

Beyond Match Day: Evaluating the Premier League's FES and Introducing the SBEFEM to Unlock Fan Engagement and Cultivate Loyalty

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This research was part of a wider unpublished master's dissertation paper conducted by the author, which featured an expanded literature review, and a case study on a Premier League football club. This document only includes the literature review and introduction of the Sports Brand Equity & Fan Engagement Model (SBEFEM) framework.

Abstract

Purpose: This research aims to comprehensively assess the strength of sports brands, particularly English Premier League (EPL) clubs, by integrating six dimensions of brand equity with fan engagement metrics. The purpose is to fill a critical void in unified frameworks for systematically monitoring, assessing, and enhancing fan engagement.

Design/Methodology/Approach: A literature review revealed the absence of a unified guide for clubs to optimise engagement strategies. In response, the Sports Brand Equity & Fan Engagement Model (SBEFEM) was developed, aligning with the Premier League Fan Engagement Standard (FES) to provide a comprehensive assessment.

Findings: Strategic fan engagement, focusing on winning, relevance, community, and participation, emerged as pivotal for EPL clubs. The SBEFEM offers a unique perspective, contributing to a robust and meaningful relationship between sports brands and fans.

Research Limitations/Implications: Limitations include the need for ongoing assessment and adaptation as the FES evolves. Despite these constraints, the SBEFEM introduces a holistic model, aligning with the FES and providing insight into evolving fan engagement dynamics.

Originality/Value: This research significantly contributes by proposing a holistic model in the nascent landscape of fan engagement, paving the way for further empirical testing. The SBEFEM, aligned with the FES, offers a nuanced understanding of diverse factors influencing fan engagement, fostering personalised and effective approaches. This work facilitates a deeper comprehension of fan engagement dynamics in the digital age, enriching the sports experience for both clubs and fans.

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1.0 Introduction

In the dynamic realm of football, continuously shaped by digital technologies influencing fan experiences, the imperative of sustaining and elevating fan engagement remains pivotal for Premier League (PL) football clubs. The digital age has brought unprecedented connectivity opportunities, demanding innovative strategies to address unique challenges. This research comprehensively explores the strategies available to Premier League clubs for sustaining and enhancing fan engagement, incorporating a literature review encompassing brand engagement, fan engagement, and the recently introduced English Premier League Fan Engagement Standard (FES) (Premier League, 2023).

1.1 Background

The idea for this study can be traced to a significant development within the Premier League – the unanimous approval of the Fan Engagement Standard (FES) in November 2022. The FES serves as a guiding beacon for clubs, steering them towards sustained, meaningful engagement with their fan base. This initiative gains particular significance post the European Super League breakaway attempt in April 2021, which sparked a fan backlash, including calls for relegation and financial penalties (BBC, 2021). Building upon prior initiatives, the FES aims to standardise fan engagement expectations in the Premier League. Implementation began in March 2023, with clubs preparing for a new era of fan interaction. In the upcoming 2023/24 season, each club will unveil its unique Fan Engagement Plan, outlining its commitment to meeting the stringent FES requirements (Premier League, 2023).

The introduction of the FES marks a pivotal juncture in the club-supporter relationship, signifying a shift towards a more inclusive and interactive partnership. Empowering fans to influence club decisions holds the potential to transform the dynamics of this relationship, fostering a more constructive partnership (Premier League, 2023). It is crucial to note that Premier League clubs historically faced challenges in fan engagement compared to lower leagues (Fan Engagement Index, 2023). To bridge this gap, clubs must explore innovative strategies that resonate with their diverse and digitally connected fan bases.

1.1.1 English Premier League

The English Premier League (EPL) epitomises football excellence globally, boasting millions of fans (Deloitte, 2023). As the competition for fan engagement intensifies, the EPL continues to captivate a global audience.

Fan engagement is the lifeblood of football clubs in the digital age, driving revenues and serving as enthusiastic brand ambassadors. Premier League clubs recognise the value of digital platforms as essential tools for meaningful fan interaction (FSA, 2023).

1.1.2 The English Premier League Fan Engagement Standard (FES)

The FES is more than a standard; it reflects the Premier League's commitment to making fans integral stakeholders, emphasising inclusivity and transparency (Premier League, 2023). Its adoption is poised to redefine the relationship between clubs and supporters, moving from interaction to meaningful involvement.

1.2 Importance of the Study

Given the Premier League's global appeal and the evolving digital landscape, understanding strategies to enhance fan engagement is crucial. Football clubs are not merely teams but brands, with fan engagement as the linchpin holding the brand together. For the Premier League, fan engagement is not just a matter of pride; it is a strategic imperative, influencing attendance, merchandise sales, and global fan base augmentation.

1.3 Research Purpose and Objectives

The primary purpose is to comprehensively examine strategies for improving fan engagement in the Premier League, addressing the question: “How do English Premier League Football Clubs Create and Maintain Fan Engagement?” To achieve this, the study is guided by the following objectives:

1. Conduct a literature review critically analysing concepts of brand engagement, fan engagement, and the English Premier League Fan Engagement Standard (FES).
2. Propose strategies and recommendations for English Premier League football clubs to enhance fan engagement activities.

1.4 Limitations

As with any research, this study acknowledges its limitations. Fan engagement is a multifaceted and dynamic phenomenon, and while this research provides valuable insights, it may not capture every nuance of the landscape.

2.0 Literature Review



Figure 1. Premier League Logo (Premier League, 2023). Copyright to Premier League.

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a succinct review of relevant literature, guiding the research's scope, methodology, and subsequent discussions. It offers a comprehensive examination of essential concepts, definitions, and theories, critically evaluating contributions from business scholars and researchers in related domains. The overarching question guiding this chapter is: *“How do English Premier League Football Clubs Create and Maintain Fan Engagement?”*

2.2 Framework for Review

Brand engagement and fan engagement stand as pivotal factors for success in the sports industry, particularly within the English Premier League (EPL). Recognizing fan engagement's critical role in modern sports business, sports clubs acknowledge the importance of meaningful connections with fans to foster loyalty and drive revenue (SportBusiness, 2023). Bilue's study highlights how fan engagement contributes to increased brand awareness and the expansion of fan bases (Bilue, 2022).

The English Premier League (EPL) holds a prominent position as one of the world's most popular and lucrative sports leagues, boasting a global fanbase (Coakley, 2016). EPL clubs have increasingly leveraged digital platforms for fan engagement in recent years (Parnell, 2018). However, amidst technological evolution and changing fan preferences, clubs must adopt effective strategies to sustain and enhance fan engagement (Gerrard, 2020).

This literature review delves into existing research on fan engagement strategies employed by EPL clubs to maintain and improve fan engagement. It also explores the concepts of brand engagement and juxtaposes fan engagement with the Premier League

Fan Engagement Standard (FES), serving as a new benchmark for evaluating fan engagement initiatives.

2.3 Brand Engagement

Brand engagement constitutes a reciprocal relationship between a brand and its customers, defined by the customer's proactive interaction, shared experiences, and brand advocacy (Fournier, 2009). Hollebeek (2011) further delineates brand engagement as an emotional and psychological connection marked by active involvement, loyalty, and positive interactions extending beyond mere purchasing behaviour.

In marketing parlance, brand engagement denotes the establishment and maintenance of a meaningful connection between a brand and its target audience (Kotler *et al.*, 2016). This connection is fostered through various channels, including advertising, social media, and customer service. The benefits of brand engagement are manifold, encompassing increased sales, enhanced customer loyalty, and a fortified brand reputation for businesses (Keller, 2018). Consumers, in turn, enjoy a more positive brand experience, fostering repeat business and positive word-of-mouth.

The origins of branding trace back to ancient civilizations, where artisans distinguished their products with symbols or unique identifiers (Holt, 2002). However, modern brand management emerged as a strategic marketing practice in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Procter & Gamble (P&G) played a pioneering role, introducing a systematic approach to brand management in the late 1800s, emphasizing strong brand identities, consistent product quality, and advertising for customer loyalty (Dyckman, 2012).

The 20th century witnessed a shift in brand management towards mass production and mass marketing, with companies like Coca-Cola and Kellogg's leading extensive advertising campaigns (Holt, 2002). The 1950s and 1960s marked a turning point with the rise of consumer behaviour research. Academics like David Aaker highlighted the importance of understanding consumer perceptions and creating robust brand images (Aaker, 1996).

The 1980s and 1990s elevated brand management's significance as companies sought differentiation in competitive markets. This era saw the development of brand equity models, including Kevin Lane Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model (Keller, 1993). These models provided frameworks for understanding brand value and measuring performance. The late 20th century, marked by the internet and digital technologies, transformed brand management. Social media and online platforms enabled direct company-consumer engagement and the cultivation of brand communities (Kapferer, 2012).

In the present landscape, brand management adapts to evolving consumer behaviours, technological advancements, and globalisation. The focus shifts from traditional strategies to experiential and customer-centric approaches. Companies strive to create

authentic brand experiences, forge emotional connections, and navigate the dynamic digital terrain (Kapferer, 2012).

2.3.1 Brand Equity Model, SIBE, CBBE, and CBE

Aaker's Brand Equity Model

A foundational model widely employed in marketing is Aaker's Brand Equity Model (1991). Aaker's conceptualisation encompasses five dimensions: brand awareness, brand image, brand associations, brand loyalty, and brand value (Aaker, 1991).

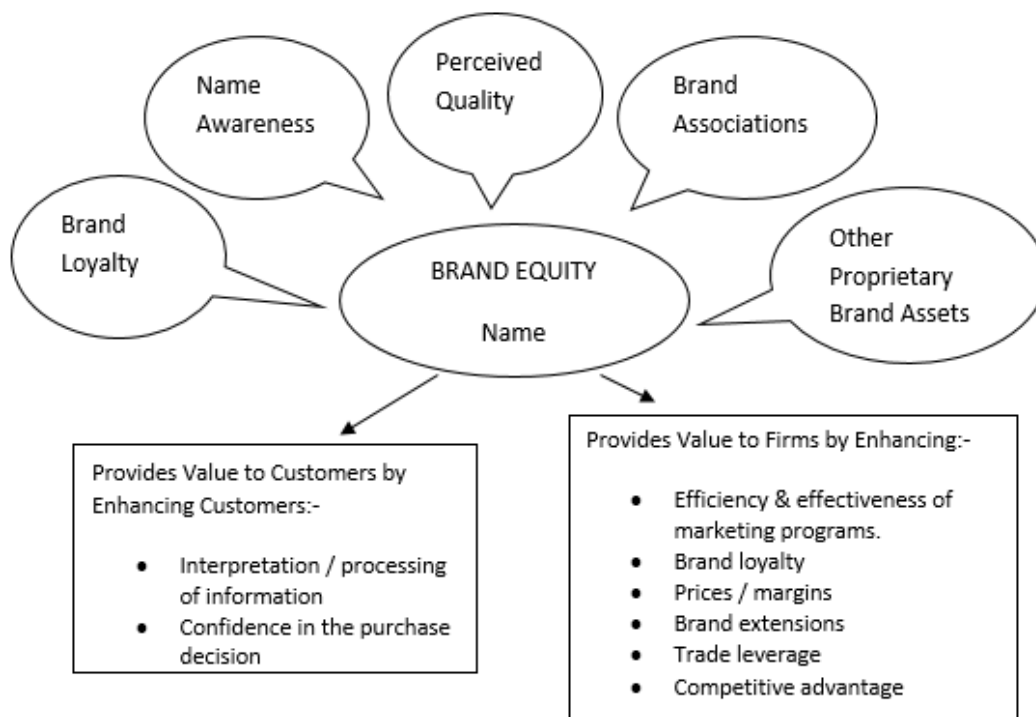


Figure 2. Aaker's Brand Equity Model (Aaker, 1991) Copyright to Aaker.

Applicable to sports, Aaker's model aids teams in comprehending fan perceptions, identifying areas for brand enhancement, and assessing the financial value of the brand. In addition to Aaker's dimensions, researchers advocate for the inclusion of brand resonance in the sports context, highlighting the emotional connection fans develop with their teams (Gladden, 2015). High brand resonance fosters emotional responses, such as excitement and loyalty, contributing to increased fan engagement (Keller, 2008). Aaker's model serves as a valuable tool for sports teams seeking to understand and manage their brands by making informed decisions based on the five dimensions.

Social Identity-Brand Equity (SIBE)

The lesser-known Social Identity-Brand Equity (SIBE) model explores the influence of fans' social identity on brand equity (Underwood *et al.*, 2001). Identifying four factors –

venue, team history, rituals, and social groups – the model posits that enhanced social identity leads to increased brand equity.

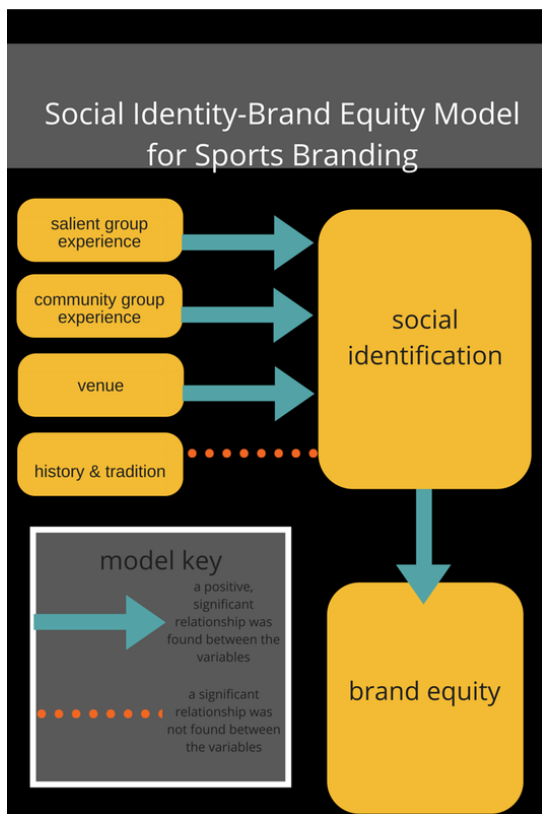


Figure 3. Social-Identity Brand Equity model (Underwood, *et al.*, 2001), from Watkins study (2014) Copyright to Underwood.

Stadium environment (venue), team history, rituals, and social groups collectively contribute to fan social identity and subsequently impact brand equity. While the SIBE model has empirical support, critiques suggest it oversimplifies fan identity, overlooking factors like team performance and product quality (Trail, Anderson, and Fink, 2000; Boyle and Magnusson, 2007; Watkins, 2014). Nevertheless, the SIBE model remains a valuable tool for understanding the relationship between fan identification and brand equity.

Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE)

Central to marketing, the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, introduced by Kevin Lane Keller, is a pyramid-shaped framework comprising brand salience, brand meaning, brand performance, and brand resonance (Keller, 2003).

Keller's CBBE Model

Brand Equity Model

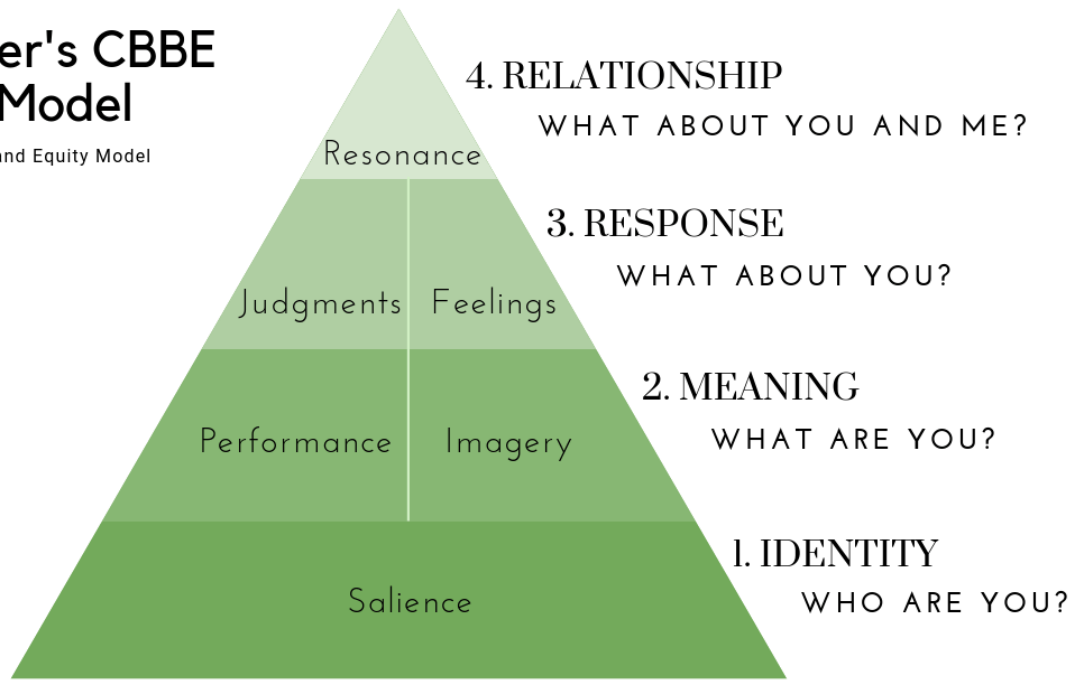


Figure 4. CBBE Customer-Based Brand Equity model (Keller, 1997). Copyright to Keller.

While offering insights into customer perception and brand equity drivers, critics argue that it overlooks the dynamic nature of brand equity, influenced by factors like team performance and consumer preferences (Kapferer, 1997; Lehu, 2004). Keller's model, focusing on customer perspectives, emphasises building strong brand-consumer relationships, distinguishing itself from Aaker's holistic approach.

Consumer Brand Engagement (CBE)

Parallel to the CBBE model, the Consumer Brand Engagement (CBE) model by Hollebeek *et al.* (2014) concentrates on consumer interactions. The multidimensional construct comprises cognitive, emotional, and behavioural engagement.

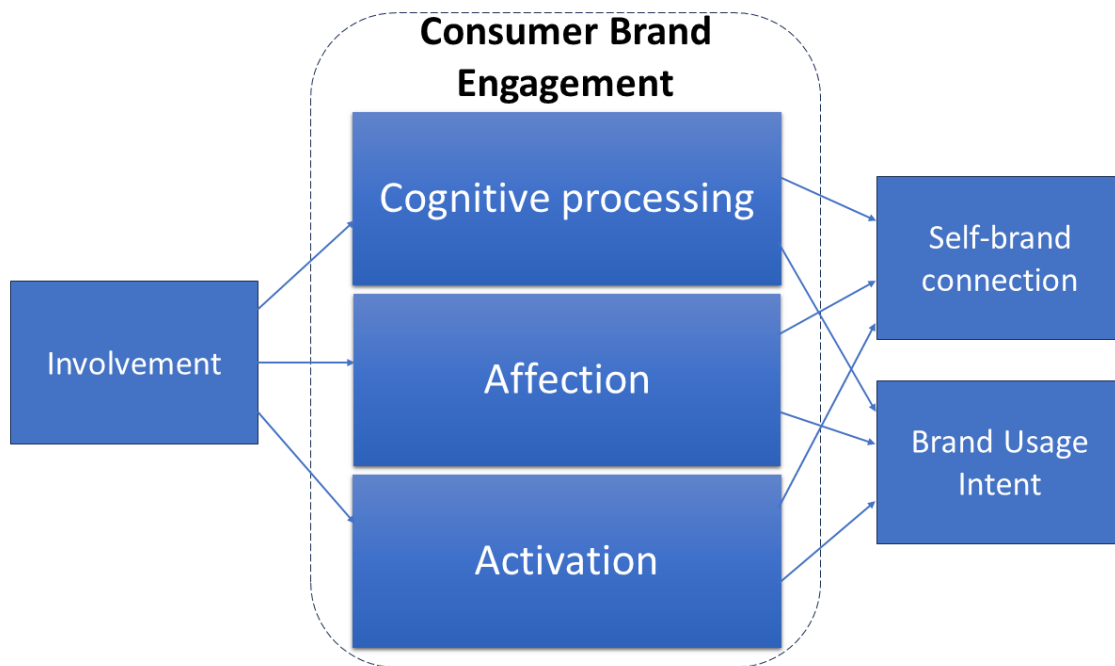


Figure 5. CBE Consumer Brand Engagement model (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014). Copyright to Hollebeek.

CBE, emphasizing consumer thoughts, emotions, and behaviours towards brands, aids businesses in understanding interactions, identifying engagement drivers, and devising strategies for increased engagement. However, recent critiques propose a new conceptualisation based on interest, commitment, and behavioural interactions, aiming for a more comprehensive understanding (Obilio *et al.*, 2021). The CBE model remains a valuable tool for businesses seeking to enhance consumer engagement.

2.3.2 Factors Influencing Brand Engagement

Brand engagement, a pivotal facet of successful marketing, involves fostering relationships through meaningful interactions. Several factors influence brand engagement, encompassing brand awareness, relevance, values, experiences, authenticity, emotional connection, and participation. Keller (2018) asserts that brand awareness is attained through advertising, public relations, and other marketing channels. A brand's values must align with consumers' beliefs, necessitating a demonstration of commitment through actions and policies. Aligning brand values with the target audience's needs establishes a connection and showcases the brand's benefits (Kotler *et al.*, 2016).

Escalas and Bettman (2015) stress the significance of creating emotional connections, asserting that emotions profoundly impact consumer behaviour and brand loyalty. Beyond mere experiences, positive emotions linked to these experiences enhance brand engagement. Encouraging customer participation in brand-related activities, such as co-creation or online communities, facilitates emotional connections (Harrigan *et al.*, 2020). Phua *et al.* (2019) highlight brand authenticity as crucial, indicating that consumers

engage more with brands displaying sincerity, transparency, and consistency in values and actions.

Academic and marketing scrutiny over the years has yielded scales and frameworks to measure brand engagement, capturing cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions (Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie, 2014; Schivinski, Christodoulides, and Dabrowski, 2016). Studies explore the impact of brand engagement on outcomes like brand loyalty, advocacy, purchase intentions, and positive word-of-mouth (Harrigan, Evers, Miles, and Daly, 2018; Leckie, Nyadzayo, and Johnson, 2016; Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan, 2012). In the digital era, researchers examine online brand engagement, differentiating it from traditional offline engagement and analysing its influence on consumer behaviour and brand perceptions (Hepola, Karjaluoto, and Hintikka, 2017; Mollen and Wilson, 2010; Shanahan, Tran, and Taylor, 2019). Understanding these factors enables businesses to craft strategies for stronger customer relationships and more engaged brand communities.

2.4 Fan Engagement

Fan engagement, defined as the emotional and psychological investment fans have in a team or organisation (Funk *et al.*, 2001), is integral to successful marketing strategies. Unlike brand engagement, which is transactional, fan engagement involves a personal and emotional connection demonstrated through metrics like social media activity, game attendance, and merchandise sales. Recognised as vital for sports teams, brands, and entertainment entities, fan engagement aims to cultivate loyalty, enhance the fan experience, and drive revenue through increased ticket sales, merchandise purchases, and sponsorships.

Several models, such as the Model of Fan Satisfaction (Madrigal, 1995), Sportscape Model (Wakefield *et al.*, 1995), and Fan Attendance Model (Kahle *et al.*, 1996), have explored different facets of fan engagement. The Sport Interest Inventory (SII) by Funk and James (2001) and the Sports Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS) by Wann and Melnick (1995) provide frameworks to measure individual sport interest and understand underlying motivations of sports fans, respectively.

2.4.1 Fan Engagement in Football

In football, fan engagement surpasses mere spectatorship, embodying active and emotional involvement with the league, clubs, and players (Bennett and Satchell, 2009). Success in fan engagement strategies relies on reciprocal relationships, where clubs actively involve supporters in decisions and foster a collaborative approach. Emotional investment in football clubs correlates with on-field performance, matchday experience, and marketing effectiveness, influencing engagement levels. Engaged fans contribute significantly to clubs' financial success, purchasing tickets and merchandise, and act as brand advocates, expanding the fan base.

Beyond financial gains, fan engagement enhances fan well-being, fostering happiness and satisfaction through a sense of community. Football clubs play a pivotal role in nurturing this community through various events, social media interactions, and forums. Prioritising fan engagement ensures the creation of a vibrant and dedicated community supporting the club through various experiences.

2.4.2 English Premier League (EPL)

Founded in 1992, the English Premier League (EPL) is the pinnacle of English football, contested by 20 clubs. It boasts global viewership, generating substantial revenue from broadcast rights, ticket sales, merchandise, and sponsorships. Historical success is marked by clubs like Manchester United, Liverpool, and Arsenal. Fan engagement is paramount for creating an electric matchday atmosphere, financial sustainability, and enduring success. Engaged fans contribute to revenue streams, enabling investments in player development, infrastructure, and league growth. Loyalty and emotional connections lead to sustained support, fostering long-term relationships, and attracting sponsors eager to align with the league's popularity.

2.4.3 Importance of Fan Engagement for the EPL

Fan engagement elevates matchday atmosphere, with passionate support and camaraderie, contributing to financial sustainability. Engaged fans attend matches, purchase merchandise, and attract sponsors, supporting club and league growth. This engagement fosters brand loyalty, fan retention, and a competitive advantage over other leagues, enticing sponsors and expanding revenue streams. The EPL's commitment to fan engagement ensures a dynamic and enduring football experience, underlining its significance in the league's continued success.

2.4.4 Fan Engagement Initiatives and Practices

In the English Premier League, initiatives and practices for fan engagement concentrate on nurturing community, interaction, and rewarding experiences. Clubs aim to forge deeper connections between fans and the league, elevating the overall fan experience. Essential initiatives include regular fan-club interactions through forums, meet-and-greet sessions, and Q&A sessions (Parnell *et al.*, 2020). Ongoing efforts to enhance the matchday experience involve pre-match entertainment, halftime shows, interactive fan zones, and stadium facilities upgrades (Dolan and Connaughton, 2015).

Moreover, digital platforms play a pivotal role in actively involving fans, leveraging content creation, and facilitating engagement. Clubs utilise platforms for fan competitions, user-generated content campaigns, live chats, and exclusive behind-the-scenes access (Stavros *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, community outreach and corporate social

responsibility (CSR) initiatives deepen the connection between Premier League clubs and fans. These include player appearances at local schools and hospitals, charity partnerships, and community development programmes (Collins *et al.*, 2017). Community engagement programmes further strengthen ties with local communities, encompassing initiatives such as community coaching, charity partnerships, and environmental sustainability programmes.

Furthermore, fan loyalty programmes, offering exclusive offers, merchandise discounts, priority ticketing, and access to exclusive events, contribute to fostering loyalty and recognition among supporters (Kunkel *et al.*, 2020). Membership programmes and rewards systems have gained popularity, offering benefits like discounted tickets and merchandise, creating a sense of belonging and encouraging repeat attendance (Lock and Filo, 2019).

2.4.5 Fan Engagement in the Digital Era

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted fan engagement in the English Premier League (Golombisky *et al.*, 2021). Suspension of the EPL and matches played behind closed doors led to reduced matchday revenue (KPMG, 2020). To address this, clubs adapted engagement strategies, primarily through digital platforms (EY, 2021). Virtual matchday experiences, live streaming, and behind-the-scenes content kept fans connected during the pandemic. While clubs have met the immediate challenge, the long-term impact on fan behaviour requires further research.

In the digital age, clubs face both opportunities and challenges. Social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, facilitate communication, content sharing, and interaction between clubs and fans (Parnell, 2018). However, the abundance of marketing messages poses challenges for clubs seeking to stand out (Gerrard, 2020). Engaging fans through social media positively influences satisfaction and behavioural intentions, extending the EPL's global reach (Kaplan *et al.*, 2010). Social media metrics, such as likes, comments, shares, and followers, gauge online brand engagement (Phua *et al.*, 2017).

Mobile apps offer fans access to news, scores, and interactive features like polls, quizzes, and games (Horne *et al.*, 2019). Providing exclusive content and personalised features, mobile apps contribute to brand engagement by tracking interactions and customer reviews (Brodie *et al.*, 2013).

2.4.6 Challenges in Fan Engagement

Achieving fan engagement presents challenges for English Premier League (EPL) clubs in the digital age. The competition for fan attention, especially in a saturated digital landscape, demands innovative strategies to maintain engagement (Lock and Filo, 2019).

Changing demographics, with younger fans preferring online content and older fans favouring traditional forms of engagement, require clubs to appeal to both demographics (Doyle *et al.*, 2017).

Criticism regarding prioritising commercial objectives over genuine fan engagement raises concerns. Sponsorship deals, merchandising, and ticket prices can create a perception of exploitation, challenging the affordability of matches for fans (Buraimo *et al.*, 2020). Diversity issues within clubs, both on and off the pitch, contribute to a sense of exclusion among underrepresented groups (Hayhurst and Kozulj, 2020).

Transparency concerns, particularly in financial operations and ownership structures, erode fan trust and hinder a sense of ownership and belonging (Chadwick and Hamil, 2017). The recent European Super League (ESL) controversy highlighted this lack of transparency, leading to fan backlash and the introduction of the English Premier League Fan Engagement Standard (FES) as a response (YouGov, 2021).

2.5 Premier League Fan Engagement Standard (FES)

The Premier League Fan Engagement Standard (FES) represents a comprehensive framework instituted by the English Premier League to elevate fan engagement practices across all clubs. Its primary objective is to instil consistency, quality, and innovation in fan engagement initiatives, fostering meaningful connections among fans, clubs, and the league (Premier League, 2023). The FES is underpinned by five key themes: leadership and culture, listening, collaborate and participate, share, and learn and improve.

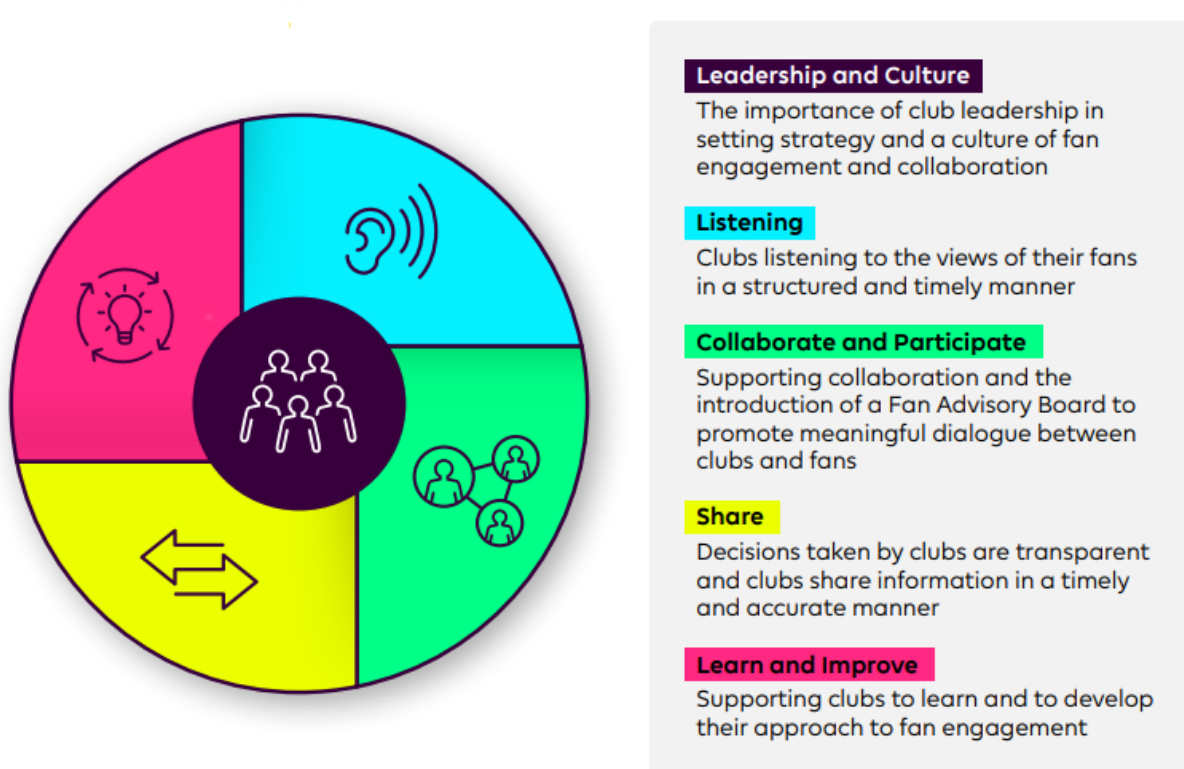


Figure 6. Fan Engagement Standard (FES) (Premier League, 2023). Copyright to Premier League.






 <p>Theme 1 Leadership and Culture</p>	<p>Embedding impactful approaches to fan engagement requires effective leadership, accountability and commitment from both clubs and fans. The actions taken by leaders and what they say matters. Club leaders have a responsibility to set an appropriate tone, vision and strategy for fan engagement with their fanbase. These elements should be underpinned by a culture of fan engagement throughout the club.</p>
 <p>Theme 2 Listening</p>	<p>Fan voices should be heard in a structured and timely manner to assist clubs in making informed decisions regarding fan-facing issues. Clubs should recognise the diversity of their fanbase and endeavour to ensure they engage in a fair and representative manner.</p>
 <p>Theme 3 Collaborate and Participate</p>	<p>Establishing appropriate structures and forums for constructive dialogue is key to ensuring a meaningful and transparent relationship between fan groups and club leadership.</p> <p>Creating forums with good governance and processes provides fans with the opportunity to discuss key fan-facing issues and to collaborate on specific topics or projects, as well as any proposals relating to heritage assets.</p>
 <p>Theme 4 Share</p>	<p>In order to embed an effective two-way dialogue between the club and its fanbase, it is important that both parties are transparent regarding decisions taken and the rationale for specific viewpoints. Clubs should share information, subject to commercial and legal sensitivities, in a timely and accurate manner to build trust with fans and inform conversations.</p>
 <p>Theme 5 Learn and Improve</p>	<p>Each club and its fanbase are on a journey to enhance existing activities supporting fan engagement. It is important that clubs continue to learn and develop to enable meaningful and sustainable change. Clubs should work together to ensure good practice and learned experiences are shared across the Premier League.</p>

Figure 7. Fan Engagement Standard (FES) Themes (Premier League, 2023). Copyright to Premier League.

Structured around these themes, the FES underscores the pivotal role of club leadership in cultivating a fan engagement culture. Clubs are urged to listen to fan views, particularly on heritage assets, in a structured and timely manner. Collaboration with supporters, including the establishment of a Fan Advisory Board, is encouraged to facilitate meaningful dialogue. Theme three emphasises regular touch points with club leadership via structured communication, fan panels, or working groups. Transparent decision-

making, timely information sharing, and continuous learning are integral to the FES evolution (Premier League, 2023).

2.5.1 Objectives of the Premier League Fan Engagement Standard (FES)

The FES strives to promote consistency in fan engagement practices across Premier League clubs. By establishing common standards and guidelines, it ensures a uniform level of engagement for fans regardless of the club they support, creating a cohesive fan experience throughout the league. Additionally, the FES aims to elevate the quality of fan engagement initiatives, encouraging clubs to develop innovative practices beyond standard expectations. This focus on quality ensures fans receive engaging and rewarding experiences (Premier League, n.d.).

Moreover, the FES inspires clubs to adopt innovative approaches in fan engagement, fostering creativity and leveraging new technologies to enhance the fan experience. By championing innovation, the FES ensures fan engagement practices remain relevant in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. Through these objectives of consistency, quality, and innovation, the Premier League seeks to enhance fan engagement practices, offering fans enriching, rewarding, and equitable experiences while strengthening connections between supporters and the league.

To meet its objectives, each of the five FES themes is linked to a series of commitments, providing a clear framework for clubs to shape their fan engagement strategy collaboratively with fans (Premier League, n.d.).




Theme	Commitments
 <p data-bbox="256 454 426 524">Leadership and Culture</p>	<ul data-bbox="504 304 1362 539" style="list-style-type: none"> • Premier League Rules - Compliance with all elements of Premier League Rules relating to fan engagement - contained in Section R • Nominated Board-level official - Each club to nominate a Board-level official to be accountable for the club's fan engagement activities • Accessibility - Publication of dedicated club communication channels for all fan-related queries (e.g. email address, phone numbers)
 <p data-bbox="276 741 406 775">Listening</p>	<ul data-bbox="504 595 1337 786" style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage Assets - A commitment from each club to consult with fans in a timely manner prior to any significant amendment to a club heritage asset • Supporters' clubs, representative groups and wider fanbase - A commitment to continue engaging with supporters' clubs, representative groups and the wider fanbase
 <p data-bbox="256 999 426 1106">Collaborate and Participate</p>	<ul data-bbox="504 846 1362 1111" style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan Advisory Board (FAB) - Each club to establish a FAB with the primary purpose of engaging in two-way dialogue, exchanging information/ideas and securing feedback from a fan's perspective • Fan Engagement Platforms - Each club to utilise the information gathered from existing fan engagement platforms (Fans Forums, Fan Panels, Fan Surveys etc.) to inform and shape discussion at the FAB • Working Group(s) - Clubs to establish Working Group(s) with the purpose of engaging with fans on specific topics as defined by the FAB

Figure 8. Fan Engagement Standard (FES) Theme Core Commitments (Premier League, 2023). Copyright to Premier League.

Theme	Commitments
 <p data-bbox="300 472 386 506">Share</p>	<ul data-bbox="502 302 1348 571" style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan Engagement Plan (FEP) - Each club to publish a FEP before the start of each season • Communication from ownership, Chair or CEO - The ownership, Chair or CEO of each club is to communicate to its fanbase at least twice per season, to provide club updates as well as outline the club's priorities and plans • Annual Report - Clubs to include a Fan Engagement Statement within their Annual Report
 <p data-bbox="268 853 418 920">Learn and Improve</p>	<ul data-bbox="502 627 1364 1030" style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan Support - A commitment from the club within the FEP to provide support and resources to supporters' clubs, representative groups and the wider fanbase • Engagement Training - The Nominated Board-level official and Supporter Liaison Officer will be provided with training opportunities by the Premier League • Fan Advisory Board (FAB) Assessment - Chair of FAB to complete an assessment of the effectiveness of the FAB with club Chairperson or CEO each season • Collaboration - Each club to attend a minimum of two Premier League Fan Engagement Working Groups in order to share best practice and collaborate with their peers

Figure 9. Fan Engagement Standard (FES) Theme Core Commitments (Premier League, 2023). For further information on core commitments see Appendix 1. Copyright to Premier League.

2.5.2 Fan Engagement and FES

While fan engagement and the Fan Engagement Standard (FES) are distinct concepts, they share an intrinsic relationship. Fan engagement represents the emotional and psychological attachment between a fan and their preferred sporting club, influenced by various factors. FES, in contrast, introduces a structured framework for clubs to measure, sustain, and enhance fan engagement. It provides a set of metrics and tools, aiming for a consistent and unified fan experience across all English Premier League clubs.

The Premier League's FES serves as a valuable tool for clubs aspiring to enhance fan engagement. By measuring and identifying areas for improvement within a common framework, clubs can devise strategies for a more engaging and rewarding fan experience. Understanding fans' desires is paramount, and by addressing all contributing factors, clubs can cultivate a more engaging fan experience.

2.6 Research Gap

While brand and fan engagement have been extensively examined in academic discourse, the recently introduced Fan Engagement Standard (FES) by the English Premier League in March 2023 presents a novel subject. With its full implementation scheduled for the

forthcoming 2023/24 football season, there exists a notable dearth of research supporting or challenging the efficacy of the FES as a framework for advancing, sustaining, and quantifying fan engagement in the EPL.

2.7 Key Findings from Literature Review

Fan engagement flourishes when individuals perceive themselves as part of a triumphant, pertinent, and inclusive community. In the context of the English Premier League, both brand and fan engagement emerge as pivotal for triumph and expansion. The Premier League Fan Engagement Standard provides a structured framework for evaluating fan engagement initiatives. However, a nuanced comprehension of brand engagement and its alignment with the FES is imperative for clubs to adeptly engage fans and fortify their brand presence (Premier League, 2023).

Additionally, the dynamic digital landscape necessitates EPL clubs to anticipate and embrace emerging trends. Future strategies may include the integration of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2022). These technologies offer opportunities for immersive fan experiences, such as virtual stadium tours or experiencing a game from a player's perspective. Artificial intelligence (AI) can further personalise the fan experience by recommending content and tailoring matchday experiences.

The Premier League Fan Engagement Standard (FES) serves as a standardised framework adopted by clubs to quantitatively assess and enhance fan engagement, ensuring consistency and transparency. Successfully implemented, this framework holds the potential for broader application across sports and industries. The interplay of concepts like brand engagement plays a pivotal role in nurturing robust relationships between consumers, fans, and brands, contributing to enduring success and positive market perceptions.

2.8 Recommendations

2.8.1 What Can Football Clubs Do Better?

Premier League football clubs can enhance fan engagement through a dual focus on on-field and off-field strategies. Addressing the challenge of fan fragmentation requires innovative approaches to reach diverse fan segments, considering multiple touchpoints such as television, social media, and mobile apps. Rising fan expectations necessitate continuous innovation, especially during less successful periods. The competition for fans' time and expenditure demands a unique and compelling experience. Key improvement areas encompass supporter ownership, reduced ticket prices, increased interaction opportunities, a dedicated feedback channel, data-driven personalisation, establishment of fan clubs, international marketing campaigns, and the integration of technologies like AR and VR.

2.8.2 Opportunities for Better Fan Engagement

Despite challenges, Premier League clubs can capitalise on opportunities by leveraging new technologies. Virtual reality and augmented reality can create immersive experiences, offering fans unique perspectives and interactive elements. Utilising data analytics enables clubs to understand and fulfil fan desires, contributing to personalised fan experiences. The integration of technologies like AR and VR, as showcased by successful collaborations with companies like Google Pixel and Sony, presents opportunities for enhanced matchday experiences. Exploring the potential of AI, as demonstrated by IBM's AI Commentary, enhances fan interaction and storytelling. The adoption of such technologies not only aligns with current digital trends but also offers opportunities to elevate fan engagement both inside and outside the stadium.

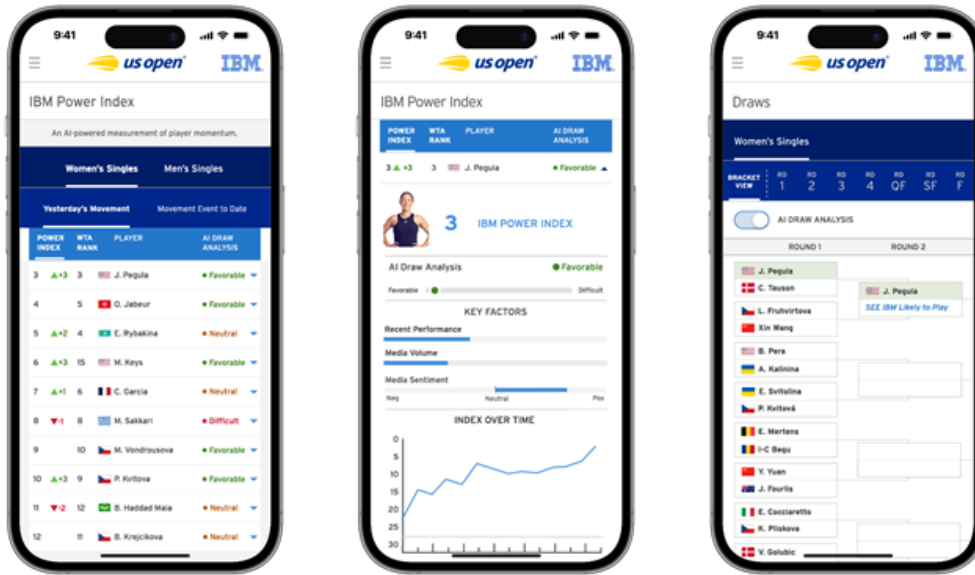
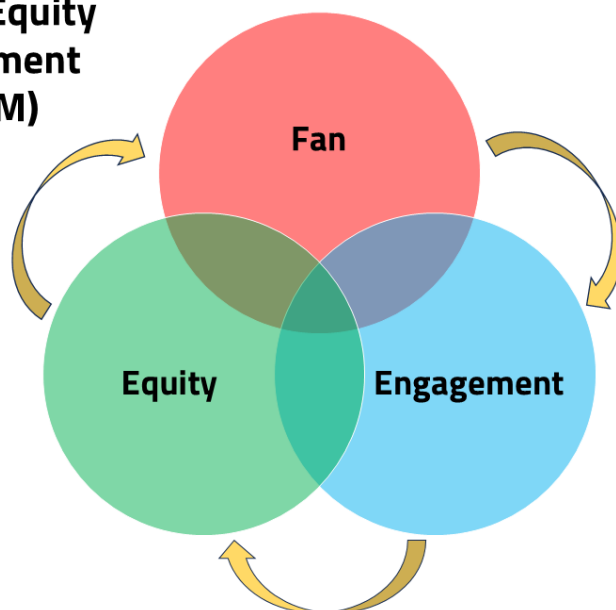


Figure 10. IBM US Open Sports App (IBM, 2023). Copyright to IBM.

3.0 Introducing the Sports Brand Equity & Fan Engagement Model (SBEFEM)

Sports Brand Equity & Fan Engagement Model (SBEFEM)



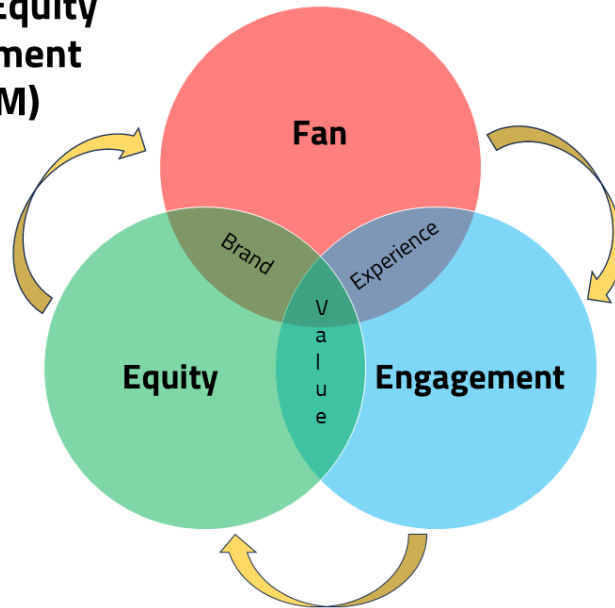
Crisp, 2023

Figure 11. Sports Brand Equity & Fan Engagement Model (SBEFEM) (Crisp, 2023). Copyright to Barry Crisp.

The Sports Brand Equity & Fan Engagement Model (SBEFEM) stands as a novel framework meticulously crafted to comprehensively evaluate sports brand strength. Synthesising six dimensions of brand equity with an equivalent set pertaining to fan engagement, the SBEFEM offers an all-encompassing perspective on a brand's stature in the sports industry. This model was developed in response to a discerned deficiency revealed through an extensive literature review, which exposed a lack of a unified framework for sports clubs to systematically scrutinise, evaluate, and elevate fan engagement.

Research conducted spanned a spectrum of studies, articles, and reports in sports marketing, brand management, and fan engagement. Despite a wealth of insights, the absence of a standardised framework was evident. The SBEFEM not only fills this void but also addresses the lack of a recognised benchmark for football clubs. The Premier League's Fan Engagement Standard, while a necessary introduction, falls short as a direct marketing or academic framework for monitoring and assessing fan engagement from a brand perspective.

Sports Brand Equity & Fan Engagement Model (SBEFEM)



Crisp, 2023

Figure 12. Sports Brand Equity & Fan Engagement Model (SBEFEM) (Crisp, 2023). Copyright to Barry Crisp.

3.1 Six Dimensions of Brand Equity

- **Brand awareness:** Measures the brand's consumer recognition.
- **Brand image:** Assesses consumer perception in terms of attributes such as excitement, prestige, and trustworthiness.
- **Brand satisfaction:** Measures consumer contentment with the brand's products or services.
- **Brand loyalty:** Gauges the likelihood of consumers to repurchase the brand's products or services.
- **Brand advocacy:** Measures the inclination of consumers to recommend the brand to others.
- **Brand resonance:** Measures the depth of emotional connection consumers have with the brand.

3.2 Six Dimensions of Fan Engagement

Utilising the English Premier League Fan Engagement Standard (FES) as a foundation, the SBEFEM incorporates six fan engagement dimensions:

- **Fan voice:** The extent to which fans feel they have a voice in the club.
- **Fan participation:** The extent of fan involvement in club-related activities.
- **Fan experience:** The quality of experiences fans have at the club's matches and events.
- **Fan loyalty:** The level of commitment fans exhibit towards the club.
- **Fan satisfaction:** The extent of fan contentment with the club.

- **Fan advocacy:** The likelihood of fans recommending the club to others.

And their impact on perceived value and the following:

- **Attitude:** The extent of positive feelings towards the sport brand.
- **Behaviour:** The extent of engagement in activities related to the sport brand.
- **Cognition:** The extent of knowledge about the sport brand.
- **Connection:** The extent of feeling a connection to the sport brand.
- **Co-creation:** The extent of fan participation in creating the sport brand experience.
- **Community:** The extent of feeling a sense of community with other fans.

Sports Brand Equity & Fan Engagement Model (SBEFEM)

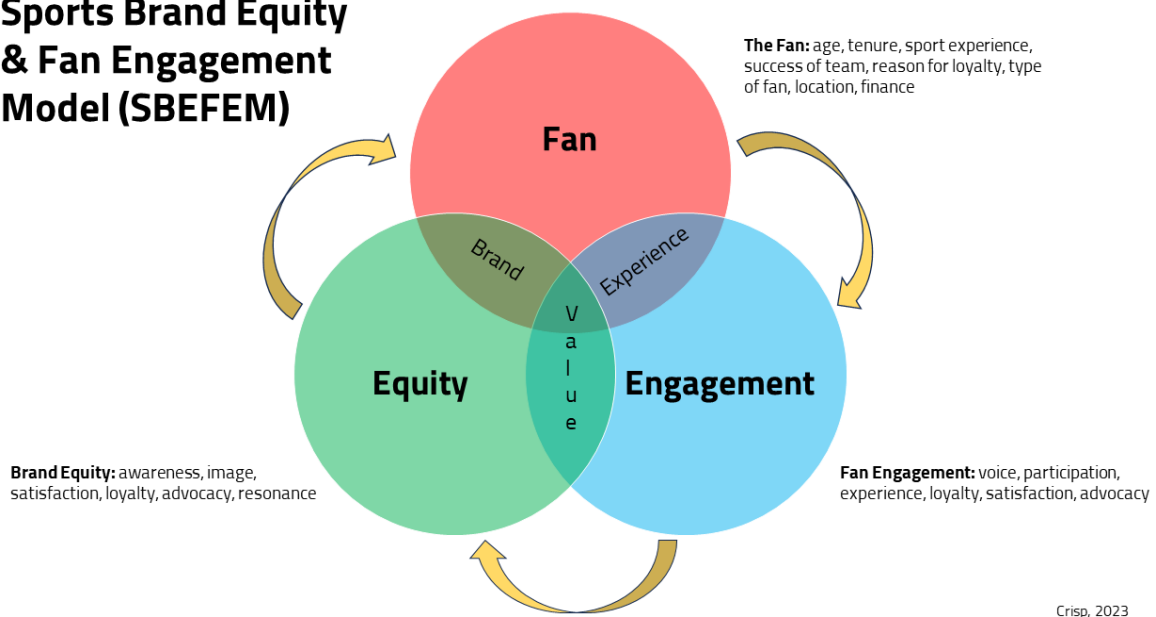


Figure 13. Sports Brand Equity & Fan Engagement Model (SBEFEM) (Crisp, 2023). Copyright to Barry Crisp.

3.2 The Fan

Various factors, including fan demographics, history, team performance, and type, impact when and how fans engage with a club, such as:

- Age of fan
- Tenure of fan (at which point/age did they become a fan and for how long)
- Experience of playing sports prior to and whilst being a fan
- Success of team
- Reason for team loyalty - hometown, current location, family history, team performance, favourite player, broadcasted most on TV (Deloitte, 2016)
- Type of fan – casual, loves the sport, die hard/committed
- Location
- Financial status (most fans are outpriced of games)

The SBEFEM serves as a strategic tool to understand and influence multiple aspects of fan engagement. Assessment of these dimensions allows clubs to tailor strategies, fostering positive attitudes, driving desired fan behaviours, enhancing knowledge, strengthening emotional connections, enabling co-creation, and cultivating vibrant fan communities.

In comparison to existing models, the SBEFEM stands out for its comprehensive integration of both brand equity and fan engagement dimensions. This unified framework enables clubs to align strategies more cohesively, establishing a robust and meaningful relationship between the brand and its fans in an era where fan engagement is crucial for sustained success and growth in the sports industry.

Sports Brand Equity & Fan Engagement Model (SBEFEM)

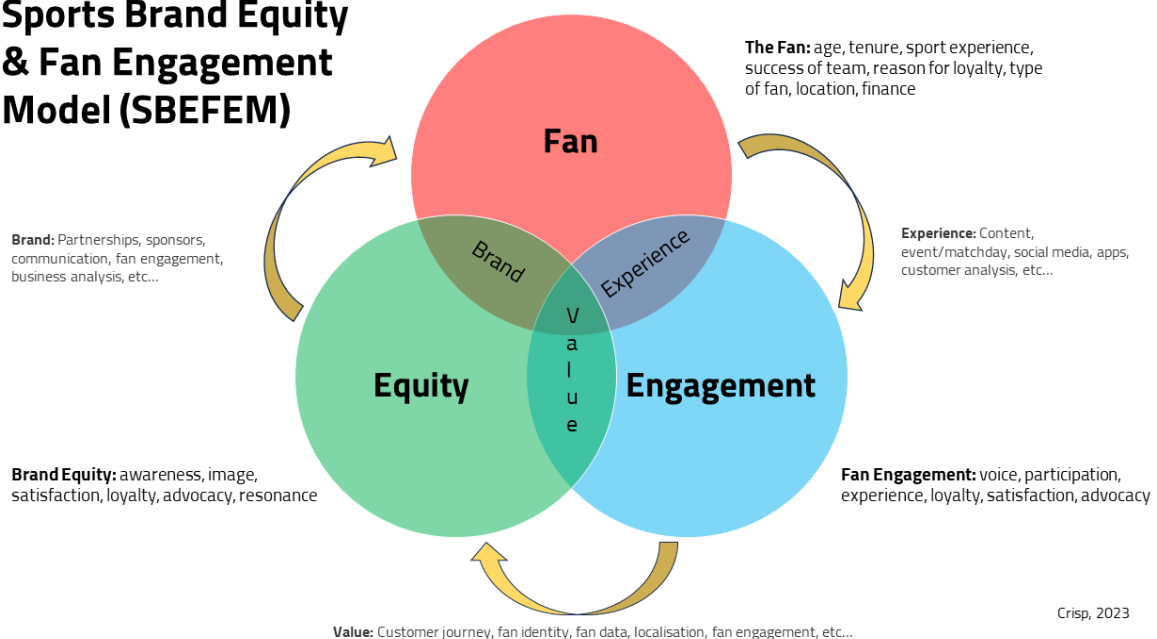


Figure 14. Sports Brand Equity & Fan Engagement Model (SBEFEM) (Crisp, 2023). Copyright to Barry Crisp.

3.3 Implications for Premier League

Fan engagement gains paramount importance in the globally followed Premier League. Clubs can utilise various channels, including social media, email, and in-person events, tailored to their unique fan base. The SBEFEM, when considered alongside the Premier League’s Fan Engagement Standard, provides a more comprehensive approach for football clubs to assess, maintain, and enhance their fan engagement activities and practices.

3.4 Implications for Research

This research emphasises the need for a comprehensive understanding of factors contributing to fan engagement, including fan needs, interests, and the impact of

engagement initiatives. Future research should focus on developing evidence-based best practices for fan engagement, effective communication, involving fans in decision-making, and creating a welcoming environment. Additionally, tools and frameworks for assessing and improving fan engagement practices require further exploration.

3.5 Implications for Practice

Football clubs should develop a comprehensive fan engagement strategy based on a clear understanding of their fan base and aligned with overall goals and the FES. Utilising data and analytics for continuous improvement, clubs can enhance communication, involve fans, and leverage digital technology for innovative engagement. The SBEFEM provides a valuable tool for sports brands globally to assess brand equity and fan engagement, complementing the FES.

3.6 Directions for Future Research

Future research avenues include primary research with football fans at the end of the 2023/24 Premier League season, employing the Premier League Fan Engagement Standard and its key themes. Additionally, a pilot study on the adoption of the SBEFEM to assess a club's fan engagement activities and impact can contribute to a deeper understanding of engaging fans in the digital age and a globalised marketplace.

4.0 Conclusion

Fan engagement stands as a pivotal determinant of a sports club's triumph, fostering a robust relationship with supporters and cultivating a positive club atmosphere. The findings of this research, underscored by the Sport Brand Equity & Fan Engagement Model (SBEFEM), illuminate key factors contributing to fan engagement, including triumphs, relevance, community involvement, and participatory experiences. For English Premier League (EPL) clubs, prioritising meaningful engagement involves attentive listening, fan involvement in decision-making, and the establishment of a welcoming and inclusive stadium environment.

The SBEFEM introduces a comprehensive framework integrating six dimensions of brand equity with six dimensions of fan engagement, providing a nuanced understanding of a sports brand's standing in the industry. This framework offers clubs a structured approach to assess, monitor, and enhance their fan engagement strategies, aligning seamlessly with the Premier League's Fan Engagement Standard (FES). Given the global fan base of the EPL, effective fan engagement strategies are paramount, and the SBEFEM serves as a valuable tool for clubs to tailor initiatives according to their unique fan base characteristics.

Clubs can use the SBEFEM to inform their fan engagement initiatives, ensuring a personalised and effective approach. Transparent communication, regular updates on club developments, and the incorporation of fan feedback into decision-making processes are pivotal aspects of maintaining fan engagement. By leveraging the insights from the SBEFEM, clubs can navigate the complex dynamics of brand equity and fan engagement, creating a more engaging and rewarding experience for supporters (McDonald *et al.*, 2022).

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6.0 Appendix


Appendix 1: Premier League Fan Engagement Standard (FES) Theme Core Commitments – Copyright to Premier League


Club Commitments	
 <p>Leadership and Culture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Premier League Rules - Compliance with all elements of Premier League Rules relating to fan engagement contained within the Premier League Handbook, as amended and updated from time to time - Including but not limited to Section R
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nominated Board-level official - Each club to nominate a Board-level official to lead the club's fan engagement activities • Each season, the Nominated Board-level official will prepare and present a Fan Engagement Report to the club Board (or equivalent), outlining the engagement activities undertaken and key issues / concerns raised from fans in that season • The Fan Engagement Report presented to the club Board (or equivalent), prepared by the Nominated Board-level official, will be made public on the club's website within 28 days of the Board presentation • Appointment of Nominated Board-level official as a member of the Fan Advisory Board (FAB)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility - Each club will publish communication channels for all fan-related queries (including but not limited to fan engagement email address, phone numbers) • Each club to commit to responding to fan queries raised via official club communication channels in a timely manner • Each club to commit to responding to fan queries raised via the Independent Football Ombudsman in a timely manner
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each club to commit to publishing its Fan Engagement Plan ('FEP') before the start of each Premier League season

 <p>Listening</p>	Club Commitments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage Assets - A commitment from clubs to consult with fans in a timely manner prior to any material amendment to a club Heritage Asset subject to contractual, legal and intellectual property obligations. Such Heritage Assets include, but may not be limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Club name - Club badges - Home club colours • Each club's Fan Engagement Plan to provide a list of all Heritage Assets in scope for fan consultation • FA Rules of Association - Compliance with all elements of FA Rules of Association relating to Heritage Assets - Section M (M1-M16)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporters' clubs, representative groups and wider fanbase - A commitment to continue engaging with supporters' clubs, representative groups and the wider fanbase • Clubs to allocate resources to engage with all official supporters' clubs • Nominated Board-level official (or club management team representative) for fan engagement must attend a minimum of two supporters club meetings per Premier League season

 <p>Collaborate and Participate</p>	Club Commitments	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan Advisory Board (FAB) - Each club to establish a FAB with the primary purpose of engaging in two-way dialogue, exchanging information/ideas and securing feedback from a fan's perspective • The FAB will be a consultative body and as such members do not hold any fiduciary duties • Core components of the FAB should include, but not be limited to: <table border="0" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top; width: 50%;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Purpose - The FAB will have a clearly defined mandate and role (advisory body) outlined within a Terms of Reference (ToR) - Ownership - The club Board will hold ultimate responsibility for the FAB - Chairperson - A Chair or Co-Chairs to be elected from the FAB membership group - Composition - Each FAB to have a minimum of six fan members (plus club representatives) - Representation - FAB to be representative of the club fanbase as practicable and have defined profiles aligned to club's equality, diversity and inclusion commitments - Engagement - Commitment to regular contact and information flow from the club Board and senior executive team - Term - For non-club FAB member(s), mandatory rotation of members on a periodic basis as deemed appropriate by the club (e.g. three years) - Confidentiality - The proceedings of the FAB and information it is privy to are to be subject to an NDA / confidentiality agreement within the FAB Terms of Reference (ToR) or in a separate agreement - Intellectual Property (IP) - Any IP created in the course of the FAB's existence is to be owned by the club - Meeting frequency - FAB to meet a minimum of two times per year </td> <td style="vertical-align: top; width: 50%;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Club ownership, Chair or CEO attendance - The club ownership, Chair or CEO is to attend a minimum of one FAB meeting per year - Nominated Board-level official - Nominated Board-level official to hold a permanent membership to the FAB - Code of Conduct (CoC) - FAB members to be bound by an agreed CoC as defined within the ToR or separate agreement - CoC Breach - Clubs will hold the right to remove a member of the FAB in the event of a confidentiality breach or breach of the CoC - Training and Safeguarding - Annually, FAB members are provided with training on club operations, social media and mental health awareness - Cascade of Information - FAB members to Chair relevant Fan's Forums or working groups in order to cascade information and canvass views on specific topics - Reporting - Maintenance of meeting summary and reports by designated FAB Secretary - Publication - Each club to publish a high-level overview of the FAB via club channels (membership, structure, frequency of meetings etc.) </td> </tr> </table> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Purpose - The FAB will have a clearly defined mandate and role (advisory body) outlined within a Terms of Reference (ToR) - Ownership - The club Board will hold ultimate responsibility for the FAB - Chairperson - A Chair or Co-Chairs to be elected from the FAB membership group - Composition - Each FAB to have a minimum of six fan members (plus club representatives) - Representation - FAB to be representative of the club fanbase as practicable and have defined profiles aligned to club's equality, diversity and inclusion commitments - Engagement - Commitment to regular contact and information flow from the club Board and senior executive team - Term - For non-club FAB member(s), mandatory rotation of members on a periodic basis as deemed appropriate by the club (e.g. three years) - Confidentiality - The proceedings of the FAB and information it is privy to are to be subject to an NDA / confidentiality agreement within the FAB Terms of Reference (ToR) or in a separate agreement - Intellectual Property (IP) - Any IP created in the course of the FAB's existence is to be owned by the club - Meeting frequency - FAB to meet a minimum of two times per year
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Club Commitments	
 Collaborate and Participate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan Advisory Board - FABs would be expected to discuss the following topics during the course of the season (subject to contractual, legal and intellectual property obligations): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The club's strategic vision and objectives - Short, medium and long-term strategy - Club business performance updates, priorities and plans - Operational matchday issues of concern to supporters - Any proposals relating to club heritage items - Stadium issues and plans - Club communities strategy - Equality, diversity and inclusion commitments - The club's plan for broader supporter engagement • Fan Engagement Platforms - Each club to utilise existing fan engagement platforms (e.g. Fans' Forum, Fan Panels, Fan Surveys etc.) to enable fans to propose key topics for discussion at the FAB • Outputs from fan engagement platforms to be discussed at the FAB as required • Working Group(s) - Each club to establish Working Group(s) with the purpose of engaging with fans on specific topics as determined by the FAB (ticketing, safety, community etc.) • FAB members to chair Working Group(s) in order to cascade information and canvass views on specific topics • Publication of Working Group summary / results on club channels in a timely manner • Nominated Board-level official (or club management team representative) must attend a minimum of two Working Group [or equivalent] meetings per season

Club Commitments	
 Share	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan Engagement Plan ("FEP") - Each club to publish a FEP before the start of each Premier League season • The FEP should include, but not be limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Details of key fan engagement activities to be completed during the season - Details of key roles and responsibilities of club officials in relation to fan engagement - Details of the Fan Advisory Board such as membership, frequency of meetings and reporting - Details of all club Heritage Assets requiring fan consultation prior to a material amendment • The FEP may be updated during the season to reflect changes in fan engagement activities (as required) <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication from ownership, Chair or CEO - The ownership, Chair or CEO (as determined by the club) of each club is to communicate to its fanbase, at least twice per season, to provide club updates as well as outline the club's priorities and plans • The communication is to include a Q&A section to allow fans to ask questions and raise points of concern (questions to be submitted ahead of session)

 <p>Learn and Improve</p>	Club Commitments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan Support - A commitment from the club within the FEP to provide support and resources to supporters' clubs, representative groups and the wider fanbase to encourage enhanced organisation and participation • Engagement Training - The Nominated Board-level official NBLO and Supporter Liaison Officer SLO will be provided with training opportunities by the Premier League • Premier League clubs are encouraged to provide relevant training for NBLOs, SLOs and key fan engagement personnel
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan Advisory Board (FAB) Assessment - Chair of FAB to complete an assessment of the effectiveness of the FAB with Club Chairperson or CEO each season • Club to publish assessment findings within the Fan Engagement Statement within their Annual Report
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration - Each club to be represented (by an appropriate executive) at two Premier League Fan Engagement Working Groups in order to share best practice and collaborate with their peers • Club to demonstrate that they have engaged with fan-focused organisations (e.g. Football Supporters Association / Kick It Out / Level Playing Field) to collaborate on fan-facing issues