional
Rivalry	Ambrose and Schnitzlein, (2017)	U.S.A.	Tennis	ATP and WTA (International)	Professional
	de Amorim and de Almeida (2015)	Brazil	Football	Brasilerao (Brazil)	Professional
	Grohs <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Germany	Football	Bundesliga (Germany)	Professional
	Havard (2014)	U.S.A.	American football and Basketball	NCAA (U.S.A.)	Amateur

	Tyler and Cobbs (2017)	U.S.A.	American football and Ice hockey	NCAA (U.S.A.)	Amateur
	Watanabe <i>et al.</i> (2019)	U.S.A.	American football	NCAA (U.S.A.)	Amateur
Social media	Brown-Devlin <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Canada, China, Germany, Japan, Sweden and U.S.A.	Winter Olympics	2018 Winter Olympics (South Korea)	Professional
	Havard <i>et al.</i> (2021)	U.S.A.	eSports	/	Amateur
	Herrera <i>et al.</i> (2018)	U.K.	Football	Premier League (England)	Professional
	Hull <i>et al.</i> (2019)	U.S.A.	Baseball	MLB (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Kim and Manoli (2023)	South Korea	Baseball	KBO (South Korea)	Professional
	Kirkwood <i>et al.</i> (2021)	International	Mixed Martial Arts	UFC (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Mendenhall (2016)	U.S.A.	American football	Super Bowl (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Phua <i>et al.</i> (2018)	U.S.A.	American football	NCAA (U.S.A.)	Amateur
	Popp <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Germany	Football	Bundesliga (Germany)	Professional
	Yang <i>et al.</i> (2016)	China	Football	2014 FIFA WC (Brazil)	Professional
	Yoshida <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Japan	Basketball and Football	J. League and NPB (Japan)	Professional
Sponsorship, stakeholders and endorsements	Biscaia <i>et al.</i> (2018)*	Portugal	Football	Primeira Liga (Portugal)	Professional
	Brown-Devlin <i>et al.</i> (2023)	U.S.A.	American football	NCAA (U.S.A.)	Amateur
	Carlson and Donavan, (2017)	U.S.A.	Basketball	NBA (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Close Scheinbaum <i>et al.</i> (2019)	U.S.A.	Cycling	Tour of Utah (U.S.A.)	Professional

	Gillooly <i>et al.</i> (2020)	U.K.	Football	3 Clubs (England)	Professional
	Herrmann <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Belgium and France	Football	Ligue 2 (France)	Professional
	Joo <i>et al.</i> (2016)	U.S.A.	Baseball	MLB (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Parker and Fink (2010)	U.S.A.	American football	NFL (U.S.A.)	Professional
Stadia and attendance	Karakaya <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Greece	Football	2 games in Athens	/
	Kinoshita and Matsuoka (2023)	Japan	Rugby	Rugby Top League (Japan)	Professional
	Laverie and Arnett (2000)	U.S.A.	Basketball	NCAA (U.S.A.)	Amateur
	Reysen <i>et al.</i> (2012)	U.S.A.	Basketball	NCAA (U.S.A.)	Amateur
	Rocha and Fleury (2017)	Brazil	Football	Brasileao (Brazil)	Professional
Theorizing fans, teams and scales	Shuv-Ami and Toder Alon (2023)	Israel	Basketball	/	Professional
	Tsigilis <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Greece	/	/	/
Well-being	Inoue <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Australia and U.S.A.	American football and Australian football	AFL (Australia) and NFL (U.S.A.)	Professional
	Kim <i>et al.</i> (2017)	U.S.A.	Football	2014 FIFA WC (Brazil)	Professional
	Mansfield <i>et al.</i> (2022)*	U.S.A.	American football, Baseball, Basketball, Cricket, Football, Ice hockey	/	/
	Robinson <i>et al.</i> (2023)	U.K.	Football	2018 FIFA WC (Russia)	Professional

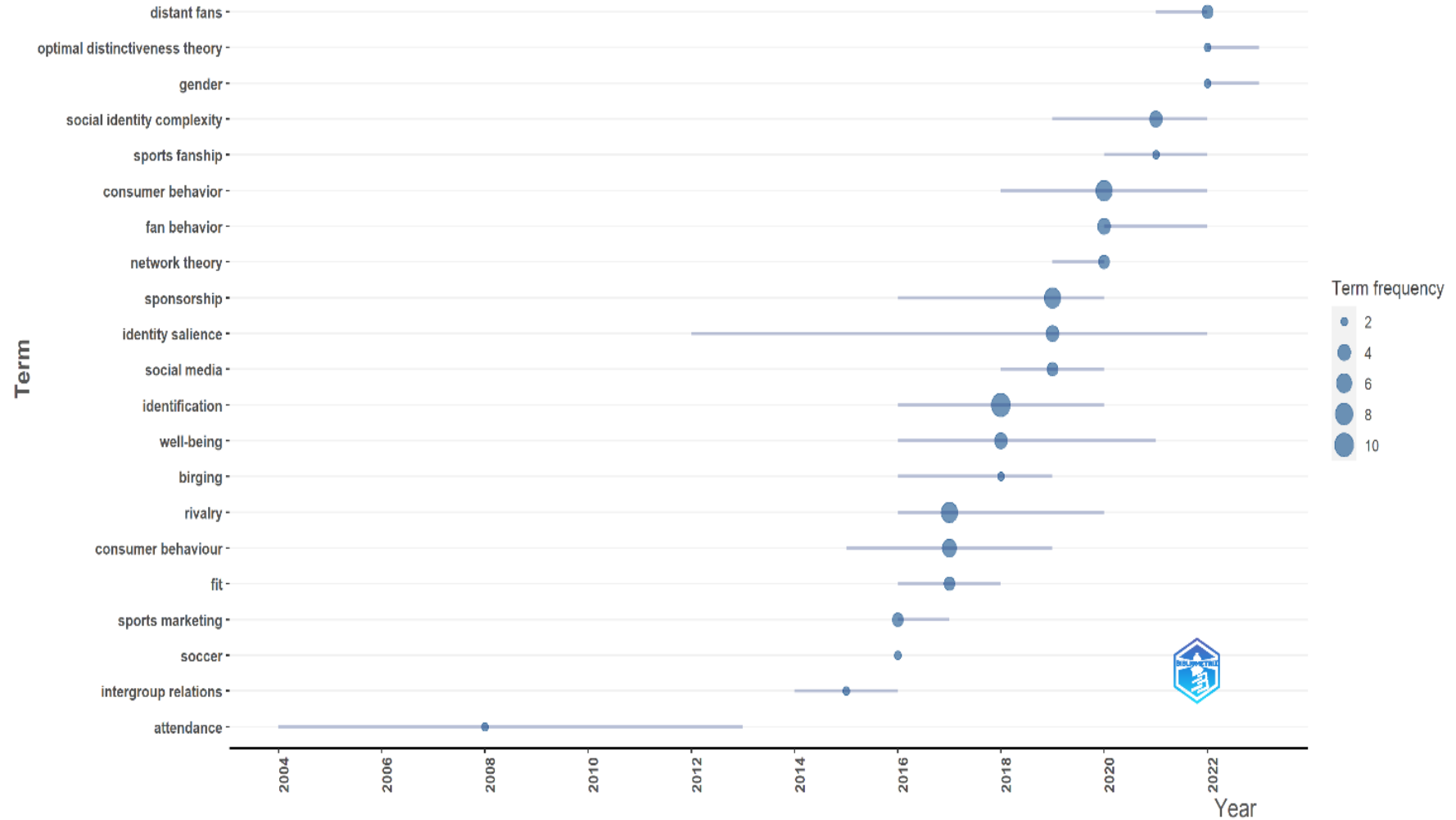
Notes. AFL = Australian Football League; ATP = Association of Tennis Professionals; CFL = Canadian Football League; CPBL = Chinese Professional Baseball League; FIFA WC = Fédération Internationale de Football Association World Cup; KBO = Korean Baseball Organization; MLB = Major League Baseball; MLS = Major League Soccer; NBA = National Basketball Association; NCAA = National Collegiate Athletic Association; NFL = National Football League; NHL = National Hockey League; NPB = Nippon Professional Baseball; UFC = Ultimate Fighting Championship; WTA = Women's Tennis Association. * Adopting identity theory; ** Adopting both identity and social identity theory. Source: Authors' own elaboration

Figure 2.3. Countries scientific production on a global scale.



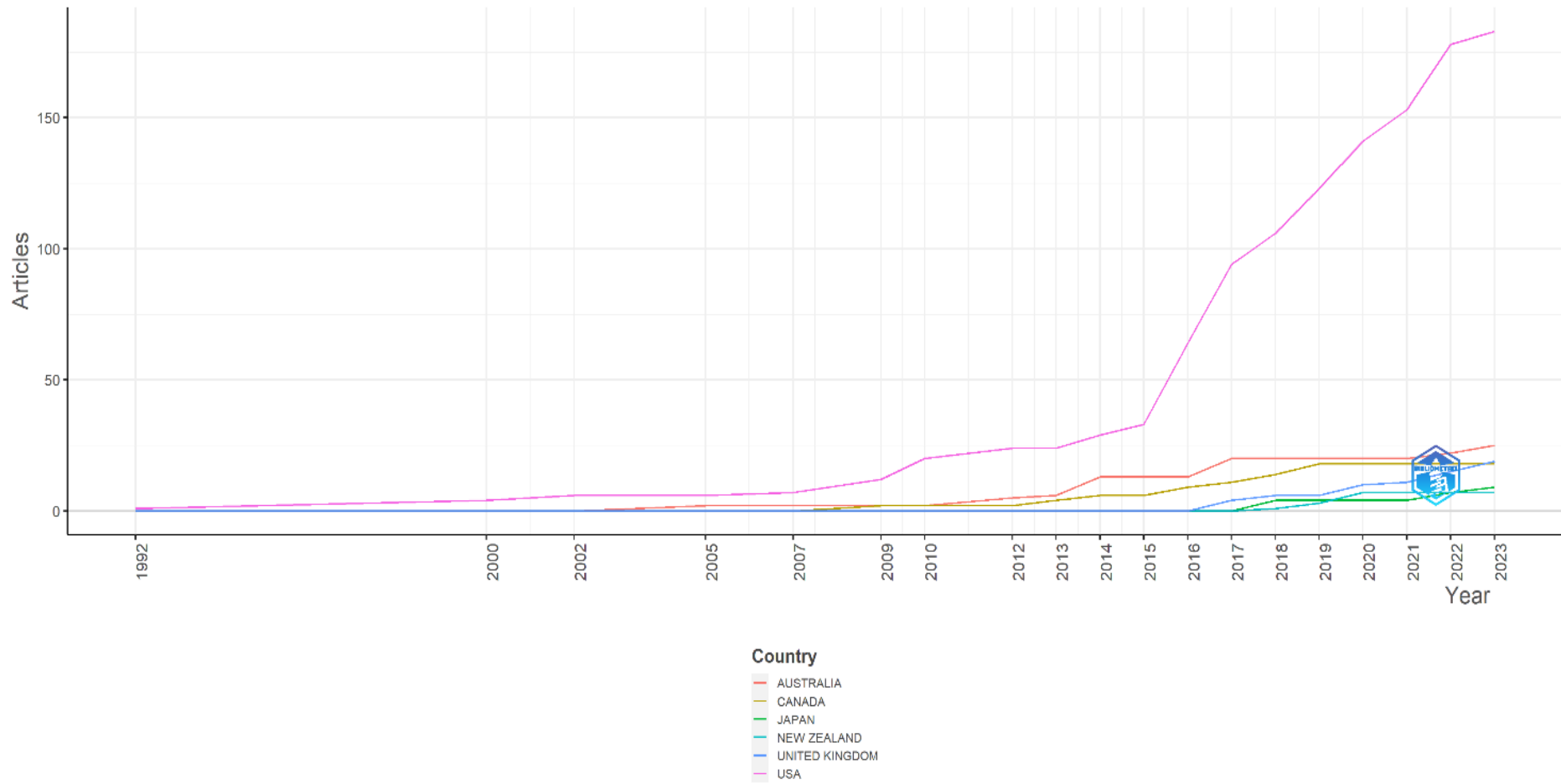
Source: Authors' own elaboration on Biblioshiny

Figure 2.4. Keywords frequencies in sampled references.



Source: Authors' own elaboration on Biblioshiny.

Figure 2.7. Top 6 countries' scientific production cumulative trends via authors' academic affiliation.



Source: Authors' own elaboration on Biblioshiny.

Chapter 3. Unveiling the emotional edge: An investigation of how fans' emotional attachment influences the relationships between fanship, fandom, subjective well-being, and attitudinal loyalty.

3.1 Introduction and hypotheses

Team identification has received consistent academic attention in sport management and marketing over the last thirty years (Lock and Heere, 2017). The psychological connection between sports fans and various features of their team (e.g., logo, stadium, athletes) has been investigated in terms of brand profitability (Matsuoka et al., 2003), consumer loyalty (Bodet and Bernache-Assollant, 2011), stadium attendance (Wakefield and Sloan, 1995), and fans' well-being (Inoue et al., 2017; Reysen et al., 2022b; Wann, 2006). However, in prior work, team identification has been primarily operationalised as the relationship between fans and their team. In line with the social identity approach (SIA), it appears well founded to distinguish between fans' personal connection with their beloved team/club (fanship) and their social connection with other fans and the broader fan community (fandom) (Gordon et al., 2021; Yoshida et al., 2015a, 2015b, 2015c; Reysen et al., 2022a, 2022b; Reysen and Branscombe, 2010).

According to the SIA, identities have an emotional dimension, which consists of identity-oriented affective values and meanings (Abrams and Hogg, 1990; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Although the role of both discrete and group-based emotions in individuals' identification with a team appears clear (Campo et al., 2012, 2019; Gordon et al., 2021; Prayag et al., 2020), there is a lack of understanding about how individual emotional attachment to the team may interact with the diverse identification processes of fans (Dwyer et al., 2015). To fill this research gap, we propose emotional attachment as a distinct yet complementary construct that interacts with identification (Sen et al., 2015). The rationale behind this

combination lays on two elements: (a) the SIA posits that identification is necessarily composed of both cognitive and evaluative components – while the emotional dimension emerges when specific identities are considered crucial and thus are internalised – (Tajfel, 1982); and (b) attachment involves a more significant affective bond with an organization (Prayag et al., 2020; Sen et al., 2015). Considering the complementarity of identification and emotional attachment as variables capturing consumer-organization linkage can better facilitate an understanding of the identification process from an emotional perspective. Furthermore, although individual-level emotional attachment to the team has been proposed as an interacting variable with fans' identification processes (Dwyer et al., 2015), this interaction remains under researched.

Accordingly, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the moderating role of emotional attachment in the relationships between fanship, fandom, subjective well-being (SWB), and attitudinal loyalty to the team. To this end, we analysed data from fans of two Italian Serie A teams—S.S. Lazio and A.S. Roma—collected via on-site and online surveys. Contrary to expectations, theoretical implications emerging from the current study highlight the negative influence of elevated emotional attachment on high identifiers - either with the team or with the surrounding fan communities. From a practical point of view, monitoring, anticipating, and addressing issues concerned with the emotional attachment of fans can be highly strategic in terms of communication and marketing strategies of clubs, sponsors and organisations.

The literature reviewed in the first chapter of the current thesis indicates that fanship and fandom are correlated, but they capture different aspects of fans' identification in relation to a sport team (Reysen et al., 2022b). Through a principal components analysis using data from different fans' interests (e.g., sports, music, media, hobbies), original work from Reysen and Branscombe (2010) provided a statistically supported distinction between these two factors.

However, since traditional team identification research does not distinguish between fanship and fandom, we explore the association between these two constructs. Accordingly, this study assumes that:

H1: Fanship and fandom are two distinct yet correlating constructs.

Extant literature supports the positive association between the psychological connection with the beloved team and different forms of well-being (Branscombe and Wann, 1991; Inoue et al., 2015, 2017, 2022; Wann, 2006; Wann et al., 2017). Wann (2006) proposed and positively tested the Team Identification–Social Psychological Health Model which supported fanship to become a positive predictor of social well-being through the necessary effects of social interactions. In addition, Fanship was found to be associated with collective identity (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010), psychological (eudaimonic) and social well-being, as well as positive emotional (hedonic) states (Inoue et al., 2015; Wann et al., 1999; Wann and Pierce, 2005). Despite the overall empirical support, recent research reported fanship as a non-significant antecedent of psychological well-being (Reysen et al., 2022b). Accordingly, further investigation is deemed constructive, and this study assumes that:

H2a: Fanship is positively associated with SWB.

While fanship is not directly associated with well-being (Wann, 2006), fandom represents and captures the social identification with the surrounding fan community and fellow fans. Accordingly, as highlighted by previous empirical findings (Reysen et al., 2022b), when compared with fanship, fandom is expected to be more strongly associated with fanship. Different empirical studies confirm the positive association between fandom and psychological wellbeing (Reysen et al., 2022a, 2022b), self-esteem (Reysen et al., 2022a), and overall well-being indexes (Reysen et al., 2017). These results appear in line with the theoretical arguments concerning the coping psychological and health resources provided by

social identification (Haslam et al., 2009; Jetten et al., 2014, 2017). Thus, this research hypothesizes that:

H2b: Fandom is positively associated with SWB, and this association is stronger than the association between fanship and SWB.

When individuals identify with a group, they are expected to express and exhibit consistent group loyalty, particularly under perceived external threat to the group's social identity (Ellemers et al., 2002; Van Vugt and Hart, 2004). The SIA posits that in the face of identity threats—possibly arising from negative group outcomes (Turner et al., 1984)—high identifiers express high levels of group cohesiveness, attraction and ultimately loyalty. Loyalty is a multifaceted and complex construct, and it has been theorised in terms of behavioural and attitudinal dimensions (Day, 1969). Of them, we focus on attitudinal team loyalty, which refers to the outcome of the interactions between external pressures to change and mature attitudes toward a team. It is featured by (a) choice persistence, (b) resistance to change, (c) cognitive processing biases towards the choice, and (d) behavioural model (Heere and Dickinson, 2008).

At the individual level, previous research has highlighted the stability and persistence of psychological identification with a beloved team (Lock et al., 2014) and its positive association with attitudinal loyalty (Matsuoka et al., 2003; Stevens and Rosenberger, 2012). Investigating Australian rugby league fans, Stevens and Rosenberg (2012) observed fan identification to be a better predictor of team loyalty than sport and team involvement. Furthermore, fanship was found to be negatively associated with changes in fans' behaviours (Harada and Matsuoka, 1999), indicating that individuals with stronger fanship tend to stay loyal to their team. Thus, this study hypothesizes that:

H3a: Fanship is positively associated with attitudinal loyalty.

Ellemers and colleagues (2001) argued that high identifiers face the fear of being excluded from their group (or potentially excluded in the future). As such, they are expected to react by (a) perceiving higher ingroup homogeneity, (b) accepting (or not accepting) a more peripheral group position, or (c) displaying group prototypical behaviours, particularly in social occasions. This last consideration relates to the existence of a tacit ‘non abandonment’ rule “which conveys that once people become involved in a group, they must show their loyalty, especially when the group most needs it—in the presence of an attractive exit” (Van Vugt and Hart, 2004 p. 588). As groups hold normative attributes, the SIA posits individuals who strongly identify with those groups are more influenced by group-induced norms than low-identifiers (Smith et al., 2007; Terry and Hogg, 1996). More often, high identifiers remain loyal to their groups as they are more positively and favourably biased towards fellow ingroup members than alternatives (Van Vugt and Hart, 2004). This leads to the next hypothesis:

H3b: Fandom is positively associated with attitudinal loyalty.

Relationship marketing research reveals that fanship predicts loyal intentions towards a team and high identifiers are less affected by satisfaction with (a) game score, (b) performance quality and (c) contest excellence, than low identifiers (Matsuoka et al., 2003). Thus, even in the absence of satisfaction, high identifiers are more likely to remain loyal to their team. However, loyalty is better predicted by the interaction of fanship and satisfaction than fanship solely (Matsuoka et al., 2003). An empirically supported model proposes fanship as a mediator between customer satisfaction and attitudinal loyalty to the team (Bodet and Bernache-Assolant, 2011). Being satisfaction one key element of consumer well-being (Lee et al., 2002), this study proposes that:

H3c: SWB positively mediates the relationship between fanship and attitudinal loyalty.

Additionally, as indicated by research within the SIA regarding health and well-being, high identifiers with groups should experience positive emotions stemming from their group membership. This is because being part of a group provides access to social and psychological resources that aid in coping with challenging or unfavourable circumstances (Haslam et al., 2009; Jetten et al., 2017). As social identities become stronger and more integrated into one's self-concept, it is expected that health-focused norms within the group will be more relevant leading to sustained group participation in group-related activities (Jetten et al., 2017). Consequently, group membership has the potential to improve individual well-being (Jetten et al., 2017), which, in turn, may positively influence the attitudinal loyalty of identified fans.

H3d: SWB positively mediates the relationship between fandom and attitudinal loyalty.

While consumers may form an identification with a brand devoid of emotional attachment (Sen et al., 2015), studies on fans of new teams indicate that emotional significance in identification evolves as they gain knowledge about the team and its players, which becomes embedded in memory (Lock et al., 2012). This evolving connection can eventually transform into a lasting emotional bond with the team (Dwyer et al., 2015; Sen et al., 2015). Specifically, over time and through direct engagement, fans who individually identify with a team develop an emotional connection to it (Dwyer et al., 2015; Lock et al., 2012), impacting their perceived satisfaction (Paxton and Moody, 2003). As fans' cognitive investment and emotional returns from their affiliation with the team grow, they feel a sense of security and comfort from the positive emotions associated with their team (Sen et al., 2015; Thomson et al., 2005), leading to increased satisfaction (Ladhari et al., 2022). Ultimately, emotional bonding with a team has the potential to reinforce the connection between personal identification with the team and the psychological benefits it provides

(Lee et al., 2002; Sato et al., 2022). Expanding on this evidence, we anticipate that emotional attachment will bolster the relationship between fanship and subjective well-being. This viewpoint is consistent with the SIA, which suggests that emotional significance is inherent in group memberships that are deeply internalized and meaningful to individuals (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). As emotional significance and meanings associated with group membership increase, so does the individual's self-esteem derived from their membership in the group (Abrams and Hogg, 1990; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Consequently, as a fan's emotional attachment grows, we anticipate it will fortify the link between fandom and subjective well-being. Thus, this study assumes:

H4a: Emotional attachment positively moderates the associations between both fanship and fandom and SWB.

Recent research findings suggest that the emotional connection football fans have with their team brand positively influences their loyalty towards the team and their resistance to change (Park et al., 2010; Lehmann et al., 2008). This observation is consistent with Hallberg's (2003) discovery that emotional attachment significantly predicts brand loyalty. Similarly, a recent study on Canadian hockey fans reaffirmed the positive impact of emotional attachment to a team brand (Ladhari et al., 2022). Despite team performance satisfaction not always being a factor, fanship still correlates positively with attitudinal loyalty (Matsuoka et al., 2003), indicating that the combination of fanship and emotional attachment strengthens loyalty. It's reasonable to expect that fans who emotionally invest in their team and experience positive emotions will continue to demonstrate loyalty towards the team. Moreover, according to the SIA, increased social identification and emotional attachment are likely to lead to greater participation in group activities (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000). The emotions associated

with identification and participation have the potential to positively influence the relationship between fandom and attitudinal loyalty (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000; Paxton and Moody, 2003). These arguments lead to the following hypothesis:

H4b: Emotional attachment positively moderates the associations between both fanship and fandom and attitudinal loyalty.

As mentioned above, it has been suggested that social interactions and engagement needs to be involved in the association between fanship and well-being in order to contribute to positive effects (Wann, 2006). Moreover, social connections (Reysen et al., 2017) and attending events (Reysen et al., 2022b) positively mediate the link between fandom and various aspects of well-being. Consequently, fans who engage in both interpersonal and group-based social interactions, particularly those attending live games (i.e. on-site group) are expected to demonstrate stronger connections between fanship, fandom, and subjective well-being compared to those who do not attend (i.e. online group). Additionally, strengthened associations between fanship, fandom, and subjective well-being resulting from live game attendance should further amplify the mediating impact of subjective well-being on the relationships between fanship, fandom, and attitudinal loyalty to the team. These considerations lead to the following hypotheses;

H5a: The on-site group will show stronger relationships between fanship, fandom and SWB than the online group.

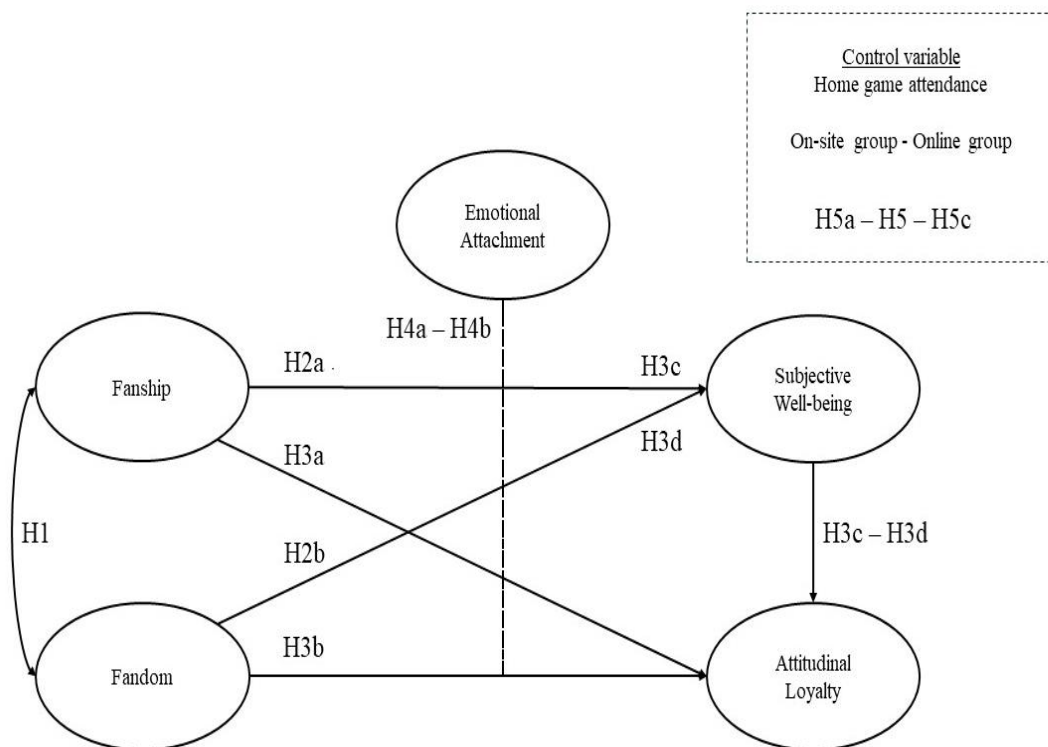
H5b: The on-site group shows stronger positive indirect effects of both fanship and fandom on attitudinal loyalty through SWB than the online group.

During sports events, high identifiers with their team often perceive elevated emotional connections with fellow fans (Doyle et al., 2016) and exhibit more intense emotional reactions (Cialdini et al., 1976). Importantly, direct involvement with the supported

club (e.g., attending games in person) strengthens fans' emotional bond (Ladhari et al., 2022). Attending games serves to: (a) tangibly reinforce feelings of bonding and attachment to the team (Dwyer et al., 2015); (b) cultivate feelings of joy (Biscaia et al., 2012), happiness, and affection (Prayag et al., 2020), all of which contribute to fans' emotional satisfaction (Dwyer et al., 2015; Thomson et al., 2005). Furthermore, interactions and activities within the fan community have been demonstrated to heighten members' emotional attachment to their group (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000). Accordingly, this study assumes that:

H5c: The on-site group will show higher positive moderating effects of emotional attachment on the relationships between fanship, fandom, SWB and attitudinal loyalty than the online group.

Figure 3.1. Visual representation of proposed hypotheses.



Source: authors' own elaboration.

Table 3.1. Breakdown of study hypotheses.

Label	Hypothesis content
H1	Fanship and fandom are two distinct yet correlated constructs.
H2a	Fanship is positively associated with subjective well-being.
H2b	Fandom is positively associated with subjective well-being, and this association is stronger than the association between fanship and subjective well-being.
H3a	Fanship is positively associated with attitudinal loyalty.
H3b	Fandom is positively associated with attitudinal loyalty.
H3c	Subjective well-being positively mediates the relationship between fanship and attitudinal loyalty.
H3d	Subjective well-being positively mediates the relationship between fandom and attitudinal loyalty.
H4a	Emotional attachment positively moderates the associations between fanship and subjective well-being, and fandom and subjective well-being.
H4b	Emotional attachment positively moderates the associations between fanship and attitudinal loyalty, and fandom and attitudinal loyalty.
H5a	The relationships between fanship and subjective well-being, and fandom and subjective well-being will be stronger for the on-site group than the online group.
H5b	The on-site group will have stronger positive indirect effects of both fanship and fandom on attitudinal loyalty through subjective well-being than the online group.
H5c	The on-site group will show higher positive moderating effects of

	emotional attachment on the relationships between fanship, fandom, subjective well-being and attitudinal loyalty than the online group.
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Source: authors' own elaboration.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Participants and procedures

Data were collected by conducting a survey targeting adult fans of the S.S. Lazio and A.S. Roma clubs. It was required that participants were self-described fans of the clubs, and their ages ranged from 18 to 85 years old. To examine between-groups comparisons as hypothesized in H5a-H5c, the same online questionnaire per each team was distributed to potential participants in two distinct on-site and online data collection settings. The on-site setting was based on a direct, in person approach and completion of the online questionnaire in the surroundings of Stadio Olimpico (Olympic Stadium) before home games of both teams (see Table 3.2).

On-site participants were able to complete the survey directly on their mobile phones after having scanned a QR code provided by the research team before entering home venue gates; accordingly, all on-site group participants were about to attend the home games. In this way, the on-site setting managed to gather data from identified actual game attending fans uninfluenced by potential (positive or negative) in- or post-game result biases. The online setting involved distributing questionnaire links in three ways: (a) among official S.S. Lazio/A.S. Roma fan club members through official contacts; (b) physical public flyers and posters positioned in various spots across the Stadio Olimpico park and within local university facilities; and (c) posting on unofficial S.S. Lazio/A.S. Roma fanbase Facebook private groups. For the on-site setting and the use of posters and flyers, a shared QR code enabled digital access to the questionnaire.

Table 3.2. On-site data collection events and surveys collected.

Date	Time	Game	Championship	Participants
05/03/2023	20.45	Roma - Juventus	Serie A	3
07/03/2023	18.45	Lazio – AZ	UEFA Conference League	25
09/03/2023	18.45	Roma -Real Sociedad	UEFA Conference League	22
12/03/2023	18.00	Roma - Sassuolo	Serie A	5
19/03/2023	18.00	Lazio - Roma	Serie A	2
02/04/2023	18.00	Roma - Sampdoria	Serie A	4
08/04/2023	20.45	Lazio - Juventus	Serie A	10
16/04/2023	20.45	Roma - Udinese	Serie A	13
20/04/2023	21.00	Roma - Feyenoord	UEFA Conference League	20
22/04/2023	18.00	Lazio - Torino	Serie A	9
29/04/2023	18.00	Roma - Milan	Serie A	12
03/05/2023	21.00	Lazio - Sassuolo	Serie A	53
06/05/2023	18.00	Roma - Inter	Serie A	12
11/05/2023	21.00	Roma - Leverkusen	UEFA Conference League	10
12/05/2023	20.45	Lazio - Lecce	Serie A	9
22/05/2023	18.30	Roma - Salernitana	Serie A	11
27/05/2023	18.30	Lazio - Cremonese	Serie A	8

Source: authors' own elaboration.

Originally, 604 fans participated in the study. Of them, 30 surveys were removed because of missing responses, and three additional surveys were removed for low engagement rate (i.e., standard deviation across answers was lower than 0.30) (Nisar et al., 2020). The final sample

included 571 fans of which 213 were recruited on site, and 358 completed the questionnaire online. The mean age of the final sample was 37 years (SD = 6.2, range 18–82). Females accounted for 29.9% of the sample while males accounted for 69.4%; four participants did not disclose their gender. Overall, 49.9% of survey participants were full-time employees; 45.9% held a secondary school certificate/diploma; 86.3 % were residents within Roman metropolitan area; 61.6% practiced amateur sporting activities; and 55% were A.S. Roma supporters and 45% were S.S. Lazio fans.

3.2.2 Measures

All survey items were rated on a seven-point-Likert scale ranging from “1 - strongly disagree” to “7 - strongly agree” (see Table 3.3, Appendix B). *Fanship* was measured with three items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$) from the original Fanship scale (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010). This scale was developed as a measure of individual connection to the fan's interest-object (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010), and the three selected items have been previously used by Reysen et al. (2022b). Three items from the group identification scale (Doosje et al., 1995) were used to measure *fandom* ($\alpha = .92$), in line with previous work (Cassidy et al., 2014; Reysen et al., 2013, 2017, 2022b). Four items from the Attitudinal Loyalty to Team Scale (ALTS) (Heere and Dickson, 2008) assessed *attitudinal loyalty*, and these items yielded a high reliability score ($\alpha = .92$), consistent with past studies (Dwyer, 2011; Tachis and Tzetzis, 2015; White et al., 2023). Concerning *SWB*, we used 17 items from the Well-being Scale to measure the social, eudemonic and hedonic dimensions of fans' SWB (Lui and Fernando, 2018), which provided adequate reliability ($\alpha = .96$). Finally, the Emotional Attachment to Sport Team Scale (Dwyer et al., 2015) was employed to capture two dimensions of fans' *emotional attachment*: emotional investment and dividend. This scale provided high reliability ($\alpha = .97$) in line with previous work (Dwyer et al., 2015; Hebles et al., 2020).

3.2.3 Back translation

All scales and items were originally developed in English. After adapting the items to the research setting (i.e., S.S. Lazio/A.S. Roma fans), the questionnaire was translated to Italian using a back translation process (Brislin, 1970). Accordingly, two bilingual authors produced English-to-Italian and, then, Italian-to-English translations of the questionnaire. In a further step, a native English speaker observed for discrepancies and similarities between the original and back translated versions. Since no significant differences were found, the English and Italian questionnaires were considered equivalent. This process was deemed coherent and suitable in previous sports management and marketing studies (e.g., Yoshida et al., 2023).

3.3 Analysis and Results

3.3.1 Measurement model

CFA was performed via IBM AMOS 29 by including all the multi-item scales described above. The model fit indexes from the CFA were acceptable ($\chi^2 / df = 1778.32/512 = 3.47$, CFI = .94, SRMR = .05, RMSEA = .07). Convergent validity across all measures were confirmed as construct reliability coefficients were .92 or above (threshold is $> .70$; Hair et al., 2021) and average variance extracted (AVE) values were .74 or above (threshold is $> .50$; Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Hair et al., 2021) for all latent constructs (see Table 3.4, Appendix B). The square root of each AVE was higher than each pair of correlation coefficients, which supported discriminant validity among constructs (MacKenzie et al., 2011). We conducted Cook's distance analysis (outliers have scores > 1.00), which indicated there were no multivariate outliers. To check for multicollinearity, we produced variable inflation factors (VIFs) for the relationships tested. No VIFs were observed as greater than 2, which is far below the threshold of 10 (O'Brien, 2007).

3.3.2 Structural model

The hypotheses led to a structural model shown in Figure 3.2; goodness-of-fit indices held acceptable results (see Table 3.5) (MacKenzie et al., 2011)..

Table 3.5. Structural model fit.

χ^2	<i>df</i>	χ^2 / df	p-value	RMSEA	p-value	CFI	SRMR
1884.68	512	3.68	0.000	0.069	0.000	0.931	0.050

Source: authors' own elaboration.

H1 proposed that fanship and fandom are distinct yet correlating constructs. First, no convergent validity issues were observed between the two constructs. Concerning discriminant validity, the AVE values of both scales were found to be greater than the square of their correlation (Fornell and Lacker, 1981), and the correlation between constructs (.842) was lower than the .950 threshold for testing empirical redundancy and random error effect (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Furthermore, in line with MacKenzie et al. (2011), after fixing the covariance of both constructs to 1.0, a chi-square difference test confirmed that the constrained model testing whether the model performed better with fanship and fandom as one construct performed significantly worse than the original hypothesized model (see Table 3.6). As such, H1 was supported.

H2a hypothesized that fanship positively correlates with SWB; however, the results exhibited a nonsignificant relationship ($\beta = .079, p = .501$). Accordingly, H2a was not supported.

H2b hypothesized that fandom positively correlates with SWB. The structural model revealed that this relationship was positive and significant ($\beta = .226, p < 0.05$). Given this evidence together with the non-significant association between fanship and SWB, H2b was supported.

Table 3.6. Fanship and fandom: discriminant validity chi-square difference test

Hypothesis testing	Paths	χ^2	<i>df</i>	Delta χ^2 (<i>df</i>)	Decision
/	Unconstrained	1886.37	514	-	-
H1	FNP \leftrightarrow FDM constrained	2196.48	515	310.11 (1) ***	Support

Notes. Critical value for Delta χ^2 with *df* = 1 is 10.83 at the .001(****p* < .001).

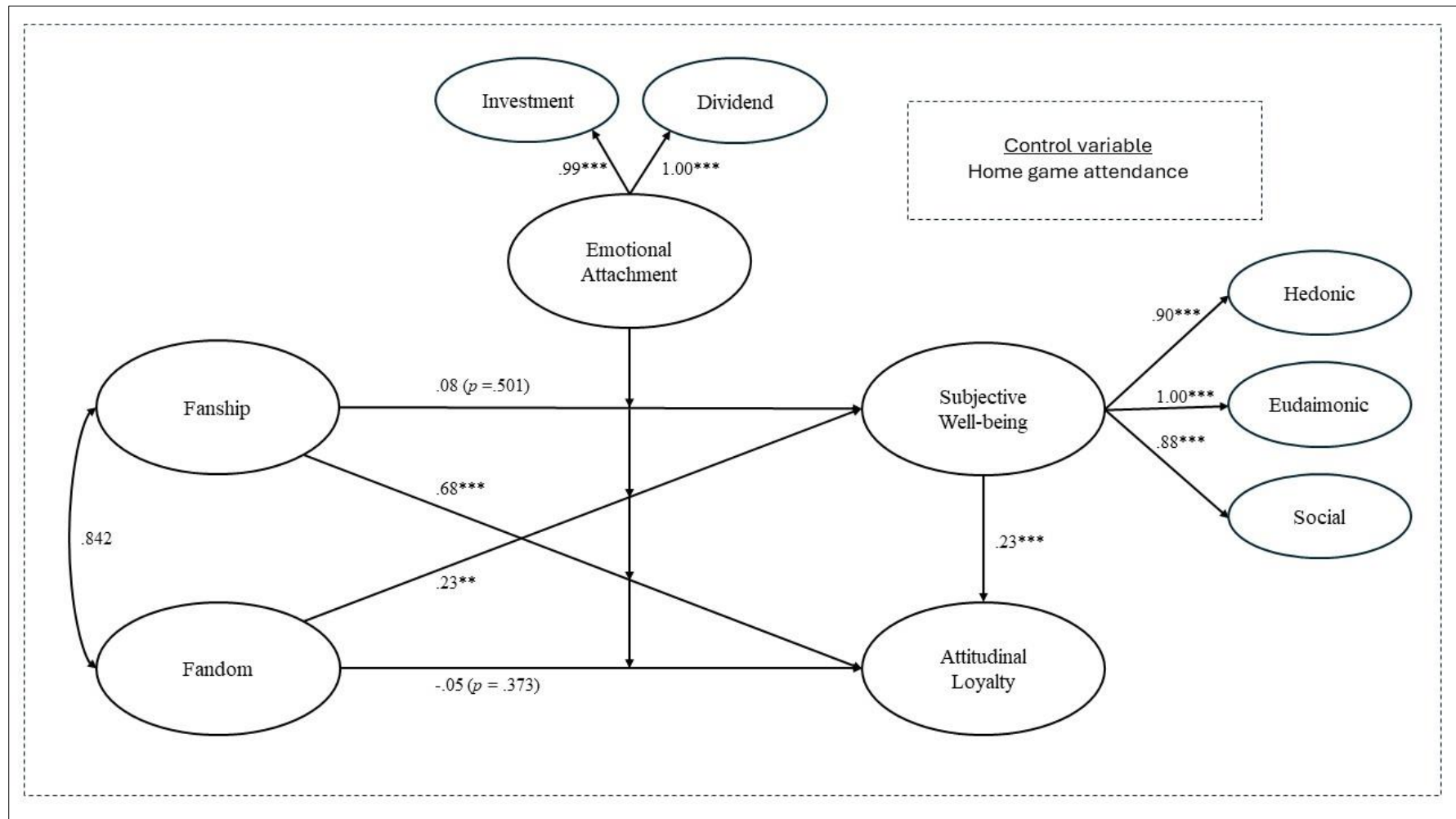
H3a proposed that fanship is positively associated with attitudinal loyalty. A positive and significant relationship between fanship and attitudinal loyalty ($\beta = .684, p < .001$) was observed, supporting H3a.

H3b expected fandom to have a positive association with attitudinal loyalty. However, this relationship was found nonsignificant ($\beta = -.051, p = .373$). Accordingly, H3b was rejected.

H3c tested the positive mediating role of SWB in linking fanship and attitudinal loyalty. First, the path from SWB to attitudinal loyalty was positive and significant ($\beta = .230, p < .001$). Then, a bootstrap estimates mediation analysis on IBM AMOS 29 was performed. However, the results showed a nonsignificant mediational relationship for SWB between fanship and attitudinal loyalty ($B = .015$, lower value $-.053$, upper value $.082, p = .588$). Therefore, H3c was rejected.

H3d proposed the positive mediating role of SWB in linking fandom with attitudinal loyalty. Following the same mediation analysis, a partial positive mediation effect of SWB was confirmed ($B = .047$, lower value $.007$, upper value $.124, p < .05$), and H3d was supported.

Figure 3.2. Hypothesized structural model with regression weights.



Notes. Circles represent latent variables. ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

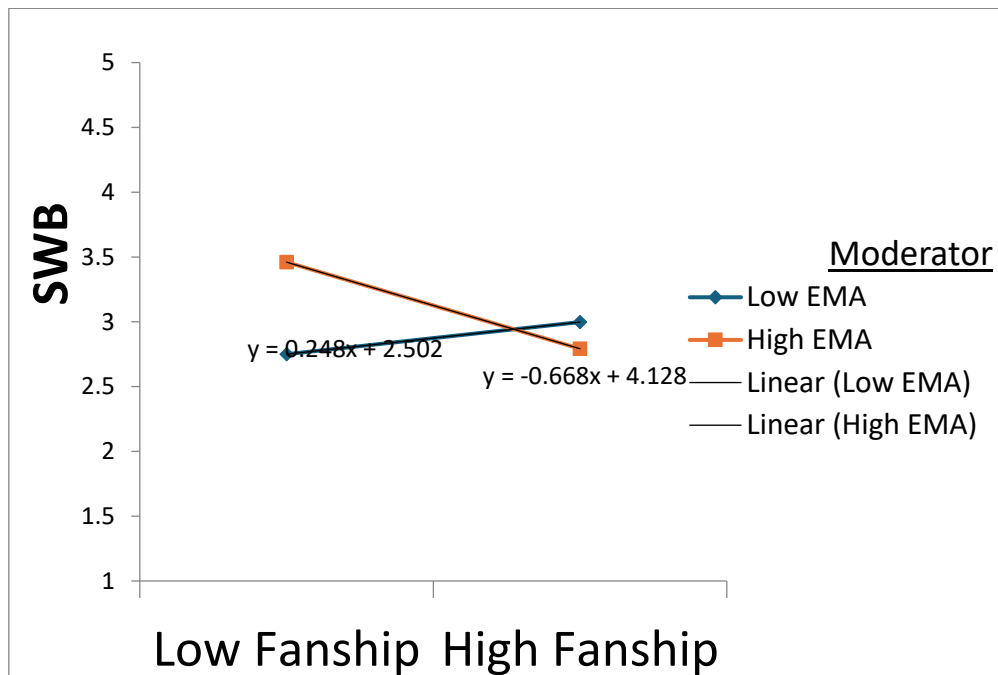
Source: authors' own elaboration.

H4a presumed that emotional attachment positively moderated the effects of both fanship and fandom on SWB. In order to test moderation hypotheses in IBM AMOS 29, first composite variables of emotional attachment, fanship and fandom were created, and they comprised all the constructs' items. Concerning, the emotional attachment composite variable, cases were divided using a median split method (median = 6.57) to form both high (n = 298) and low (n = 273) emotional attachment groups. Then, interaction variables between emotional attachment and fanship, and emotional attachment and fandom were created and let covary with exogenous variables (i.e., fanship, fandom, and emotional attachment) influencing subjective well-being; moderation analysis revealed that the interaction between fandom and emotional attachment had no significant relationship with SWB, while there was a negative moderating effect ($B=-.229$, $p<.001$) of emotional attachment regarding the path from fanship and SWB (see Figure 3.3). Therefore, H4a was not supported.

H4b expected emotional attachment to positively moderate the effects of both fanship and fandom on attitudinal loyalty. The same median split approach used to test H4a was used. A moderation analysis revealed that the interaction variable between fanship and emotional attachment had no significant association with attitudinal loyalty. In addition, emotional attachment had a negative moderating effect ($B=-.257$, $p<.001$) on the path from fandom to attitudinal loyalty. Emotional attachment weakened the positive relationship between fandom and attitudinal loyalty (see Figure 3.4); therefore, H4b was not supported.

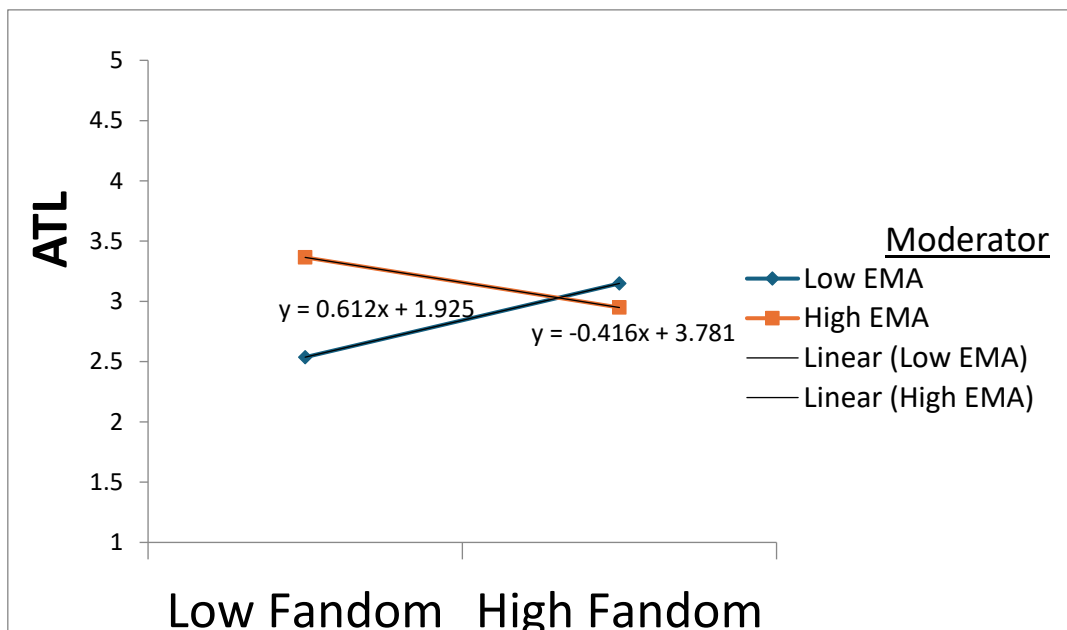
Finally, multi-group analyses were performed. H5a premised that the on-site group would display stronger positive relationships between fanship, fandom and SWB than the online group. A chi-square test was performed by computing a fully constrained model and another model that allowed the path of interest to vary freely across both groups. Controlling for the paths from both fanship and fandom to SWB, with one degree of freedom, chi-square

Figure 3.3. Emotional attachment moderation effect in the relationship between fanship and SWB



Source: authors' own elaboration

Figure 3.4. Emotional attachment moderation effect in the relationship between fandom and attitudinal loyalty.



Source: authors' own elaboration

differences were significant ($p < .001$). In addition, concerning both paths, the on-site group offered significant positive unstandardized estimates (fanship to SWB, $B = .313$, $p < 0.001$; fandom to SWB, $B = .360$, $p < 0.001$) while the estimates for these paths for the online group were non-significant (see Table 3.8, Appendix B). Thus, H5a was supported. H5b predicted that there would be a higher positive indirect effect between both fanship and fandom and attitudinal loyalty through SWB for the on-site group than for the online group. Accordingly, a chi-square test was performed (see Table 3.9, Appendix B). The online group did not provide any significant mediation effects of SWB between either fanship or fandom and attitudinal loyalty. On the contrary, the on-site group yielded higher, significant mediation effects in the same paths. Specifically, SWB appeared to partially explain indirect effects in the relationships from fanship ($B = .095$, lower value .016, upper value .209, $p < .05$) and fandom ($B = .110$, lower value .049, upper value .214, $p = .000$) towards attitudinal loyalty. Moreover, the regression weight of the individual path from SWB to attitudinal loyalty was found to be higher in the on-site group ($\beta = .310$, $p < .001$), than the online group ($\beta = .183$, $p < .001$). Accordingly, H5b was supported.

Then, we tested H5c, which proposed that the on-site group would provide higher positive moderating effects of emotional attachment on the relationships between fanship, fandom, SWB and attitudinal loyalty than the online group. Accordingly, for each group, chi-square difference tests were performed. Thus, a fully constrained model has been checked against models in which single interaction effects between emotional attachment and fanship as well as fandom were freed one at a time (see Table 3.10, Appendix B). Non-significant chi-square differences were observed when considering the relationships between both fanship and fandom and attitudinal loyalty. Conversely, the moderation effect of emotional attachment on the relationships between both fanship and fandom and SWB were significant (fanship to SWB delta $\chi^2 = 11.45$, $p < .001$; fandom to SWB delta $\chi^2 = 13.22$, $p < .001$). The moderating

effect of emotional attachment moderation on the relationship between fanship and SWB was significant and more strongly negative in the on-site group ($B=-.275$, $p<.001$) than in the online group ($B=-.153$, $p<.05$). Exploring the association between fandom and SWB, the on-site group yielded a significant and negative weight concerning emotional attachment moderating effect ($B=-.131$, $p<.05$) while in the online group the moderating effect was found non-significant. Therefore, H5c was not supported.

3.4 Discussion

The aims of this study were multifaceted and they encompassed: (a) comparing fanship and fandom in their respective predictive capacities with respect to SWB and attitudinal loyalty to the team; (b) exploring the moderating effect of football fans' emotional attachment to the team in the model; (c) observing the mediating role of SWB in both fanship and fandom associations with attitudinal loyalty; and (d) controlling for between-group discrepancies relatively to the on-site and online groups. Results showed that identifying with fellow fans and the broader fan community of the supported team (i.e., fandom) is positively linked with higher perceptions of SWB. In addition, identifying with the team or club (i.e., fanship) strongly correlates with loyal attitudes toward the team. Furthermore, while only fanship was directly and positively associated with attitudinal loyalty, SWB fully mediated the positive relationship between fandom and attitudinal loyalty. Additionally, emotional attachment negatively moderated fanship's association with SWB and fandom's association with attitudinal loyalty.

We further found that contrary to the online group, the on-site group reported: (a) a significant positive association between fanship and SWB, although the strength of this relationship was lower the association between fandom and SWB; (b) the positive mediating of SWB between fanship and attitudinal loyalty; and (c) the stronger negative moderation effect of emotional attachment on the relationship between fandom and SWB. While previous

research has focused on the relationships between individual or group-based discrete emotions and fanship (Campo et al., 2012, 2019; Gordon et al., 2021; Prayag et al., 2020), this work answered calls for further exploration of individual-level emotional attachment (Dwyer et al., 2015) in relation to fanship and fandom (Reysen et al., 2022b). Our results uncover four important theoretical implications.

3.4.1 Theoretical implications

The aim of this study was to explore the moderating effect of football fans' emotional attachment with respect to the relationship between both fanship and fandom, on one hand, and the degree of SWB and attitudinal loyalty to the team, on the other. Results showed that identifying with fellow fans and the broader fan community of the supported team (i.e., fandom) is positively linked with higher perceptions of subjective well-being; simultaneously, identifying with the team or club (i.e., fanship) strongly correlates with loyal attitudes toward the team itself. Furthermore, while only fanship directly and positively correlated with attitudinal loyalty, SWB positively and partially mediated the relationship between fandom and attitudinal loyalty. Emotional attachment negatively moderates fanship correlation with SWB and fandom correlation with attitudinal loyalty. Contrary to online group, live home game attendance group reported also: (a) a significant positive correlation between fanship and SWB, although lower than fandom one; (b) SWB positive mediating role between fanship and attitudinal loyalty; (c) negative moderation of emotional attachment in the relationship between fandom and SWB as well as stronger negative effects with respect to online group. While previous research has focused on the relationships between individual or group-based discrete emotions and fanship (Campo et al., 2012, 2019; Gordon et al., 2021; Prayag et al., 2020), this work answered calls for further exploration of individual-level emotional attachment (Dwyer et al., 2015) in relation to fanship and fandom (Reysen et al.,

2022b). In addition to confirming the discriminant validity of fanship and fandom, our results uncover four important theoretical implications.

First, contrary to study hypotheses, when combined with high levels of fanship or fandom, high degrees of emotional attachment reduced the tested relationships. On the contrary, when either form of identification were low, emotional attachment had a moderate positive effect, confirming affective element centrality. Notwithstanding the overall homogenous elevated values of emotional attachment (mean = 6; median = 6, 57) might have affected median split procedure (i.e., low emotional attachment group still holds rather high composite values) and study results, these findings hold novelty and scientific knowledge. From a SIA-based perspective, the high values of the emotional attachment, in conjunction with high degrees of either fanship or fandom, appear to burden football fans. This notion might be explained in terms of different characteristics of harmonious and obsessive passion towards a sporting object and related fan identity (Vallerand et al., 2003). Vallerand and colleagues (2003) underlined that while a person's harmonious passion is in balance with other life domains and identities, obsessive passion is invasive and takes a large share of a person's self, thus centralising resources. Obsessiveness takes place on a person's uninterrupted engagement and positive performance in the passionate activity since the latter is highly crucial for the individual's self-worthiness perception (Vallerand et al., 2003). Only in obsessive passion engagement is performed even when negative returns are received (Vallerand et al., 2003). Italian football fans are well-known for their passion towards their beloved teams and identifying with a team or a fan community borders on religious devotion (Billings et al., 2023; Statz et al., 2022). As football culture monopolizes the overall share of sports fan identities, the Italian sociocultural environment might encourage obsessive passions of fans. Moreover, while stressing and hostile activities can negatively influence emotional attachment dynamics (Paxton and Moody, 2003), the latter are deemed to be affected by

organization past glory and history (Gordon et al., 2021; Paxton and Moody, 2003). Although both sampled clubs have a historical importance in Italian football, successes either at the national or international level are limited in comparison to rivals (e.g., F.C. Juventus, F.C. Inter Milan, A.C. Milan). The overall limited successful history of the two clubs might negatively affect the emotional attachment effect on identification links with outcome variables (Gordon et al., 2021; Paxton and Moody, 2003).

Second, results support the idea that, in the case of high degrees of fanship and fandom, SWB has a positive relationship with attitudinal loyalty. Indeed, SWB positively and partially mediated the relationships between fandom and attitudinal loyalty to the team in both on-site and online groups. In addition, the positive mediation of SWB was observed between fanship and attitudinal loyalty, but only for the on-site group. These findings are in line with SIA research concerning health and well-being, in particular when considering that group identification encompasses health-related norms supporting specific behaviours (Haslam et al., 2009; Jetten et al., 2014). Since both fanship and fandom appeared correlating with SWB, in-group norms positively stimulate loyal attitudes toward the team. In line with previous work (Inoue et al., 2020; Zhong and Mitchell, 2012), this research confirms that prolonged well-being perceptions positively affects inner behavioural trends.

Third, while socially identifying with other fellow fans and the broader fan community stands as an effective predictor of SWB, personally identifying with the team/club also correlated with attitudinal loyalty. These results appear in line with previous considerations underlining that while well-being is better predicted by fandom than fanship (Reysen et al., 2022a; 2022b). Nevertheless, between-group analysis outlined that in on-site group (and not the online group) both fanship and fandom positively correlated with SWB, contrasting previous findings (Reysen et al., 2022b). On the one hand, these results appears in line with original works concerning fanship and fandom (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010). On the other hand,

we have presented evidence that supports the personal and social positive experiential influence of sports spectatorship and fan participation (Inoue et al., 2017).

Finally, this study confirms that attending live games – particularly home ones – produces a significant positive emotional impact in team fans' experiences (Biscaia et al., 2012; Inoue et al., 2017, 2019; Yoshida et al., 2023). In line with previous works (Biscaia et al., 2012; Inoue et al., 2017, 2019), stadium attendance enhances the emotional components and well-being outcomes of identifying with the team and fellow fans; interacting with fellow fans, benefiting from emotional and social support, experiencing live event and directly participating at supporting the team are some of the sources of additional emotional and well-being (Inoue et al., 2017, 2019; Yoshida et al., 2023).

3.4.2 Practical implications

Marketers and managers can benefit from the notions highlighted here, particularly considering emotional and well-being considerations. The underlying concept stated is that emotional attachment should not overwhelm the other components of identification specifically when identification is high. First, anticipating emotional attachment and well-being states might be beneficial for sports-industry professionals and organisations (Prayag et al., 2020). Notwithstanding the high degree of fanship, understanding trends and dynamics in fans' emotions and well-being as well as adjusting organizational communication and positioning, can reinforce the linkage between fans and the club, thus stimulating even further long-term marketing profitability (Kim and Kim, 2023). Current findings support the need to consider fans as emotional stakeholders (Senaux, 2008; Zagnoli and Radicchi, 2010); as fans are not able to regulate the affective dimension of their identification with the team and with the other fans, negative effects on fans well-being might occur consequentially causing drawbacks in loyal attitudes and behaviours.

Furthermore, football clubs might aim at facilitating and educating fans' emotional regulation; strategies aiming at channelling (not reducing) the magnitude of emotional dimension of identification stimulating the cognitive and evaluative counterparts underlining the importance of parallel identities connected to fans' ones (e.g., father, son, worker, regional or national citizen) through communication and ads. Additionally, club-oriented emotional relief and regulation might occur through fans' social interactions in physical spaces, events, and online platforms. Venting has been recognized as a strategy to cope with negative emotional pressure (Kim and Kim, 2023); physical venting might occur in ad-hoc structures and through specific activities managed by clubs. As highlighted by results, home games are crucial events for fans' emotional attachment and SWB, thus using these events for emotional education and identity management might be highly fruitful. Specific figures might be charged by clubs to monitor and assist fans emotional response on social media.

3.5 Limitations and future research

Despite the theoretical and practical implications, limits to the current study should be acknowledged. To begin, the negative and nonsignificant moderating effect of emotional attachment might be explained by the individualistic conceptualization of emotional attachment as developed by Dwyer and colleagues (2015). This nuance is reflected in the instrument developed by these authors and employed in this study. Given the adoption of SIA, a group-based understanding on emotional attachment might have been more suitable.

Second, the overall homogenous elevated values of emotional attachment (mean = 6; median = 6, 57) might have affected median split procedure and study results; indeed, sampled low emotional attachment group holds rather high composite values. Despite these considerations, findings hold novelty and scientific knowledge.

Third, focusing on fanship and fandom did not allow this study to analyse different categories of sports fans (e.g., local/displaced, Lintumaeki and Koll, 2023; seasonal ticket

holders/random game attendant, Zagnoli and Radicchi, 2010; temporary/local/devoted/fanatical/dysfunctional, Hunt et al., 1999) concerning the proposed model. As diverse types of sports consumers (and fans) hold different degrees of emotional significance attached to the team (Hunt et al., 1999), future research might investigate the discrepancies among groups in relation to the two forms of identification.

Furthermore, although the fanship dimensions appear to remain stable across times and game results (Doyle et al., 2017; Lock et al., 2014), perceptions of emotional attachment may be affected by specific sporting results and different trends throughout the season. Hence, a longitudinal analysis may add useful knowledge concerning fanship, fandom and the affective dimensions across seasonal time span and positive/negative performance trends.

Although the scope of this study was to investigate the association, moderation and mediation among study variables in the proposed structural model, a limitation of this study might be considered (a) the missing predicting values of fanship and fandom on subjective well-being; and (b) the proposal of other predicting variables (e.g., fan engagement behaviour) (Yoshida et al., 2024).

Finally, the teams and fans examined in this research belong to a similar sociocultural background—they belong to the same city—and have been witnessing similar sporting results throughout their history. Accordingly, future research might compare the results reported in this study with data obtained in relation to other football teams and different team sports with varying sociocultural contexts.

3.6 Conclusions

Since identifying with a team or the group of fans endorse a significant emotional dimension (Biscaia et al., 2012; Prayag et al., 2020; Tajfel and Turner, 1979), understanding how emotional attachment can affect fan's identification outcomes is fundamental to augment future research and managerial strategies (Dwyer et al., 2015). The current research

underlines the potential negative side of elevated emotions; indeed, findings demonstrate that high emotional attachment produces drawbacks in SWB for high identifiers with the team as well as in the attitudinal loyalty for high identifiers with other fellow fans. Furthermore, the on-site attendance group analysis highlights that perceptions of SWB (a) are positively predicted by both fanship and fandom and (b) positively predict loyal attitudes towards the team. For the first time, this study introduces the construct of emotional attachment with the team in the broader team identification research (Dwyer et al., 2015); finally, the current research aimed at extending existing academic knowledge concerning the distinction between fanship and fandom (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010; Reysen et al., 2022b) as well as SIA research on health and well-being (Haslam et al., 2009; Jetten et al., 2017). Managers and marketers can benefit from this study by adopting a strategic approach by adopting educative communication orientations and potential emotional relief options.

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3.8 Appendix B

Table 3.3. Survey: scale, items and Cronbach's Alpha

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	Dimensions	Items**
Fanship	.918	Unidimensional	<p>"I am emotionally connected as A.S. Roma/ S.S. Lazio".</p> <p>"I strongly identify with A.S. Roma/ S.S. Lazio".</p> <p>"A.S. Roma/ S.S. Lazio is part of me".</p>
Fandom	.919	Unidimensional	<p>"I strongly identify with other fans of A.S. Roma/ S.S. Lazio community".</p> <p>"I see myself as a member of A.S. Roma/ S.S. Lazio community".</p> <p>"I am glad to be part of A.S. Roma/ S.S. Lazio community"</p>
Subjective wellbeing	.959	Social	<p>"I have someone who knows me well to talk to when I have problems".</p> <p>"I know I can count on my friends and/or family in a time of crisis".</p> <p>"There is at least one person I know who loves me and/or needs me".</p> <p>"I enjoy spending time with friends and/or relatives".</p>

			<p>“I plan for the future”.</p> <p>“I feel confident that I am able to solve most problems I face”.</p> <p>“I get along with people in general”.</p> <p>“I believe I have the potential to reach my goals”.</p> <p>“I believe that I can make a difference in the lives of others”.</p> <p>“Life has meaning for me”.</p> <p>“I am satisfied with my spirituality”.</p> <p>“I think I am as smart as, or smarter than, others”.</p> <p>“I often do things that bring out my creative side”.</p> <p>“I like engaging in stimulating conversations.</p>
		Eudaimonic	
			<p>“I try to do things that make me happy”.</p>
		Hedonic	
			<p>“I feel happy often”.</p> <p>“I enjoy life”.</p>
			<p>“I would still be committed to A.S. Roma/ S.S. Lazio regardless of the lack of any star players”.</p>
Attitudinal	.918	Unidimensional	<p>“I could never switch my loyalty from the A.S. Roma/ S.S. Lazio even if my close friends were fans of another team”.</p>
loyalty			

“I would still be committed to the A.S. Roma/ S.S. Lazio regardless of the lack of physical skill among the players”.

“It would be difficult to change my beliefs about the A.S. Roma/ S.S. Lazio”.

Attached*

Investment* Bonded*

Emotional

Passionate*

attachment .966

Happy*

Dividend* Delighted*

Emotional*

Energized*

* Hinted by “When I think of A.S. Roma/ S.S. Lazio, I feel. . .”.

** Measured on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree).

Table 3.4. Construct reliability and Average Variance Extracted

Construct	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR (H)	EMA	FNP	ATL	SWB	FDM
EMA	0.974	0.95	0.739	0.974	0.975				
FNP	0.922	0.797	0.739	0.924	0.860***	0.893			
ATL	0.921	0.745	0.724	0.93	0.782***	0.851***	0.863		
SWB	0.952	0.868	0.41	1,015	0.571***	0.561***	0.640***	0.932	
FDM	0.924	0.802	0.708	0.948	0.691***	0.842***	0.711***	0.527***	0.896

EMA: Emotional Attachment; FNP: Fanship; ATL: Attitudinal Loyalty to the Team; SWB: Subjective Wellbeing; FDM: Fandom.

*** $p < 0.00$

Table 3.7. Fanship and fandom: discriminant validity chi-square difference test.

Hypothesis	Paths	β	B	Lower	Upper	p-value	Decision
H3a	FNP→ATL	.684	-	-	-	***	Support
H3b	FDM→ATL	-.510	-	-	-	.373	Not supported
H3c/d	SWB→ATL	.230	-	-	-	***	Support
H3c	FNP→SWB→ATL	-	.015	-.053	.082	.588	Not supported
H3d	FDM→SWB→ATL	-	.047	.007	.124	*	Support
H4a	EMA mod. FNP→SWB	-	-.229	-	-	***	Not supported
	FDM→SWB		-.053			.362	
H4b	EMA mod. FNP→ATL	-	.061	-	-	.188	Not supported
	FDM→ATL		.257			***	

Notes. B = standardized coefficient; B = *unstandardized coefficient*; *** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$.

Table 3.8. Chi-square difference tests for H5a

Hypothesis	Path	Groups	<i>B</i> (<i>p</i> -value)	χ^2	<i>df</i>	Delta χ^2 (<i>df</i>)	Decision
	Fully constrained	-	-	2868.99	1096	-	-
H5a	FNP→SWB	On-site Online	.313*** .015 (.862)	2837.59	1095	31.40*** (1)	Support
H5a	FDM→SWB	On-site Online	.360*** .000 (.996)	2827.66	1095	41.33*** (1)	Support

Notes. B = Unstandardized coefficients. Critical values for $D \chi^2$ with *df* = 1 are 6.64 at the .01 level (***p* < .01) and 10.83 at the .001 (***)*p* < .001).

Table 3.9. Chi-square difference tests for H5b.

Hypothesis	Path	Groups	<i>B</i>	Lower	Upper	p-value	χ^2	df	Delta χ^2 (df)	Decision
	Fully constrained	-	-	-	-	-	2868.99	1096	-	-
	SWB→ATL	Live	.310***	-	-	-	2864.79	1095	4.20** (1)	Support
		Online	.183***	-	-	-				
H5b	FNP→SWB→ATL	Live	.095**	.016	.209	.019	2834.51	1094	34.48*** (2)	Support
		Online	.004	-.055	.060	.783				
H5b	FDM→SWB→ATL	Live	.110	.049	.214	.000	2823.49	1094	45.50*** (2)	Support
		Online	-.001	-.028	.028	.916				

Notes. Critical values for Delta χ^2 with df = 1 are 2.71 at the 0.1 level (*p < 0.1), 3.84 at the .05 level (**p < .05) and 10.83 at the .001(***p < .001). Critical values for Delta χ^2 with df = 2 are 4.61 at the 0.1 level (*p < 0.1), 5.99 at the .05 level (**p < .05) and 13.82 at the .001(***p < .001).

Table 3.10. Moderation effects of emotional attachment between on-site and online groups: chi-square difference tests

Hypothesis	Paths	Live-Online groups	Unstd. Estimate of free model	χ^2	<i>df</i>	Delta χ^2 (<i>df</i>)	Decision
	Fully constrained	-	-	54.25	11	-	-
H5c	EMA mod. FNP→SWB	Live Online	-.275*** - .153***(.010)	42.79	10	11.45*** (1)	Not supported
H5c	EMA mod. FDM→SWB	Live Online	-.131**(.036) Non-sig. 027(.659)	41.02	10	13.22*** (1)	Not supported
H5c	EMA mod. FNP→ATL	Live Online	Non-sig .053(.263) .094(.060)	52.34	10	1.90 (1)	Not supported
H5c	EMA mod. FDM→ATL	Live Online	-.279*** -.243***	53.25	10	1.00 (1)	Not supported

Notes. The critical values for Dx2 with *df* = 1 are 2.71 at the 0.1 level(**p*<0.1), 3.84 at the .05 level (***p* < .05) and 10.83 at the .001(****p* < .001).

Chapter 4. Exploring sports fanship, fandom, emotional attachment and subjective well-being: A social identity approach to Italian football consumer-brand identification

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4.1 Introduction and research questions

Emotions are crucial elements in sports spectatorship and understanding in-depth how they characterize fans' experiences is crucial for better addressing marketing and communication strategies. Adopting the SIA, this study explores the intense role of emotional attachment in football fans concerning their own identifications with the team (i.e. fanship) and with the fellow fans (i.e. fandom) through in-depth qualitative content analysis; fans' subjective well-being (SWB) perceptions are also investigated here. Understanding how fans personally communicate their distinct identifications either with the team or with the surrounding fan community as well as the peculiarities of their emotional attachment to the team might be highly beneficial for marketers and managers working in the football industry.

Although drawing from the theoretical reviews presented in previous chapters, this study should not be considered as a mere add-on to the quantitative study outlined in Chapter 3; indeed, several elements of originality and innovativeness characterize this work including: (a) a first-ever qualitative exploration of the key constructs presented throughout the thesis.; (b) collecting not only participants' perceptions and thoughts concerning their own cognitive investment and emotional dividend (Dwyer et al., 2015), but also the specific emotions attached to both emotional attachment dimensions; and (c) the analysis of the perceived emotions is here performed to understand the content of fans' emotional attachment to the brand of the supported team.

Drawing from both self-categorization and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel and Turner, 1979), the Social Identity Approach (SIA) assumes that individuals internally aim for their self-concept to be favourable. Since personal and social identities coexist within the self-concept, groups are crucial social platform for this aspiration; more precisely, the self-concept is shaped and enriched by social identities emerging from memberships in groups in which individuals feel and desire to belong to (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). According to the SIA, group identity is defined as “that part of the individuals’ self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group/s together with the value and emotional significance of that membership” (Tajfel, 1981 p. 255). This description of social identities evokes (a) the cognitive, (b) the evaluative, and (c) the emotional dimension of group identification.

Groups are distinguishable if four criteria are met: (a) a common identity is perceived to be shared; (b) a perception of being part of the same collective is shared as well; (c) interchangeability with other members is perceived; (d) two or more individuals are in line with the previous points (Turner et al., 1987). Activating the relative identity, group membership, participation and activities enhance the possibility for members to distinguish from out-group individuals and stimulating the creation of ‘us’ and ‘them’ identification divide.

Within the broader sports industry, teams and relative fan communities are evident examples of groups as interpreted by the SIA (Reysen et al., 2017, 2022; Reysen and Branscombe, 2010). Specifically, the way individuals feel connected to their beloved teams has been investigated through the theoretical lenses of the SIA, recognizing team identification as a proper group identity (Inoue et al., 2017, 2019; Lock et al., 2014; Lock and Heere, 2017); indeed, in the last three decades, team identification research has captured relevant academic attention in the sports management and marketing field (Lock and Heere, 2017) in relation to

an extremely wide variety of variables including among other: (a) brand loyalty (Bauer et al., 2005, 2008; Sato et al., 2023); (b) perceived emotions and emotional support (Biscaia et al., 2012; Inoue et al., 2019). (a) fans' wellbeing (Inoue et al., 2017, 2019; Yoshida et al., 2023). When applying the SIA, different sport consumer researchers place significant emphasis on the two-folded conceptualization of fan-team and fan-to-fan identifications (Lock and Heere, 2017). Reysen and Branscombe (2010) found a correlation and distinguished between fanship (degree of identification with the team) and fandom (degree of identification with fellow fans and the broader fan community of the team); particularly, the authors assumed fanship to be a personal identity and fandom to be a group identity. This study draws from this theoretical framework to develop the qualitative content analysis outlined in the following sections. Different works from Reysen and colleagues found positive correlations between fandom and different forms of well-being (e.g., subjective, and psychological) (Reysen et al., 2017, 2022). Although referring to attachment conceptualization, Yoshida and colleagues (2015b) reported a positive association between fans' bonding with the surrounding fan community and behavioural loyalty.

This study answers to previous call for further investigation of and comparison between fanship and fandom (Reysen et al., 2022). Extant literature lacks a qualitative exploration of the two constructs and an extensive understanding of fanship and fandom within the Italian sport fan context; the current study aims at filling these gaps.

SIA posits that group identification involves a significant degree of emotional value and significance (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and that as the identification with the group increases so does the degree of emotional attachment to the group (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000; Paxton and Moody, 2003). Groups are deemed to offer opportunities for consumers to fulfil emotional attachment needs which are complementary to needs of belonging to a group (or brand) (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Emotional attachment to a

team appears to consist in: (a) the cognitive involvement of an individual toward the group (i.e., investment); and (b) the emotional perceptions received from the group (i.e., dividend) (Dwyer et al., 2015; Paxton and Moody, 2003).

Emotional attachment is a supporting element in the identification process of sports fans with a team or more broadly with a sports-related consumptive object. Indeed, in the Psychological Continuum Model (Funk and James, 2001) attachment is a fundamental stage in fans' cognitive connection to the team, with affective dimensions distinguishing attraction from attachment.

Furthermore, perceived emotions are crucial elements in the development of the emotional attachment of sports fans (Dwyer et al., 2015; Paxton and Moody, 2003). Several empirical studies affirm the impact of discrete emotions (Biscaia et al., 2012) and emotional support (Inoue et al., 2019) on the relationship fanship and well-being. Inoue and colleagues (2017) noted that life satisfaction is influenced by both sports event attendance and emotional support mediating team identification. Inoue, Wann, Lock and colleagues (2019) observed that, together with sense of belonging, SWB was enhanced by perceived emotional support among American older adults; in turn, fanship and match attendance were investigated and confirmed as drivers of emotional support perceptions (Inoue et al., 2019).

Being group identification and membership driven by self-esteem-enhancing desires (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel and Turner, 1982), the positive association between sports-related fanship and socio-psychological wellbeing does not come as a surprise (Wann, 2006; Inoue 2017, 2019). Importantly, it has been underlined the crucial mediating role of social activities and interactions (e.g. live game attendance) in strengthening of this association (Inoue et al., 2017, 2019; Reysen et al., 2017, 2022; Wann, 2006). These findings support the SIA-based research on health and well-being which is grounded on the concept that group and relative identifications provide psychological resources and mechanisms (including related

experiential opportunities) for coping with detrimental, stressful, or disastrous situations (Jetten et al., 2017)

Concerning fandom, earlier work from Reysen and Branscombe (2010) indicated a positive correlation between both fanship and fandom with happiness perceptions; however, recent research found only fandom to significantly associate with psychological well-being through the mediation of friendship volume and participating in social activities (Reysen et al. 2022).

Since Reysen and colleagues (2022) highlighted the research gap surrounding fandom and well-being, this research aims at extending this line of research by qualitatively exploring not only fandom- but also fanship-induced well-being perceptions. Moreover, the current study answers previous calls for expanding the scientific knowledge concerning sports fans' emotional attachment to the team and the relative connections with their identification processes (Dwyer et al., 2015)

Drawing both from the SIA, a line of research has been exploring the connections between fanship, fandom and brand identification (Heere et al., 2011; Heere and James, 2007; Yoshida et al 2015a, 2015b). In the beginning, this research stream focused on the effects of multiple associated group identities on fanship and consequential behavioural outcomes (Heere et al., 2011; Heere and James, 2007). Furthermore, different works have explored antecedents and consequences of fan community identification (in this study, fandom) (Yoshida et al. 2015a, 2015b). In the contexts of Japanese professional football and baseball, fan community identification had a significant association with team brand equity and four behavioural consequences: positive word-of mouth, fan community engagement, member responsibility, and customized product use (Yoshida et al., 2015a).

Bauer and colleagues (2005; 2008) found that football club fanship stands as most significant symbolic brand benefit predicting loyal attitudes toward the team brand (2005). Stadium attendance, news media consumption, club-related merchandise purchasing and wearing club

colours appeared to be the most consistent loyal among football fans (2008). The specific motions connected to football brands need to be considered as key experiential benefits (Bauer 2005; 2008).

Furthermore, rooted in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982), brand attachment has been conceptualized and investigated as “an emotion-laden target-specific bond” between a consumer and a brand (Thomson et al., 2005) p. 78). Previous studies identified a strengthening effect of emotional attachment to the brand in the relationship between brand identification and customer loyalty (Hallberg, 2003). In particular, in conditions of high cognitive investment with a club is expected to positively influence consistent behavioural loyalty suggesting an irrational, sacrifice-like engagement to the team (Dwyer et al., 2015; Ladhari et al., 2015).

Loyal behaviours of consumers were found to be predicted by the interaction between consumers’ identification with the brand and satisfaction with the sports products and services (Bodet and Bernache-Assollant, 2011; Matsuoka et al., 2003). Satisfied consumers tend to witness high level of consumer well-being (Lee et al., 2002) and, in turn, engage more with the brand. Being spectatorship fundamentally based on experiential products and services, these last considerations are heavily amplified among identified fans. Indeed, Sato and colleagues (2023) recently investigated the relationship football fans’ identification with supported brands and perceived happiness. Findings underlined a positive association particularly through direct event experience (Sato et al., 2023). Similarly, a study focusing on football fans in Portuguese La Liga reported a positive direct association between feelings of joy and advantageous behavioural intentions towards the team (Biscaia et al., 2012); satisfaction and behaviours were found positively associated as well. (Biscaia et al., 2012).

This study draws from existing literature for exploring football brand identification and brand fan community in combination with fanship and fandom; it is in the purpose of this research

to identify specific emotions attached to football brands and how these emotions affect the shared perception of clubs (Lee et al., 2018)

Furthermore, this study fills the gaps concerning team identification research in the Italian football-centric sports system. In the Italian sports context, football represents by far the most practiced sport with 26% of registered athletes belonging to the Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio (FIGC) (CONI, 2020). This percentage places Italy well above (by 17 percentage points) the average interest of the populations of the thirteen major world nations/economies (FIGC, 2023). Within the approximately 34 million stakeholders, just over 24 million are people who can call themselves ‘fans’ (Stage Up/Ipsos, 2023). It seems clear, then, how in Italy soccer no longer represents just a game but has become a form of culture and impersonation of values and bonds, not forgetting the relational aspect that makes it an easy topic of discussion in any context (Deloitte, 2023). In addition, this sport creates a strong bond between the people, the territory, and the communities in which the fan and his or her team fit. Ultimately, this sector has a significant socio-economic impact benefiting the country Italy, which can be estimated at over 4.5 billion euros, with total direct revenues of 5 billion euros and an estimated impact on GDP of over 11.1 billion euros (FIGC, 2023).

Building on these assumptions, we asked the following research questions:

RQ1. How do fans describe themselves in terms of fanship and fandom? Which are the common features?

RQ2. In terms of emotional attachment, how do football fans perceive to emotionally invest in and receive from the supported team?

RQ3. What are the emotions associated with the identified team/brand?

RQ4. How do football fans describe themselves in terms of subjective well-being (SWB)?

4.2 Methodology

We used an exploratory, qualitative content analysis semi-structured interviews' transcripts. Italian SS Lazio and AS Roma fans were interviewed on (a) fanship, (b) fandom, (c) emotional attachment, (d) the specific emotions perceived to be invested and received (Dwyer et al., 2015), and (e) well-being. Participants were recruited using the convenience sampling method and then using the snowball sampling. Table 4.1 shows participants recruited by convenience methodology as known (K) and those recruited by snowball methodology as unknown (U). Beginning in March 2023, fans were contacted direct call and were informed about the research information and how the interview was administered. Those contacted were asked not to provide a telephone response, but to send confirmation of willingness to participate by message. Of the thirty people contacted, nineteen agreed to be interviewed, while the other eleven declined the invitation or sent no message. Since January 2024, to equalize the number of interviews between the two groups analyzed, a message was sent to an additional four AS Roma fans using the previously mentioned methodologies; three of them responded positively and the second step of interviews could then proceed.

4.2.1 Sampling and participant

In the framework outlined above on the Italian sports context, we decided to interview SS Lazio and AS Roma fans who together, in the 2022/2023 season, represent about 10% of the total number of fans in Italy (SS Lazio fans: 684,000; AS Roma fans: 1,804,000) (Stage Up/Ipsos, 2023). The choice of these two clubs was dictated by several factors. First, as we have seen, SS Lazio and AS Roma are two of the top six teams by number of fans in Italy. The two selected clubs, being from Rome, therefore share the same environment and community representing a valid element to compare the two groups of fans. Both, then, share a similar sports history of few victories: SS Lazio, born in 1900, has won a total of 17 national and international trophies, while AS Roma, born in 1927, 18 national and

international trophies. They do, however, have in common that they won their last Scudetto at the turn of the 2000s, in the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 seasons, respectively. These commonalities are contrasted by some differences that have emerged in recent decades: in particular, SS Lazio has been led since 2004 by Italian businessman Claudio Lotito, while AS Roma since the 2011-2012 season has alternated between different groups of U.S. businessmen as owners.

The 22 participants who agreed to participate in the study are fans born and raised in the province of Rome. At the occupational level, among the respondents we have: eleven full-time employees, two part-time employees, two part-time independent contractor employees, one full-time independent contractor, three students, one freelance consultant, one freelance manager, and one sports contributor. Of the fans interviewed, sixteen were male and six were female, ranging in age from 22 to 64 years (mean age 35.4 years). Participants' demographics and interview dates are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Interviewees and demographic characteristics.

Participant	Team/N ^o	Age	Gender	Known/Unknown	Occupation	Interview date
SS Lazio/1		28	M	K	Full-time employee	07-03-2023
SS Lazio/2		44	M	K	Full-time employee	07-05-2023
SS Lazio/3		29	F	K	Independent contractor	07-05-2023
SS Lazio/4		31	M	K	Full-time employee	07-07-2023
SS Lazio/5		56	M	K	Independent contractor	07-08-2023
SS Lazio/6		56	F	K	Full-time employee	07-16-2023
SS Lazio/7		29	M	K	Full-time employee	07-19-2023
SS Lazio/8		28	M	K	Full-time employee	07-24-2023

SS Lazio/9	26	M	U	Student	10-08-2023
SS Lazio/10	50	M	U	Freelance/Counsultant	10-16-2023
SS Lazio/11	52	M	U	Full-time employee	10-16-2023
AS Roma/1	29	M	K	Full-time employee	07-06-2023
AS Roma/2	58	M	K	Freelance manager	07-07-2023
AS Roma/3	64	M	K	Full-time employee	07-08-2023
AS Roma/4	26	F	K	Part-time employee	07-10-2023
AS Roma/5	28	M	U	Part-time employee	07-12-2023
AS Roma/6	26	F	U	Student	07-24-2023
AS Roma/7	22	F	U	Indipendent contractor	08-16-2023
AS Roma/8	24	M	U	Student	08-16-2023
AS Roma/9	24	F	K	Full-time employee	01-09-2024
AS Roma/10	25	M	U	Full-time employee	01-09-2024
AS Roma/11	23	M	K	Sports associate	01-10-2024

Notes. F = Female; K = Known; M = Male; U = Unknown

Source: authors' own elaboration.

4.2.2 Interview instrument

Semi-structured interviews were conducted for the study. The research team developed questions that reflected the themes analysed in line with the research questions. The questions were structured to learn about (1) participants' motivations for becoming a fan of their team, (2) the degree of identification with the team and identification with their team's fan community, (3) the degree of emotional attachment and (4) the specific emotions perceived by fans in terms of what they feel toward the team and what they experience from the team; and (5) the level of well-being as a fan of their team and personally. All interviews were

conducted between March 2023 and January 2024 by the first author except for the last three (all in January 2024) which were conducted by the second author. The second author had been able to follow up on the last four interviews conducted by the first author to improve consistency. All interviews lasted between 20 and 55 minutes and were conducted digitally in Italian through Microsoft Teams. The interviews were all conducted individually, except for the Rome/7 and Rome/8 interviews, which were conducted in pairs. Each interview was recorded with the participant's permission.

4.2.3 Content analysis

A qualitative inductive subsumption approach to content analysis has been adopted in this study (Mayring, 2014; Schreier, 2013); this data-driven analytical approach was deemed fitting, constructive and potentially effective to extract novel insights and unexpected knowledge concerning researched constructs. In order to do so, before moving to the main analysis a coding frame was delineated, shared and accepted across all researchers (Schreier, 2013); while fanship, fandom and emotional attachment – divided into investment and dividend – were free from a priori categorization, subjective well-being contents were expected to fall into its social, physical, financial, hedonic, and eudaimonic categories (dimensions) (Lui and Fernando, 2018).

In line with research existing inductive subsumption process outlines (Mayring, 2014; Schreier, 2013), the main analysis was composed of the following steps: (a) reading the document until a relevant idea was found; (b) checking the potential fit in the relative category and the presence of a related subcategory; (c) in the adverse case, creating a new subcategory; (d) collocating the extracted text in the fitting subcategory; (e) keeping analysing the text for another relevant idea (Mayring, 2014; Schreier, 2013). This process

should be performed until data saturation is reached (Mayring, 2014). Obviously, the coding frame was updated at each subcategory definition.

To begin, all the interviews were transcribed by the first and second authors and then subjected to cross-review to assess any errors or structural differences. Then, the authors identified, discussed, and coded all text passages using NVivo14 qualitative data management software. In a second stage, one of the two authors proceeded to check all identified references to exclude typos or errors. In agreement with Pereira and colleagues (2021), each piece of content included in a subcategory is defined as an ‘answer unit’. The authors agreed to eliminate from the analysis those subcategories that were reported by less than 20 percent of the fans. The threshold for each subcategory is 5 out of 22 fans had to have talked about it.

In the results section we present, explain, and exemplify the subcategories emerged in the content analysis procedure. The frequency of coded data is also specified for each subcategory.

For the analysis of the emotions that fans perceive to invest and receive from their team (Dwyer et al., 2015), a frequency analysis was performed following the 7-factor model proposed by Lee et al. and colleagues (2018); the authors transcribed the emotions into a table and then proceeded to classify them into the 7 categories indicated by Lee and colleagues’ model (2018).

4.3 Results

4.3.1 Data analysis and findings

A total of 355 answer units were coded, including 151 for the Fanship and Fandom constructs, 135 for Emotional Attachment, and 69 for Subjective Well-Being. For each construct we will report tables with the total number of answer units per subcategory and the number of fans whose answers are included in each subcategory. Relatively to

4.3.2 Results on Fanship and Fandom and Discussion

Table 4.2 schematizes the response units and the number of fans whose responses are included in each subcategory regarding the fanship construct. Table 4.3 does the same regarding the fandom.

In both fanship and fandom two subcategories consistently emerged, namely *Group Participation* and *Stadium Attendance*. The former relates to the broad set of activities fans perceive to engage in the expression of their distinct social identities and this subcategory appears stable in both fanship (4 answer units in 3 Lazio fans, 2 answer units in 2 Roma fans) and fandom (1 answer units in 1 Lazio fan, 3 answer units in 3 Roma fans).

Stadium Attendance was coded as the thematical set of considerations concerning the activities and involvement related to live game attendance. This subcategory appears strong in fanship-related behavioural involvement of fans transversally in both teams (4 answer units in 3 Lazio fans, 5 answer units in 4 Roma fans). Concerning fandom, *Stadium Attendance* subcategory emerged 4 times in 4 interviews with Roma fans and never with Lazio fans.

“To me supporting Roma is going there, being with the people at the stadium, with the people I love or with people I can even meet directly there” (Roma/6, Fandom, *Stadium Attendance*).

Concerning fanship we find similar values in the subcategories of *Being part of something bigger*, that is, identifying oneself through the team in something bigger than the individual self (for both fans 2 answer units in 2 fans), and *Leadership*, that is, identifying oneself in team members with particular charisma (5 answer units in 3 Lazio fans, 4 answer units in 4 Roma fans). On the contrary, fandom across fans from two teams reported the greatest differences. Here, in fact, Lazio fans declare a strong identification with the fan group by

referring to a real sense of *Family* (11 answer units in 6 Lazio fans versus 4 answer units in 3 Roma fans).

“There is an union and this also enriches being together, with the family, which can also be social with the family, if it belonged to some group; let's say my Lazio group, it's more of a family group than the group it was when I was twenty years old when I went to the North, to the Curva group” (Lazio/11, Fandom, *Family*)

The subcategory *Being part of something bigger* was also coded in fandom but, again, without differences (2 answer units in 1 Lazio fan, 3 answer units in 3 Roma fans). Last, the subcategory of *Identity Change* was coded as referring to the possibility of changing one's identity as a fan due to personal or contextual factors. This subcategory does not show differences between the two fans (4 answer units in 2 Lazio fans, 3 answer units in 3 Roma fans), but it is interesting that more than 20% of the fans report this aspect.

Concerning fanship, the response units for the subcategory of *Identity Change* are similar for the two fans (5 response units in 4 Lazio fans, 6 response units in 3 Roma fans), while we note significant differences in the subcategory *Sport Results*, which is the level of identification with the team based on sports results.

“Usually, it works the other way around, because in your youth you are agitated and then as the years go by, when family, work and other difficulties take over it tends to decrease, but for me it wasn't like that. Over the years, emotions have certainly increased” (Roma/3, Fanship, *Identity Change*)

As many as 8 Lazio fans (12 response units) state that their level of identification is related to

the results achieved; this aspect is also present among Roma fans but with lower values (6 response units in 4 fans). For Roma fans, a strong element of identification in the team is closely related to the city of Rome. The *City Identification* category was coded at 12 response units for 7 Roma fans and in no case for Lazio fans.

“Being a fan of A.S. Roma is like loving the city of Rome; for me the two things are profoundly related” (Roma/6, Fanship, *City Identification*).

For what is identification with fellow supporters (i.e., fandom) Lazio fans report a significant *Minority/Majority* sentiment, i.e., that related to identification in a particular group caused by a minority or majority feeling compared to others; in fact, we find 9 response units in 4 Lazio fans, while no response units for Roma. Notably, the coded response units always refer to the sense of minority that Lazio fans perceive; this feeling is in line with the data on the number of soccer fans in Italy presented by Stage and Ipsos in August 2023, which place Lazio in sixth place overall (behind Juventus, Inter, Milan, Napoli, and Roma) with an estimated 684,000 fans (or about 3 percent of the total) (Stage Up/Ipsos, 2023).

“When I was a boy, we were always inferior in numbers. This thing gave me more pride the fact of being inferior in numbers.” (Lazio/11, Fandom, *Minority/Majority*).

Of particular interest is the analysis of the subcategory *Outgroup Derogation*, i.e., the tendency to show negative, sometimes deviant behaviour toward members of an identified outgroup. From this point of view, in Lazio fans, 5 response units were coded in 5 different fans, compared to the single response unit in Roma fans. This aspect may be related to the

minority sentiment mentioned earlier.

“Lazio fans benefit from the club history and from being an historical multisport club; on the other hand, Roma fans are very attached to game results and hold absurd expectations which often are actually crazy. Roma fans are indeed only ordinary fans” (Lazio/4, Fandom, *Outgroup Derogation*).

For fanship, Lazio and Roma fans also report a *Minority/Majority* feeling here. Referring to a different construct, this subcategory modifies its meaning by referring to identification in a particular team caused by a minority or majority feeling compared to other teams. With this meaning, the subcategory is minimally present for both fans (2 response units in 2 Lazio fans and 1 response unit in 1 Roma fan). Regarding fandom, we find an interesting result. Lazio fans alone, in fact, declare a detachment from what are the group dynamics related to the fan group. In this sense, the subcategory *Detachment from the ultras*, was coded with 14 the response units in 4 fans, with references mainly to the extremist political current and their sexist behaviours within the curve.

“I feel like a Lazio fan, as everyone feels, but I don't feel like it when we start talking about political ideology which unfortunately they put on the field in the stands every Sunday” (Lazio/1, Fandom, *Detachment from the ultras*)

For the subcategory *Shared Fate*, which is when members of a group recognize that they have a common path and when they recognize that they are treated equally within the group, similar numbers were coded for the fanship construct (4 answer units in 2 Lazio fans and 3 answer units in 3 Roma fans). In the fandom construct, on the other hand, the aspect of

sharing a common path and within the group is an element coded for Roma fanship only (4 answer units in 3 fans). It is evident, then, how both fans identify with their team's path, while only the Roma fans identify with their own fan group. This aspect is in line with the analysis of the *Detachment from the ultras* subcategory done in

In aggregate terms, for fans' identification with their team (fanship), the answer units are similarly distributed (36 for Lazio fans and 43 for Roma fans). The main differences can be seen in Lazio fans identifying more with their team's results and Roma fans identifying more with the strong connection in terms of name, colours, and symbols with their hometown. In contrast, regarding fans' identification with the group (fandom), we note a clear prevalence of answer units in Lazio fans (46 for Lazio fans and 23 for Roma fans). Lazio fans state that their identification with the fan group depends on feeling that they are in a minority situation compared to other teams, plus they do not identify with the attitudes of other fan groups. At the same time, however, Lazio fans distance themselves from certain behaviours that part of their fan base disavows, such as joining political groups or sexist initiatives at the stadium.

Table 4.2. Fanship.

SS Lazio		AS Roma	
Subcategories	n° answer units/fans	Subcategories	n° answer units/fans
• Group Participation	4/3	• Group Participation	2/2
• Stadium Attendance	4/3	• Stadium Attendance	5/4
• Being part of something bigger	2/1	• Being part of something bigger	2/1
• Leadership	5/3	• Leadership	4/4
• Identity Change	5/4	• Identity Change	6/3
• Sport Results	12/8	• Sport Results	6/4
• Minority/Majority	2/2	• City Identification	12/7
• Shared Fate	4/2	• Minority/Majority	1/1
		• Shared Fate	3/3
Subtotal of answer units 36		Subtotal of answer units 43	

Source: authors' own elaboration

Table 4.3. Fandom.

SS Lazio		AS Roma	
Subcategories	n° answer units/fans	Subcategories	n° answer units/fans
• Group Participation	1/1	• Group Participation	3/3
• Being part of something bigger	2/1	• Stadium Attendance	4/4
• Family	11/6	• Being part of something bigger	3/3
• Identity Change	4/2	• Family	4/3
• Outgroup Derogation	5/5	• Identity Change	3/3
• Minority/Majority	9/4	• Outgroup Derogation	1/1
• Detachment from the Ultras	14/4	• Shared Fate	4/3
Subtotal of answer units 46		Subtotal of answer units 23	

Source: authors' own elaboration.

4.2.4 Results on Emotional Attachment and Discussion

As outlined in theoretical review, emotional attachment to the team has been framed in terms of two factors which this work refers to, namely emotional investment and dividend (Dwyer et al. 2015). Emotional investment consists of the “cognitive feelings a fan puts into the team” (Dwyer et al. 2015, p. 575). From this point of view, as visualized in Table 4.4 there was a greater investment of feelings by Lazio fans with 54 answer units compared to 33 by Roma fans. The answer units were coded into 3 subcategories.

The first subcategory is Game-Related and to team results, that is, the feelings that each fan feels invested in their team before, during, or after a game or after a series of specific results or events. As can be seen from Table 4.4, the difference between the two fanbases (12 answer units in 5 Lazio fans, 18 answer units in 7 Roma fans) is due to an involvement of Roma fans in the Post-Game phases, while in the Pre-Game and In-Game phases the response units do not differ.

“The match is a situation where you can allow yourself to rejoice and suffer freely, not like in other social contexts” (Roma/1, In-Game)

The second coded subcategory is related to Group-Related emotional investment, that is, the feelings each fan shows toward their team in relation to group involvement situations. In this subcategory we note a slight majority of answer units in Lazio fans (7 answer units in 4 Lazio fans, 5 answer units in 3 Roma fans). Group Participation dynamics do not differ, while Lazio fans invest feelings when experiencing stadium dynamics (Stadium Attendance).

Table 4.4. Emotional Attachment - Investment

SS Lazio		AS Roma	
Subcategories	n° answer units/fans	Subcategories	n° answer units/fans
<i>1) Game-Related</i>	12/5	<i>1) Game-Related</i>	18/7
• Pre-Game	7/4	• Pre-Game	7/4
• In-Game	4/3	• In-Game	4/3
• Post-Game	1/1	• Post-Game	7/4
<i>2) Group-Related</i>	7/4	<i>2) Group-Related</i>	5/3
• Stadium Attendance	5/3	• Stadium Attendance	3/1
• Group Participation	2/2	• Group Participation	2/2
<i>3) Person-Related</i>	35/10	<i>3) Person-Related</i>	10/6
• Obsession	22/7	• Obsession	4/3
• Time	7/4	• Time	2/2
• Expectations	6/3	• Expectations	4/2
Subtotal of answer units 54		Subtotal of answer units 33	

Source: authors' own elaboration

Table 4.5. Emotional Attachment - Dividend

SS Lazio		AS Roma	
Subcategories	n° answer units/fans	Subcategories	n° answer units/fans
1) Game-Related	9/6	1) Game-Related	13/8
• In-Game	1/1	• In-Game	2/2
• Post-Game	8/6	• Post-Game	11/8
2) Group-Related	10/6	2) Group-Related	12/4
• Family	7/4	• Family	4/2
• Group Participation	3/2	• Group Participation	9/4
		3) City-Identification	4/3
Subtotal of answer units	19	Subtotal of answer units	29

Source: authors' own elaboration

“There are emotions I felt at the stadium that I would have a hard time describing to you, but I haven't felt those emotions anywhere else” (Lazio/1, Stadium Attendance).

The third subcategory is the one called Person-Related, which is the one related to emotional investment linked to personal motivations toward the team. The differences in this subcategory are obvious: the answer units coded for Lazio are significantly higher than those for Roma (35 in 10 Lazio fans, 10 in 6 Roma fans). This discrepancy is evident in the section called Obsession, which is the feeling of true obsession that fans feel toward their team, but it is also evident in the other two sections, Time and Expectations. The most eye-popping result, however, is the fact that 10 out of 11 Lazio fans surveyed fall into this subcategory, denoting a strong personal aspect in what is Lazio fans' investment in their team.

“However, being a fan is a bit sick. As when you are in love and sometimes you don't realize that there it is an irrational part. Sometimes you ask yourself why I have to feel so bad?” (Lazio/10, Obsession).

Dividend refers to the “affective feelings derived from the team” (Dwyer et al. 2015, p. 575). In this category, however, coding of the interviews showed that Roma fans receive more feelings from their team than Lazio fans (29 Roma answer units versus 19 Lazio) (see Table 4.5). As with emotional investment, response units have been coded into subcategories, but the subcategory Person-Related does not appear and we have added, only for Roma, the subcategory City Identification. Again, the first subcategory is Game-Related and to the team's results. In line with what was seen in emotional investment, Roma fans report

receiving more feelings from the team in the In-Game and Post-Game phases (13 answer units in 8 Roma fans, 9 answer units in 6 Lazio fans).

“I like sitting in front of the television and receiving feelings of tension, apprehension and joy which depend mainly on the result but sometimes also on the performance” (Roma/3, Post-Game).

The second subcategory is the one called Group-Related. In this subcategory in number of answer units differs little (10 answer units in 6 Lazio fans, 13 answer units in 4 Roma fans), but within it there are differences in sections. In particular, the dynamics related to the affective feelings received by Lazio fans turn out to be greater in terms of Family, i.e., the feelings in terms of a narrow sense of belonging, but less in terms of Group Participation.

“Taking into account that I have passed on the tradition of Lazio and the relating passion to my son, sharing this passion and my emotions with him is intertwined a bit with my son's feelings” (Lazio/5, Family).

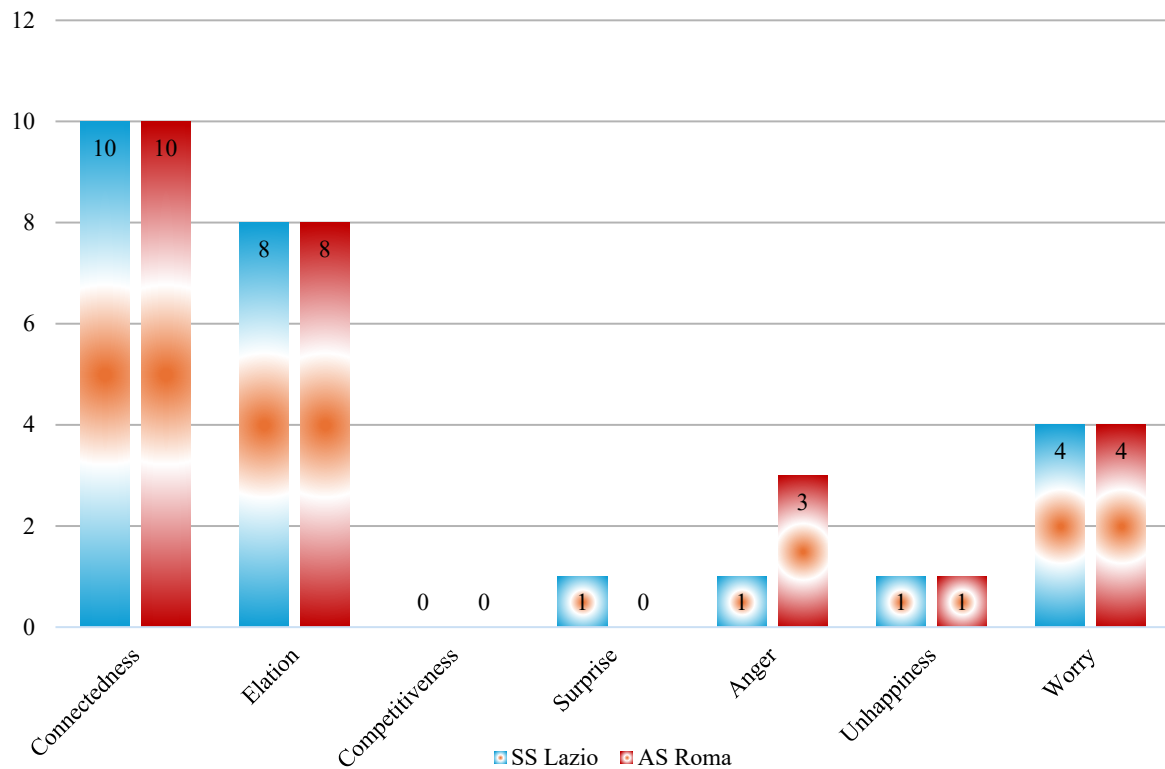
Finally, in the category of emotional dividend, coding has highlighted the subcategory of City Identification. As already seen for fanship, this subcategory appears among Roma fans (4 answer units in 3 Roma fans). Such evidence further highlights the strong connection to the city that Roma conveys to its fans.

“Supporting Roma is like loving the city of Rome; for me the two things are profoundly related. [...] Whatever may happen I will always see in A.S. Roma the link with my city” (Roma/6, City identification).

From the results just presented, it is evident how there is a difference in what are the feelings that the two fans invest in their team (54 for Lazio fans and 33 for Roma fans). While Roma fans invest their emotions primarily around the match or a series of results, for Lazio fans they have a more personal emotional attachment to their team, to the point of obsession. Conversely, affective feelings derived from the team are higher among AS Roma fans (19 for Lazio fans and 29 for Roma fans). Underlying this result is greater involvement in Game-Related dynamics and the strong City Identification that the club conveys to its fans.

The analysis of the construct of emotional attachment, understood in its two categories of investment and dividend, offers an important insight into what emotions fans give and receive from their team. While a strong attachment to the city and match results shines through in Roma fans, Lazio fans show themselves to be more emotionally involved in personal dynamics with the team. To reinforce the expression of the fans' emotional investment and dividend, they were asked to describe the two categories with up to three emotions each. The classification of emotions was used proposed by Lee et al. (Lee et al., 2018). This model consisted of 7 factors, each containing 24 emotions: connection (passion, longing, support, and connection), elation (happy, excited, satisfied, proud, optimistic, and amused), competitiveness (competitive and aggressive), surprise (amazed, surprised, and astonished), anger (annoyed, frustrated, and angry), unhappiness (suffering, sad, regretful, and disconsolate) and worry (fearful and anxious) (Lee et al., 2018). All the emotions described by the fans fell within the distinctive ones in the proposed model, and the results in terms of frequency can be seen in Figure 4.1 for Investment and Figure 4.2 for Dividend.

Figure 4.1. Fans' Emotions – Investment.



Source: authors' own elaboration.

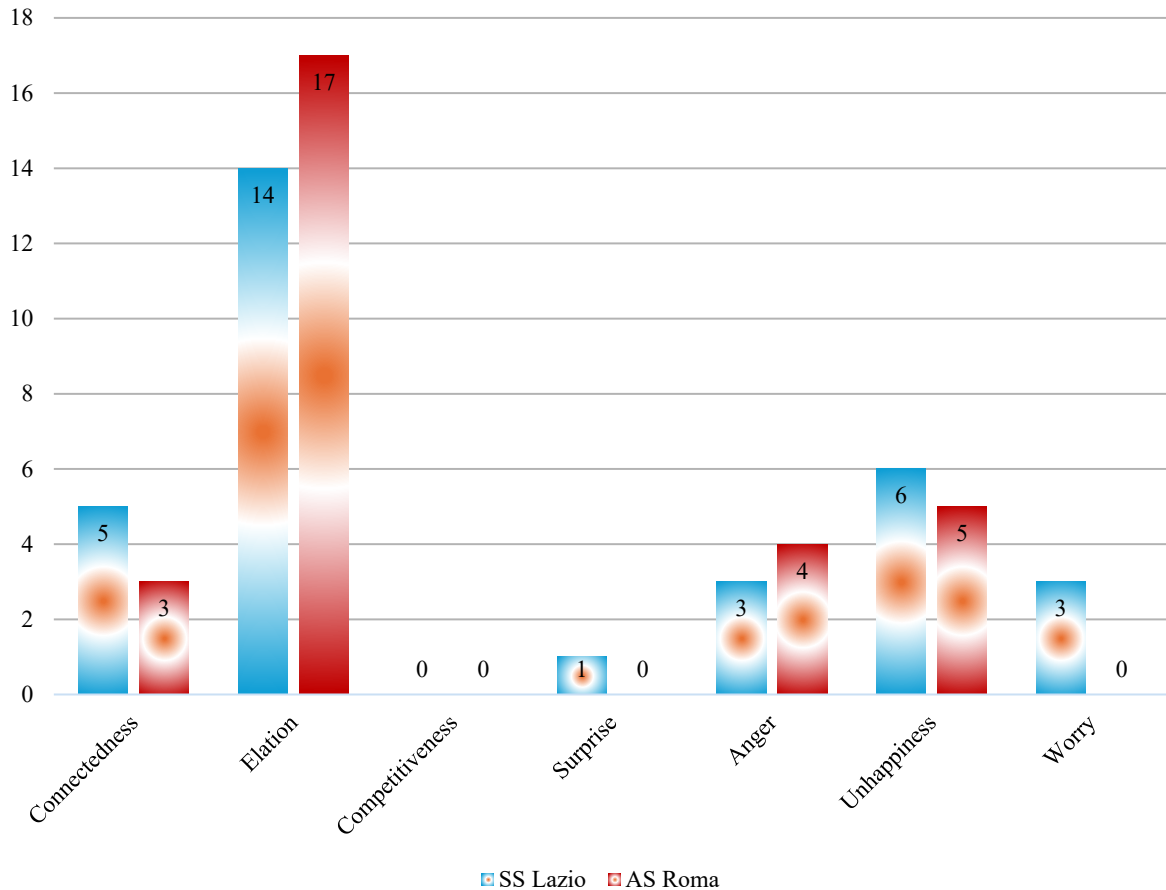
4.2.5 Results on Subjective Well-Being and Discussion

For what concerns SWB, Lui and Fernando (2018) provided a multidimensional conceptualization (and psychometric instrument) of the construct. This research relies on this framework and thus analyses the social, physical, financial, hedonic, and eudaimonic dimensions of SWB (Lui and Fernando, 2018). These dimensions were used in our research as analysis categories for each of which the relevant subcategories were coded (see Table 4.6).

From the Social point of view, in line with the dynamics analysed above, we find differences between the two fans. Lazio fans declare social well-being mainly attributable to the subcategory Family (6 answer units in 3 fans) and minimally to the subcategory Group Participation (2 answer units in 2 fans). In contrast, Roma fans do not declare family well-

being but, from a social point of view, find well-being from Group Participation (5 answer units in 3 fans) and Being part of something bigger (2 answer units in 2 fans.

Figure 4.2. Fans' Emotions – Dividend



Source: authors' own elaboration.

In the category related to Physical Well-being, as was imaginable, reference answer units were coded, but these did not meet the inclusion threshold expected by the authors.

In the category related to Financial well-being, the two fans are very similar to each other on the level of Expenditure Balance (2 out of 2 answer units in both fans), but they differ regarding Work-Life Balance (2 out of 2 answer units in Lazio fans and 6 out of 5 in Roma fans). Roma fans, in fact, state that being a fan intervenes in some aspects of their work-life

balance. This stems mainly from the weekly organization to follow the team in their sports commitments.

Hedonic Well-Being refers to the subjective evaluation of life circumstances and the balance between positive and negative emotions of each human being (Lui and Fernando, 2018). In this category, we identified three subcategories: Sheltering, Sport Results, and Venting.

By Sheltering we mean the self-reported feeling of shelter and safety when cheering on their team. This aspect was coded into as many as 11 answer units in 5 different Roma fans compared to 5 answer units in 2 Lazio fans, indicating how for Roma fans this feeling plays a key role in their well-being as fans.

“Once we start singing the anthem everything disappears for me. Even if I get to the stadium after I've had a bad day or it happens that I got angry at work or I'm sad, suddenly everything is cancelled out. [...] Going to the stadium it's as if I actually forget about my problems and I am able to enjoy the moment” (Roma/6, Sheltering)

More answer units were also coded in Roma fans (4 answer units versus only one in Lazio fans) in reference to Venting i.e., the feeling of venting that being a fan gives in terms of well-being.

“At that point I was able to unload everything I had inside when I was at the stadium, and I let off steam; it was a real relief valve” (Roma/4, Venting).

As for Sport Results-dependent well-being, for both fans there were 6 answer units. It is evident how Roma fans associate well-being as fans with moments of venting and moments when they feel protected.

Eudaimonic well-being refers to the subjective experiences associated with eudaimonia or living a life of virtue in pursuit of human excellence (Niemiec, 2014). In this section, the fact that for four Lazio fans (for 6 answer units) and three Roma fans (in 3 answer units) consider they're being a fan a habit in their lives led us to include the Habit subcategory. Indeed, we believe that such activity that has become, precisely, habitual, gives value and meaning to the identity of the fans but also to their own lives.

“It has now become a habit for me, something I am used to doing and every two Sundays, or rather now, with the midweek shift even more so. A part of who I am that I would definitely miss if it wasn't there” (Lazio/1, Habit).

In general, Roma fans most often link the level of well-being to their team (30 for Lazio fans and 39 for Roma fans). This is mainly realized in the Hedonic category. Here Roma fans report a greater sense of security and outlet in feeling like Roma fans, feelings also found in Lazio fans but to a lesser degree. The Work-Life Balance aspect also appears to be an important issue for Roma fans and less so for Lazio fans who instead see being a fan more as an established habit.

Table 4.6. Subjective well-being

Categories	Subcategories	SS Lazio	Subcategories	AS Roma
		n° answer units/fans		n° answer units/fans
Social	1) Family	6/3	1) Being part of something bigger	2/2
	2) Group Participation	2/2	2) Group Participation	5/3
Physical		----		----
Financial	1) Expenditure Balance	2/2	1) Expenditure Balance	2/2
	2) Work-Life Balance	2/2	2) Work-Life Balance	6/5
Hedonic	1) Sheltering	5/2	1) Sheltering	11/5
	2) Sport Results	6/4	2) Sport Results	6/6
	3) Venting	1/1	3) Venting	4/3
Eudaimonic	1) Habit	6/4	1) Habit	3/3
Subtotal of answer units 30			Subtotal of answer units 39	

Source: authors' own elabor

4.4 Implications, limitations and future research

4.4.1 Theoretical implications

The current research offers various elements of theoretical implications. To begin, building on existing literature concerning fanship and fandom, which had conceptualized fanship as a personal identification with team (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010; Reysen et al., 2017, 2022), findings suggest two elements for a SIA-based reconfiguration of fanship as a social identity: first, when analysing fanship in fans from both teams, subcategories with relevant degrees of connectedness, sharedness and social interconnections like group participation, shared fate, stadium attendance, minority/majority, hold elevated shares (14 answer units/ 7 fans); moreover, fanship and fandom share the same emerging subcategories almost completely, thus suggesting that the structural content of the constructs might be specular. Being fanship a mirroring construct of what has been broadly labelled as ‘team identification’ in sports consumer research (Wann, 2006; Reysen and Branscombe, 2010; Reysen et al., 2022), this reconfiguration appears in line with the traditional SIA-based understanding (Lock and Heere, 2017; Wann 2006). In addition, while previous studies on fanship and fandom have focused on structural equation modelling-based quantitative methodology, this study provides original in-depth qualitative understandings of these specific forms of sports consumers identifications, and the emotional values and significances attached to them (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Indeed, current results concerning the emotional attachment to the team denies the absence of the affective components in fans’ social identities (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

Furthermore, this research answers previous calls for exploring emotional attachment to the team in the identification processes of sports fans (Dwyer et al., 2015). as evidenced by the number of answer units as well as the number of emerged subcategories, this study outlines the significant preponderance of football fans to refer more to the (cognitive) investment side of emotional attachment with respect to the emotional dividend. Dwyer and colleagues

(2015) suggested that this situation portrays an irrational form of attachment to the team which may be associated with enhanced consumptive behaviours as well as perceptions of personal sacrifice. This consideration is here supported by the emergence of *Obsession* as a consistent subcategory, particularly among Lazio fans. In line with these findings, Vallerand and colleagues (2003) found that sports fans tend to retain obsessive passions and engagement even when they receive negative personal returns and sensations.

In terms of frequency analysis of invested and received emotions, this study refers to and extends Lee's and colleagues' model (2018) in four ways, namely: (a) the model is proposed and used in an inductive qualitative content analysis; (b) contrary to Lee's and colleagues' (2018) findings, competitiveness category was here found to be void; (c) between-teams analysis revealed elevated congruence ; (d) finally, while investment emotions tend to be strongly positive (i.e., prevalence of connectedness and elation), divided appears to be rather affected by negative emotional categories - anger, unhappiness, and worry. In line with Lee's and colleagues' arguments concerning anger affecting supporting behaviours toward the team (2018), the rather relevant negative emotions emerging from perceived dividend appears to confirm the idea of fans' obsessiveness; notwithstanding the negative outcomes, fans tend to keep their faiths and loyalty toward the team (Vallerand et al., 2003). Although being inductive and not focusing on discrete emotions, these findings contrast Biscaia's and colleagues' (2012) structural model displaying only joy as affecting fans' satisfaction and behavioural intentions – through satisfaction mediation.

Finally, results highlight the fulfilment of venting and sheltering needs through fanship- and fandom-induced behavioural engagement. While sheltering might be translated into a superordinated aspirational need to belong to a group (Tajfel and Turner 1979), venting has been recently outlined as a coping strategy to diminish the effect of disadvantages outcomes Kim and Kim (2023). These findings support and extend SIA research to health and

wellbeing which posits that group membership offers various psychological resources to cope with stressful and negative conditions (Jetten et al., 2017). In particular, outlined results builds on Inoue's and colleagues' (2022) configuration of how identifying with a team – considered as a group identity – provides opportunities and resources to crisis recovery; sheltering and venting needs fulfilment might be intended as parts of relatedness, social support and in-group norms which may then be associated with greater well-being (Inoue et al., 2022; Jetten et al., 2017) Across subjective wellbeing answering units, the consistent referencing stadium attendance as as a driver positive engage, recharge, shelter, distress and activate personal health is well founded in sports spectatorship research and in line with previous works (Inoue et al., 2017; Yoshida et al., 2023).

4.4.2 Managerial implications

As emotions and identifications are recognized as key brand benefits associated with football brands (Bauer, 2005, 2008), exploring and understanding these elements is fundamental in football club brand images. Clubs, marketers, and managers should profit from a strategic approach to fans' identification processes (symbolic benefit) and perceived emotions (experiential benefit), since positive emotions and strong identification are positively correlated with positive loyal behaviours toward the team (Bauer, 2005, 2008; Maderer et al., 2016). The combination of interview-based data and frequency distribution of emotions concerned with personal cognitive investment and emotional dividend is here suggested as a research tool to provide in-depth knowledge relative to these key brand benefits.

Previous studies identified a strengthening effect of emotional attachment to the brand in the relationship between brand identification and customer loyalty (Hallberg et al., 2003). In conditions of high cognitive investment with a club is expected to positively influence consistent behavioural loyalty suggesting an irrational, sacrifice-like engagement to the team (Dwyer et al., 2015; Ladhari et al., 2022). Current findings extend existing knowledge

concerning the cognitive-oriented investment and affective dividend of fans in the traditionally football-centric Italian sports industry. The overall predominance of cognitive investment dimension vis-à-vis the emotional dividend reflects mirrors the widespread behavioural (and financial) engagement with Italian fans and highlights (a) an implicit and widespread tendency to irrational engagement with the identified club (brand); and (b) a shared sensation of receiving back from the club less than the personal investment. Strategically targeting this sensation might positively develop clubs' shared image.

Clubs and managers are expected to aim at increasing perceived well-being of fans since service satisfaction was found to positively moderates (Matsuoka et al., 2013) or even predict (Bodet and Bernache-Assollant, 2011) the relationship between brand identification and loyal attitudes of consumers. As highlighted in the findings, venting, and sheltering needs imply various opportunities managers and marketers can profit from. To stimulate emotional relief, both direct experiential (e.g. socialization and interactive areas around stadium area) and digital platforms (e.g. official social media pages) social connections might be promoted (Kim and Kim, 2023). Sharing emotional contents, reviving key moments, interfacing with fellow fans is expected not only expected to reduce negative emotions but also reinvigorate fanship and fandom (Kim and Kim, 2023; Reysen and Branscombe, 2010). Given the highly extended social visibility football clubs (particularly in Italy) benefit from, marketing and communication campaign might be focused on: (a) stimulating a sense of being 'sheltered', being protected by daily life problems, implicitly underlining a sense of belonging to the team and fans groups. (b) educating and promoting healthy ways to release emotional negativities after perceived disappointments. Monitoring social media platforms might be a functional way to capture the sentiment after key seasonal moments, events, or game-related negativities.

Finally, club specific emerging themes should be evaluated as threats and opportunities in the

development of their brand images; for example, the presence of fans aligned with racist and neofascist fans within S.S. Lazio fanbase is perceived to obstacle fans' fandom and, consequently, the shared brand identity of the club. Targeting actual or potential problems in fanship and fandom perceptions is expected to ameliorate related brand identity. On the other hand, the strongly and widely perceived alignment between A.S. Roma club and the home city appears as a crucial asset enabling future marketing opportunities entailing multiple geographical group identities (e.g. city identification) (Heere and James, 2007).

4.4.3 Limitations and future research

The study has some limitations. The first concerns the sample since a low number of fans was reached in relation to the soccer fanbase in Italy. Future research should therefore verify the results obtained on a larger number of fans. A further limitation regarding the sample lies in the fact that the fans analysed share the same social, cultural, and especially urban context with the related commonalities and rivalries. Future research should analyse constructs among fans who do not share the same city and generate a comparison with other countries to see to what extent differences may exist on the issues of Social Identity, Emotional Attachment and Social Well-Being related to sports.

From a methodological point of view, one limitation lies in the manual coding and not through the automated software NVivo 14 because of the Italian language used in the interviews. In fact, the software does not provide automatic coding on Italian-language texts, so it was necessary to code answer units manually. The authors minimized possible discrepancies between the concepts of the constructs expressed in English and those expressed in Italian from the interviews.

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4.5.1 Websites

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Chapter 5. General discussion and future research

The current thesis and its overall findings extend current scientific knowledge in several ways including: (a) a further exploration of fanship and fandom through both quantitative and qualitative research (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010; Reysen et al., 2017, 2022b); (b) highlighting the potential disharmonious effect of elevated emotional attachment and identification; (c) providing results and considerations relatively to identified fans' well-being. To begin, this thesis extends extant knowledge concerning fanship and fandom by investigating their relationship with emotional attachment, subjective well-being, and attitudinal loyalty. Fanship appears positively associated with attitudinal loyalty and subjective well-being (only in attending live game occasions), and fandom is positively associated with subjective well-being. While consistent empirical evidence highlights the distinctiveness of the constructs and the correlation between them (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010), the SIA-based conceptualization of fanship and fandom appears more intricate. Indeed, while existing literature focusing on fanship and fandom comparison has framed fanship as a personal identity (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010; Reysen et al., 2022b), it has been argued that fanship mirrors the more traditional understanding of team identification which, on the contrary, different SIA-oriented scholars have been consistently framing as a group identity (Lock and Heere, 2017; Wann, 2006). Affirming how fanship should or should not be conceptualized is out of the scope of this thesis, which significantly draws from previous works from Reysen and his research group (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010; Reysen et al., 2017, 2022a, 2022b); nevertheless, results presented in Chapter 4 appear in line with the broader SIA-based team identification research (Heere and James, 2007; Lock and Heere, 2017; Lock et al., 2014), suggesting that fanship may not be limited to a personal identification with the team yet it might be considered as a proper social identity parallelly to fandom. Indeed, fans' identification with the team encompasses the cognitive, evaluative and

emotional dimensions of a social identity as well as the essential elements for the emergence and existence of a group as outlined by the SIA (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). Empirical findings outlined in Chapter 4 suggest that fanship might be considered a group identity eventually. In addition, while previous studies have focused on structural equation modelling-based investigation of fanship and fandom, this thesis provides for the first time in-depth qualitative understandings of both constructs.

Moreover, aiming at filling previously highlighted research gaps (Dwyer et al., 2015), this thesis introduces the construct of emotional attachment to the team to the research on fanship and fandom. Although these might be limited to the Italian football context, overall outlined findings underline the potential negative effects of elevated emotional attachment for high identifiers with the team and/or with the surrounding fan community; specifically, when feeling strong emotional attachment to the team, high identifiers with the team may experience reduced well-being perceptions while high identifiers with fellow fans might limit their own attitudinal loyalty to the team. These results extend previous findings on emotional attachment and brand identification (Hallberg et al., 2003). On the contrary, emotional attachment appears to have a slightly positive moderating effect for low identifiers, thus confirming affective element centrality. Outlined results also underline that fans tend to emphasize their cognitive investment and refer to limited perceptions of emotional dividends; this condition paves the way to what has been referred to as an irrational, sacrifice-like form of emotional attachment which then influences continued behavioural engagement (Dwyer et al., 2015; Ladhari et al., 2022). Functioning as a laic form of devotion parallel to religiousness (Billings et al., 2023; Statz et al., 2022), emotionally attaching to a team can materially and spiritually express a personal passion which has the negative potential to turn obsessive (Vallerand et al., 2003). Indeed, sports fans – particularly Italian football fans - might retain obsessive passions and engagement even when they receive negative personal

returns and sensations (Vallerand et al., 2003). These forms of passions take a significant share of individual's self, are key for individual's self-worthiness perception and are invasive with respect to other life domains. In general, this thesis displays the disharmonious effects of strong identities combined with elevated attached emotional values.

Furthermore, this thesis draws from and extends SIA-oriented research on health and well-being (Haslam et al., 2009; Jetten et al., 2017). Particularly referring to live game attendance properties, the structural model proposed above confirmed that both fanship and fandom positively correlate with perceived well-being, extending existing research (Reysen et al., 2022b); in turn, well-being tend to enhance loyal attitudes toward the team for high identifiers either with team and/or with fellow fans. Indeed, SWB positively and partially mediated the relationships between fandom and attitudinal loyalty to the team in both on-site and online groups in Chapter 3; the positive mediation of SWB was observed between fanship and attitudinal loyalty as well, but only for the on-site group. These findings are in line with SIA research concerning health and well-being, in particular when considering that group identification encompasses health-related norms supporting specific behaviours (Haslam et al., 2009; Jetten et al., 2014). Since both fanship and fandom appeared correlating with SWB, in-group norms positively stimulate loyal attitudes toward the team. In line with previous work (Inoue et al., 2020; Zhong and Mitchell, 2012), this research confirms that prolonged well-being perceptions positively affects inner behavioural trends. This consideration adds to the argument that group identification offers additional psychological resources to cope with stressful and negative conditions (Jetten et al., 2017). In line with previous works (Biscaia et al., 2012; Inoue et al., 2017a, 2019), stadium attendance enhances the emotional components and well-being outcomes of identifying with the team and fellow fans; interacting with fellow fans, benefiting from emotional and social support, experiencing live event and directly participating at supporting the team are some of the sources of

additional emotionality and well-being (Inoue et al., 2017, 2019; Yoshida et al., 2023). However, overall results confirm that well-being is better predicted by fandom than fanship (Reysen et al., 2022a; 2022b). In addition, this thesis extends SIA-oriented research on health and well-being by highlighting the fulfilment of venting and sheltering needs through fanship- and fandom-induced behavioural engagement. While sheltering might be translated into a superordinated aspirational need to belong to a group (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), venting has been recently outlined as a coping strategy to diminish the effect of disadvantages outcomes (Kim and Kim, 2023).

The presented model, studies and findings can support clubs, marketers, and managers aiming at fostering fans' identification, emotional attachment, well-being and loyalty. A strategic approach stimulating fans' identification processes, perceived positive emotions as well as well-being is expected to foster loyal attitudes and behaviours toward the team and its brand (Bauer, 2005, 2008; Bodet and Bernache-Assollant, 2011; Maderer et al., 2016; Matsuoka et al., 2013). For what concerns the emotional attachment to the team, fans may share a sensation of receiving back from the club less than the volume of personal investment. Strategically aiming at reinforcing this sensation of received emotional content might increase their attachment to the team and to the brand. In addition, being fans crucial emotional stakeholders (Zagnoli and Radicchi, 2010), clubs and marketers may educate fans and promote healthy ways to release emotional negativities after perceived disappointments. educating and promoting. Moreover, venting, and sheltering needs imply opportunities that managers and marketers can strategically manage by stimulating emotional relief through physical movement and distress, social interactions and empathy – either live or digital (Kim and Kim, 2023). Social interactions resulting from these practices may eventually reinforce fanship, fandom and emotional attachment across fans.

Findings and discussions presented in the current thesis pave the way for future research

opportunities. To begin, future avenues of research are recognized at the end of the systematic literature review. The latter highlighted that gender issues, identification-related emotions and betting behaviours are rather under researched themes. Given the elevated presence of quantitative knowledge in the fields, in-depth qualitative research may provide extending insights. In addition, future research settings might favour: (a) investigations of unexplored sports fans' cultures and social environments; (b) comparisons between professional and amateur contexts, different sports and/or national environments.

Moreover, the model researched in chapter 3 may be tested in other social, national, and sporting contexts offering comparative opportunities to extend existing knowledge concerning the interactions between fanship, fandom and emotional attachment. In particular the potentially negative interaction effects of elevated identification and emotional attachment on well-being and attitudinal loyalty should be further investigated. The latter might be investigated directly in relation with fans' wellbeing and attitudinal loyalty to the team in order to test previous findings in consumer research (Hallberg 2003, Ladhari et al., 2022). The interactions between the investigated constructs as well as the proposed model might be influenced by the diverse typologies of fans (Hunt et al., 1999), the research timing during the competitive season and team performance trends; accordingly, longitudinal and fan segmenting approaches might ameliorate the presented model and research.

Finally, this longitudinal and/or comparative approach might be applied to qualitative research on fanship, fandom, emotional attachment, and subjective well-being. More heterogeneous samples might provide further or different insights with respect to the ones outlined in previous study. A longitudinal structure of research might follow the potential variations in terms of affective and well-being perceptions throughout stressful and emotional moments of the season. As evidenced in Chapter 4, Sheltering and Venting themes appear highly interesting concept to be investigated in further research.

Chapter 6. Thesis conclusions

The main outcome of this thesis dissertation is highlighting the importance of emotional attachment in combination with sports fans' identification with the beloved team and with the surrounding fan community, particularly when observing the related well-being outcomes (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010; Reysen et al., 2022b). The potential negative side of elevated emotions in for those individuals experiencing high fanship and/or fandom are exhibited in the presented studies. This thesis offers different elements of research originality and development; to begin, this thesis introduces emotional attachment with the team in team identification research (Dwyer et al., 2015). Before presenting the empirical cases, a first ever multidisciplinary systematic literature review concerning team and fan identification research has been delivered and presented in the manuscript. The analysis of the 115 sampled references confirmed the mature phase of the related research topic and provided theoretical, methodological, findings- and ports-specific insights concerning the sampled literature.

Furthermore, drawing from the SIA, the first empirical study presented in this thesis highlighted the unexpected and counterintuitive negative moderating influence of emotional attachment affected fanship correlation with subjective well-being and fandom correlation with attitudinal loyalty. Fans' well-being appears positively affected by both fanship and fandom, particularly in the attendance of live games. Indeed, this thesis refers and extends SIA research on health and well-being (Haslam et al., 2009; Jetten et al., 2017).

The last empirical work qualitative exploration this thesis highlights how often identified sports fans refer to detrimental and harmful emotions which they have been experiencing and considering as part of their emotional attachment; notwithstanding these negative sensations, fans tend to consider their identification. Importantly, this thesis underlines the need to consider highly identified sports fans as core emotional stakeholders of supported clubs and organizations (Zagnoli and Radicchi, 2010); accordingly, managers, marketers and clubs

should take in great account the emotional attachment of identified fans and how these feelings interact with fanship and fandom. Adopting educative emotional approaches through communication, potential emotional relief options and supporting the emotional dividend perceptions across fans can be integrated in management and marketing strategies to address potentially detrimental effects of elevated emotional attachment across high identifiers either with the team or with the surrounding fan community.

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