

An Analysis of the Motivators of Seattle Sounders FC Season Ticket Holders: A Case Study

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**Abstract**

The Seattle Sounders FC took Major League Soccer by storm in their inaugural season of 2009. The club led the league in attendance, won the Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup trophy, and clinched a playoff berth. Their success was attributed in part to their rabid fan base, which routinely sold out their 30,000-seat venue and nearly doubled the league attendance average. How was it that an expansion franchise was able to garner such immediate, fervent support, while original franchises with well-established fan bases struggled? This case study sought to supplement the limited current literature regarding the motivating factors of American soccer fans. The purpose of the present study was to examine how sport attachment, attachment to community, and the need for vicarious achievement in Seattle Sounders FC season ticket holders influenced team identification. Additionally, the relationship between fan superiority and team identification was empirically examined, the first time such a relationship has been quantitatively measured.

## Introduction

Soccer has a great tradition of success in Europe, where its importance in the lives of individuals across the continent has produced ritualized atmospheres among supporters and fostered the emergence of subcultures centered in national identity (Giulianotti, 2005; Peitersen, 2009). Many, however, associate European supporter culture with “hooliganism,” where similar subcultures are created for the purpose of exerting dominance over rival groups through violent measures (Sahaj, 2009). Because hooliganism is well-publicized, it often serves as the framework through which many view European soccer culture. However, Peitersen (2009) argued that soccer has indeed helped “harmonize” the transition into the modern European Union through increased television coverage and the promotion of matches as an important component of Pan-European culture. As social and national identity still serve as primary motivators for Europeans to attend soccer matches, the same attraction to the game has lagged in the United States. Deeply rooted in American assimilation practices that promoted baseball and football and discouraged the growth of soccer as a game that was “too European,” the sport has floundered in spectator popularity (Coakley, 2009). The failure of the North American Soccer League and the early attendance woes of Major League Soccer, introduced in 1996, have left many to wonder if soccer will ever flourish in the United States. The arrival of the expansion Seattle Sounders FC in 2009 gave hope to the idea that soccer could succeed in the United States. The team led the league in attendance, exceeding the second-best attended club by over 10,000 spectators per game, and nearly doubled the league average of 16,120 (Miller & Washington, 2010). The Sounders FC’s large and highly visible fan base that topped MLS attendance charts in 2009 has led some to espouse the idea that soccer fans in Seattle are superior to those in other areas of the U.S. (Mickle, 2009; Sutton, 2010; Sounders FC’s success, 2010).

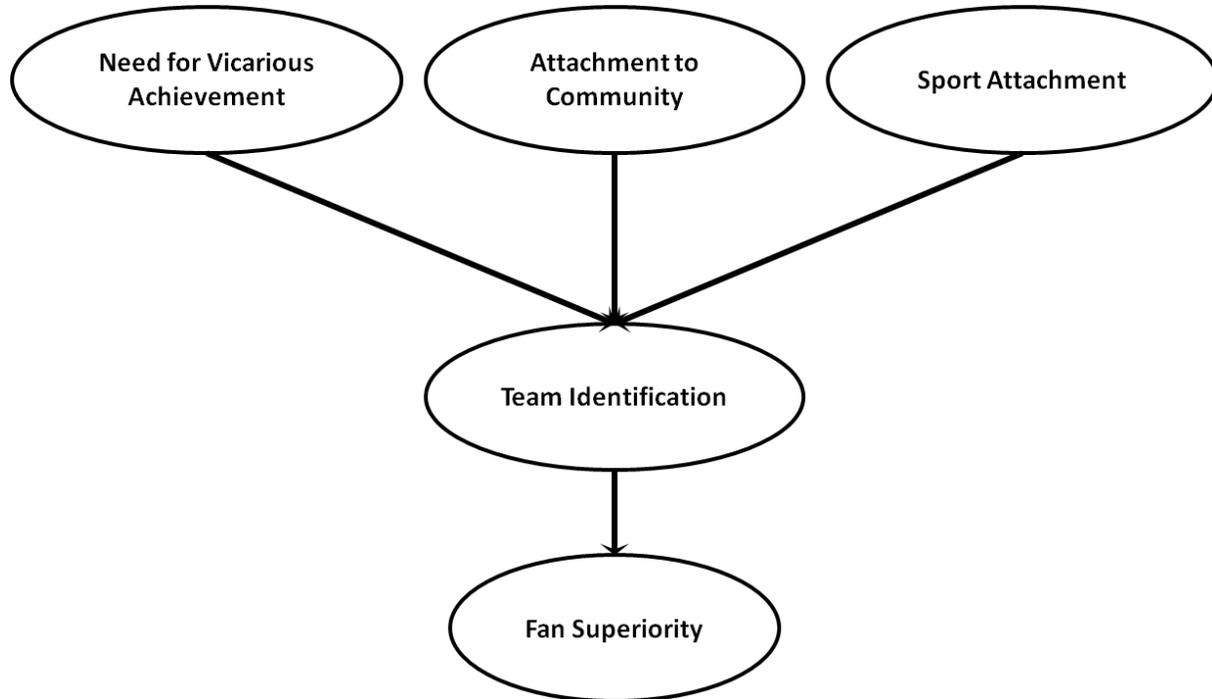
As Major League Soccer continues to expand into new markets across North America, it is prudent to examine the factors that produced the unprecedented popularity of the Seattle Sounders FC. While the Sounders FC averaged 31,203 fans per game, the rest of MLS averaged 16,120, with original franchises in New York, New England, Kansas City, and Dallas occupying four of the bottom five rankings in 2009 average attendance (Miller & Washington, 2010). How was it that an expansion franchise in Seattle was able to garner immediate support, while original franchises with well-established fan bases struggled? With only marginal support in comparison to other North American sports leagues, the MLS could learn a great deal from an examination of the Sounders FC organization. It would benefit the MLS and its franchises to examine the motivating factors of Sounders FC supporters to discover what inspired the unprecedented support of an expansion franchise.

Although Wann (1995) concluded that spectator identification with a sports team was a useful and predictive assessment tool, Trail and colleagues (Trail, Robinson, Dick, Gillentine, 2003; Woo, Trail, Kwon, & Anderson, 2009) have extended this to points of attachment. There is currently limited literature discussing the effect of these factors on American soccer fans. In addition, never before has the relationship between the fans’ perceived superiority and team identification been directly examined.

Thus, we examined how sport attachment, attachment to community, and the need for vicarious achievement in Seattle Sounders FC season ticket holders influence team identification. We also examined the relationship between team identification and the perceived superiority of Sounders FC fans to see if a relationship exists (Figure 1). Furthermore, we compared two Sounders FC season ticket holding subgroups on these relationships to determine if differences exist. We hoped to provide valuable insight on whether motivational differences existed between

first and second-year season ticket holders so recommendations could be made on how to best maximize ROI (return on investment) in targeting these subgroups.

**Figure 1.** Theoretical model of variables predicting fan superiority.



### Review of Literature

James, Kolbe, and Trail (2002) wrote, “the importance of season ticket purchasers to new franchises warrants a close examination of these individuals, since season ticket holders represent a significant and crucial portion of team revenue” (p. 224). We are using social identity theory to examine the motivating factors of vicarious achievement and attachment to community. In addition, we will use identity theory as the guiding theory to examine sport attachment and team identification. The motivating factor of fan superiority will be guided by social identity theory and the theory of perceived superiority.

### Identity Theory

Identities are cognitive schemas that reflect internally stored information and meanings that serve as frameworks for interpreting experience (Trail & James, 2011). The items used to measure team identification are a development of Identity Theory, which can be described as perceived situational meanings, resulting from the interaction between one’s identity standard and given situational meanings, which are typically socially determined or influenced (Stryker & Burke, 2000). These perceived situational meanings will enter a cognitive comparison with one’s identity standard. The result of such a comparison elicits behavior (Trail & James, 2011). Identity Theory focuses on role-based identities that are hierarchically oriented (Trail & James, 2011). Stets and Burke (2000) saw that the employment of a particular role identity requires acting to fulfill the expectations of the role, coordinating and negotiating interaction with role partners, and manipulating the environment to control the resources for which the role has

responsibility. This can be applied to an individual taking on the role of a fan of a particular team and a soccer fan during a match. The individual employs a role identity of the fan through his or her support of the team in a similar manner as his or her fellow fans with the responsibility of creating crowd noise to manipulate the environment. The individual employs the role identity of a soccer fan through the responsibility of negotiating when it is appropriate to cheer or when it is appropriate to remain silent (e.g., when a player sustains an injury). While the principles of Identity Theory can be applied to the internal measures of an individual's identification with the team and attachment to the sport, the role of the external environment on the individual's definition of role requires an analysis of Social Identity Theory.

### **Social Identity Theory**

The items used to measure vicarious achievement, community attachment, and fan superiority are a development of Social Identity Theory; described by Stets and Burke (2000) as a person's knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group. In the formation of a social identity, a self categorization occurs in an accentuation of the perceived similarities between the self and other in-group members, and an accentuation of the perceived differences between the self and out-group members (Stets & Burke, 2000). Turner, Brown, and Tajfel (1979) found a tendency in schoolchildren to favor the in-group over the out-group in behavior that was unrelated to out-group derogation or in-group economic interests. In-group favoritism in sport spectator behavior has been examined by Wann and Grieve (2005), who found that the individual's psychological connection to his or her team played a vital role in the level of bias. Jones (2000) found that fans of an English football club were able to demonstrate a strong sense of belonging to the group, and also to show favoritism within the group. Jones also identified out-group derogation as the second compensatory behavior within the fan group. Turner et al. (1979) suggested the desire for a positive social identity may represent an independent factor in intergroup discrimination, separate from the functional relations between groups. Thus, vicarious achievement, defined as "the need for social prestige, self-esteem, and sense of empowerment that an individual can receive from their association with a successful team" (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002, p. 198) is derived from social identity theory.

The concept of attachment to community also manifests social identity theory by an in-group/out-group comparison process through which accentuation of perceived differences in various attitudes, beliefs and values, behavioral norms, and styles of speech occurs (Stets & Burke, 2000). The concept of fan superiority is partially rooted in the ideas of social identity theory and in-group favoritism, as an in-group/out-group comparison process takes place through which there may be a tendency to favor the in-group over the out-group in behavior, attitudes, preferences, or perception (Turner et al., 1979). An additional guiding theory of the idea of fan superiority is the theory of perceived superiority.

### **Theory of Perceived Superiority**

The idea of fan superiority is based in the psychological theory of perceived superiority, which states that individuals, when asked to rate their own characteristics in comparison to others, tend to report that they possess superior characteristics in respect to others, as well as members of other groups (Buunk, 2001; Hornsey, 2003). Turner et al. (1979) provided peripheral support for the idea of perceived superiority, citing the over-estimation of in-group performance and the under-estimation out-group performance. Hornsey (2003) links the idea of group bias

with superiority bias, citing a positive relationship between interpersonal superiority and intergroup superiority in Australian students.

### **Sport Attachment and Team Identification**

Past literature has only found moderate support for the relationship between sport attachment and team identification (Trail et al., 2003). The relationship between sport attachment and team identification was hypothesized by Woo et al. (2009) in the form of a reciprocal relationship between sport identification and organization identification. While organization identification explained 7% of the variance in sport identification, sport identification was not significantly related to organizational identification, and thus there was no evidence of a reciprocal relationship. Similarly, in a study of fan motives in relation to gender, James and Ridinger (2002) found that females reported a stronger connection to a specific team than to a sport in general. Sport attachment has been shown to explain a wide range of variances in team identification. In a study of WNBA fans Funk, Ridinger, and Moorman (2004) found “interest in basketball” only explained 4% of the variance in “interest in team.” Robinson and Trail (2005) found attachment to sport explained 10% of the variance in team identification. Funk, Mahony, Nakazawa, and Hirakawa (2001) found a more significant relationship, citing “interest in soccer” explained 20% of the variance in “interest in team” in a study of the motivational factors of Women’s World Cup spectators. While the strength of the relationship has shown to vary dramatically across past literature, there is recurring evidence that a relationship between sport attachment and team identification indeed exists.

### **Attachment to Community and Team Identification**

Anderson and Stone (1981) were among the first to engage sport spectators and community members to determine the meaning of sport on residents of a metropolitan area (Minneapolis). They found a significant increase in the number of residents who considered themselves to be fans over a fifteen-year period from 1960-1975. More recently, attachment to community has explained a significant amount of variance in team identification. Funk et al. (2001) found national pride (a wider extension of community attachment) explained 17% of the variance in interest in team. Gladden and Funk (2002) found pride-in-place explained 30% of the variance in importance of brand association and 26% of the variance in the construct of fan identification. This variance represents a sizeable portion of the development of attitudes pertaining to brand association. Similarly, Funk et al. (2004) found community support explained 32% of the variance in interest-in-team. Other relationships were not as strong, as Robinson and Trail (2005) found attachment-to-community explained 14% of the variance in attachment-to-team, while Mahony et al. (2002) noted that community pride explained 11% of the variance related to the frequency of attendance of Japanese soccer fans. The above literature shows that despite the wide ranging amounts of variance in team identification explained by community attachment, community attachment has consistently explained more variance than sport attachment.

### **Vicarious Achievement and Team Identification**

Past literature has found vicarious achievement explained a great deal of variance in team identification (33%, Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002; 43%, Robinson & Trail, 2005; 51%, Trail, Fink et al., 2003; 51%, Trail & James, 2001; 59%, Trail, Robinson, Dick, & Gillentine, 2003; 50%, Wann, 1995). The direct relationship between vicarious achievement and team

identification has also been found to explain smaller amounts of variance. Funk et al. (2001) found vicarious achievement explained 12% of the variance in interest-in-team. Robinson, Trail, and Kwon's (2004) study of golf spectators found that vicarious achievement explained 12.8% of the variance in identification with a specific golfer, since golf has no team component. Funk, Mahony, and Ridinger (2002) found vicarious achievement explained 16% in spectator support level and Funk, Ridinger, and Moorman (2003) found vicarious achievement to explain the same amount of variance in consumer support. Funk, Ridinger, and Moorman (2004) determined vicarious achievement explained 30% of the variance in team interest. While the relationship has been examined under a number of variables representing ideas similar to team identification, vicarious achievement has consistently explained a fair amount of variance in team identification.

### **Fan Superiority and Team Identification**

Past literature examining the relationship between fan superiority and team identification has been qualitative in nature. The idea of perceived superiority with respect to sport fans was examined in perceptions of the role of English soccer fans in home field advantage, as the mean scores for each item pertaining to crowd support were significantly higher when respondents compared their fellow fans with fans of other teams (Wolfson, Wakelin, & Lewis, 2005). Wolfson et al. also reported the only characteristics on which fellow supporters were not described as superior to other fans were *stable* and *physically attractive*. Peitersen (2009) also took a qualitative approach, viewing fan superiority within the realm of peaceful support of international soccer fans in Europe culminating in the UNESCO Fair Play Trophy, awarded to the nation of the most admired supporters after the European Championships. In contrast, Depken (2001) evaluated the relationship in a quantitative manner, using a mathematical formula assessing (among other data) average attendance figures, average income, and size of stadium with respect to National Football League franchises to determine which city had the NFL's "best" fans. There has yet to be a study measuring the direct relationship between fan superiority and team identification.

### **The Model**

Sport Marketers are well aware of the importance of market segmentation because individuals attend sporting events for different reasons. Our proposed model attempts to capture which specific motivating factors have the strongest correlation with identification with team. This model adds to the understanding of sport consumption by examining the factors related to an individual's connection to a team and the subsequent analysis of identification within season-ticket holding subgroups, allowing for recommendations to be made to the Sounders FC on how to potentially market to each subgroup. Potential group differences can shed light on different points and levels of attachment, leading to more effective marketing practices by the organization. The model also contributes to literature concerning the idea of fan superiority, previously addressed by Wolfson et al. (2005), Depken (2001), and Peitersen (2009). The relationship between team identification and fan superiority has yet to be examined.

Thus, the purpose of our investigation is to determine if group differences exist between first-year and second-year season ticket holders of the Seattle Sounders FC by examining sport attachment, attachment to community, and the need for vicarious achievement in Seattle Sounders FC season ticket holders; the relationship of these factors with team identification; and the relationship between team identification and fan superiority (Figure 1). We plan to examine

if such a relationship exists and how it might be used to more precisely market to Sounders FC fans. To achieve this objective we surveyed two groups of Sounders FC season ticket holders; those who bought their season tickets before the Inaugural Sounders FC season in 2009, and those who purchased before the second season of 2010.

## **Method**

### **Sampling and Procedure**

Data were collected from Seattle Sounders FC season ticket holders through online social networks such as Facebook and interactive Sounders FC forums and blogs. Respondents accessed the online survey through Soundersfc.com blogs, Goalseattle.com forums, and through the Emerald City Supporters' Facebook group page. Surveys were administered in the last month of the 2010 MLS regular season to avoid a potential bias in responses connected to a potential positive or negative run of form during the regular season, or the club's current place in the MLS table. All subjects were informed that the IRB had given approval for the research.

### **Instrument**

The items measuring team identification, attachment to community, sport attachment, and vicarious achievement had been used in previous research. A fan superiority scale was created specifically for this research and was composed of three items. The response format was a 7-point scale from 1 (Disagree) to 7 (Agree) for these five scales. The questionnaire, including demographic items, contained a total of 24 items that were arranged randomly.

We used Woo et al.'s (2009) items to measure team identification, which had a previous Cronbach's Alpha value of .88, and sport attachment, which had a previous value of .81. We also used Robinson and Trail's (2005) measure of attachment to community which had a previous Cronbach's Alpha value of .84. Items measuring vicarious achievement were taken from Trail's (2010) Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption Manual, where the Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from .85-.89.

## **Results**

After eliminating incomplete surveys, 328 survey responses were useable, 80.9% of the sample was Caucasian. The next highest ethnic demographic was Asian or Pacific Islander, at 9.6%. Approximately 85% of the sample was male. The average age of the sample was 48.0 years.

We determined that one item from the Team Identification scale had to be removed due to skewness and kurtosis values. A CFA for the measurement model run on the whole sample had an RMSEA of .080, a  $\chi^2/df = 2.59$  and all AVE values were adequate (Table 1). Internal consistency measures for each scale were good as well (Table 1).

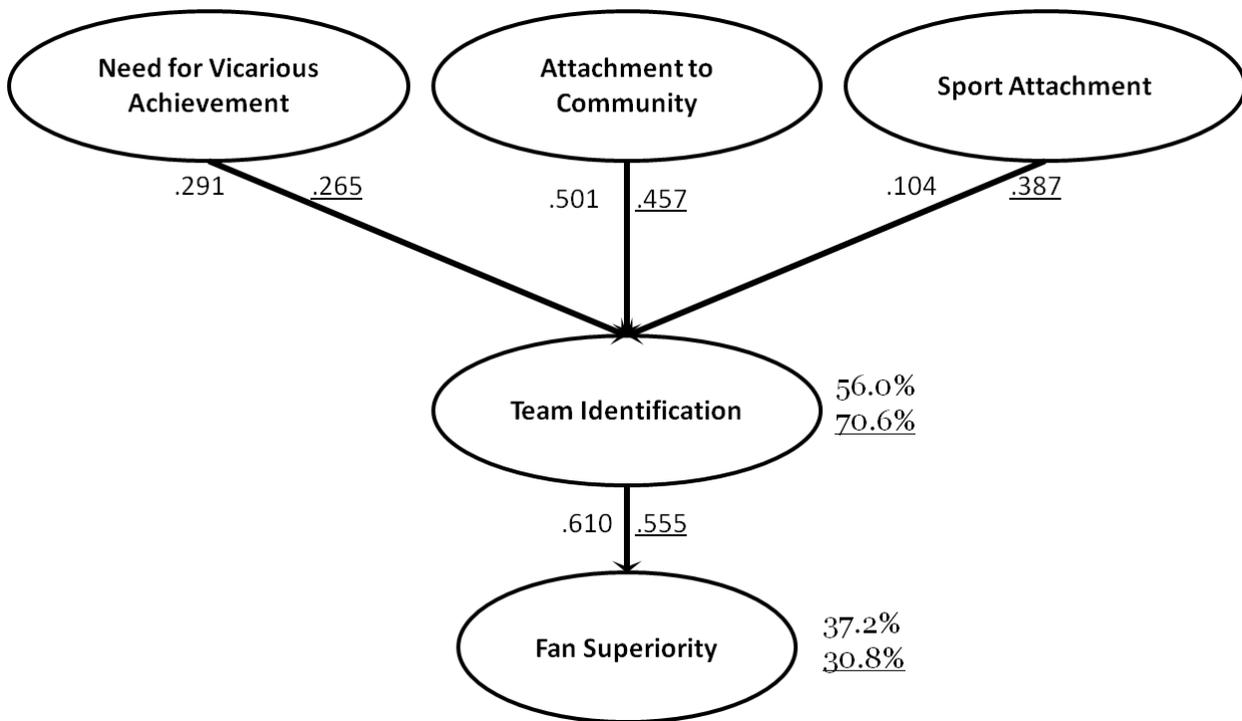
**Table 1**

*Factor Loadings ( $\beta$ ), Confidence Intervals (CI), Standard Errors (SE), Cronbach's Alpha values ( $\alpha$ ), and Average Variance Explained (AVE) Values*

Factor and Item	$\beta$	CI	SE	$\alpha$	AVE
Identification with the team				.73	.594
I consider myself to be a "real" fan of the Sounders FC		Eliminated due to skewness and kurtosis issues.			
I would experience a loss if I had to stop being a Sounders FC fan	.699	.627-.770	.043		
Being a fan of the Sounders FC is important to me	.836	.771-.901	.040		
Need for Vicarious Achievement				.92	.812
The Sounders FC increase my self-esteem	.832	.796-.868	.022		
The Sounders FC enhance my self-worth	.962	.943-.981	.011		
The Sounders FC improve my self-respect	.905	.880-.930	.015		
Attachment to the Community				.84	.633
I attend Sounders FC matches to support the city's team	.787	.736-.839	.031		
My connection to the community is why I like the Sounders FC	.853	.808-.897	.027		
I support the Sounders FC because the team enhances the status of the city	.742	.685-.799	.035		
Sport Attachment				.75	.490
Soccer is my favorite sport	.773	.694-.851	.048		
First and foremost, I consider myself a soccer fan.	.707	.626-.787	.049		
I am a soccer fan at all levels (e.g. high school, college, professional).	.607	.521-.694	.052		
Fan Superiority				.84	.663
The Sounders FC have the best fans in Major League Soccer	.707	.647-.768	.037		
No other team in Major League Soccer has fans like Sounders FC fans	.849	.805-.893	.027		
The Sounders FC have better fans than other teams in Major League Soccer do	.876	.834-.917	.025		

The sample then was split and a SEM testing the model on the first year season ticket holders had an RMSEA of .10 and a  $\chi^2/df$  of 2.78. Community Attachment, Sport Attachment, and Need for Vicarious Achievement (NVACH) explained 56% of the variance in Team Identification, and Team Identification explained 37.2% of the variance in Fan Superiority (Figure 2). A second SEM on the second year season ticket holders had an RMSEA of .089 and a  $\chi^2/df$  of 1.72. Community Attachment, Sport Attachment, and NVACH explained 70.6% of the variance in Team Identification, and Team Identification explained 30.8% of the variance in Fan Superiority. With respect to group differences, other than those noted above, the biggest differences existed between Sport Attachment and Team Identification,  $\beta = .104$  in first-year season ticket holders but  $\beta = .387$  in second-year season ticket holders.

**Figure 2.** Structural model of variables predicting fan superiority. Path coefficients and percent of variance explained values that are not underlined represent 1<sup>st</sup> year season ticket holders; those that are underlined represent 2<sup>nd</sup> year season ticket holders.



## Discussion

The focus of the study was to determine the primary motivating factors of Sounders FC season ticket holders, and to determine if group differences exist between first and second-year season ticket holders. We sought to determine if the potential existence of group differences between first-year and second-year Sounders FC season ticket holders on the relationships among the variables might reveal different market segments within the larger season-ticket holder segment.

The relationship between Team Identification and Fan Superiority has important implications not only for Sounders FC marketers, but for future research in the study of fan motives. The relationship between Team Identification and Fan Superiority suggests that part of season ticket holders' attachment to the Sounders FC lies in the belief that they are a part of the "best" fan base in MLS. The existence of such a relationship implies that fan superiority helps serve as a motivating factor for Sounders FC season ticket holders.

In respect to group differences, the motives of Need for Vicarious Achievement and Community Attachment explained very similar amounts of variance in Team Identification within both subgroups, although attachment to community explained slightly more variance for 1<sup>st</sup> year season ticket holders than for 2<sup>nd</sup> year season ticket holders. A more interesting finding of the present study was the discovery of significant group differences in the relationship between Sport Attachment and Team Identification in first-year and second-year season ticket holders. Sport Attachment explained an insignificant amount of variance in Team Identification in first-year season ticket holders, but explained a meaningful amount in second-year season ticket holders. The greater Sport Attachment in second-year season ticket holders reveals

evidence of a new market segment within the Sounders FC season-ticket holding fan base. Members of this segment likely follow the game internationally and had possibly purchased single-game tickets during the 2009 season. They may have been impressed with the club's passionate fan support, often seen abroad but unrivaled here in the United States.

### **Support for existing theory**

The strength of the relationship between Sport Attachment and Team Identification has varied across past literature, as the variance explained has showed to be as low as 4% (Funk et al., 2004) and as high as 20% (Funk et al., 2001) in the literature examined. While Sport Attachment did not explain variance in Team Identification in the first-year subgroup, Sport Attachment explained around 15% of the variance in Team Identification in second-year season ticket holders. This characteristic of the second-year season-ticket holding subgroup could serve to supplement existing literature as further evidence of the relationship between Sport Attachment and Team Identification.

Vicarious Achievement explained a small amount of the variance in Team Identification in both samples (less than 9%). This does not represent the general theme of past literature, which has shown Vicarious Achievement explained a great deal of variance in Team ID (33%, Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002; 43%, Robinson & Trail, 2005; 51%, Trail, Fink et al., 2003).

Finally, we feel the present study can serve to begin to explain a relationship between Fan Superiority and Team Identification, which has not been addressed empirically in past literature. Additionally, the items created to measure Fan Superiority exhibited good internal consistency. Team Identification explained 37.2% of the variance in Fan Superiority in first-year season ticket holders and 30.8% in second-year season ticket holders, all of which contribute to present literature on fan motives as the first time such a relationship has been measured quantitatively.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

The significant and meaningful relationship in which Community Attachment was found to explain variance in Team Identification should have important implications to Sounders FC marketers. This relationship suggests the strong attachment that Sounders FC season ticket holders have to the city of Seattle, and that such attachment explains a great deal of why they identify with the Sounders FC. This emphasis on community attachment should be of great interest to Sounders FC marketers during the upcoming 2012 season because of the emergence of the Portland Timbers and Vancouver Whitecaps as regional rivals. Sounders FC fans' strong attachment to their community is a motive that can be marketed to in the context of regional rivalry games, and further intensified as the Northwest clubs jockey for playoff position. The findings of the present study suggest that a timely marketing campaign centered on Sounders FC fans' pride in the city as a rallying cry to beat their regional rivals or surpass them in the standings could be extremely effective. The strength of this relationship might also imply that the Sounders fan base is a very loyal one, evidenced by the combination of their attachment to the community and their disinclination to achieve vicariously. The lack of a large relationship between Vicarious Achievement and Team Identification suggests Sounders fans are not likely to latch on to nearby Portland or Vancouver should either side become more successful than the Sounders FC. Further research should explore Vicarious Achievement and BIRGing and CORFing behaviors in Sounders FC fans to more specifically determine the extent of their loyalty to the club.

Furthermore, the relationship between Team Identification and Fan Superiority has important implications not only for Sounders FC marketers, but for future research in the study of fan motives. The large relationship between Team Identification and Fan Superiority suggests that part of season ticket holders' attachment to the Sounders FC lies in the belief that they are a part of the "best" fan base in MLS. The existence of such a relationship implies that this idea helps serve as a motivating factor for Sounders FC season ticket holders to be Sounders fans and to attend matches. Fan superiority is a motive that can be captured by Sounders FC marketers through a continued emphasis on league-leading attendance and a potential player campaign detailing how the intense fan support energizes their play on the pitch. Emphasis on the Sounders FC's fervent fan support is already in use in marketing campaigns. The present study can serve to validate the effectiveness of those campaigns and even suggest a more highly specialized campaign catering to Fan Superiority. Teams often dedicate one game per year as "Fan Appreciation Day" in which they reward the league's "best" fans, but there has been little research completed to conclude whether an extended marketing campaign catering to the motive of Fan Superiority would be effective for other MLS clubs. Further empirical research using the items generated in the present study should be engaged to discern whether or not similar motives of "superiority" exist within other MLS teams that are not as well-attended as the Sounders FC.

Finally, an equally significant finding of the present study was the discovery of significant group differences in the relationship between Sport Attachment and Team Identification in first-year and second-year season ticket holders. This finding validates the central focus of the study. The greater Sport Attachment in second-year season ticket holders reveals evidence of a new market segment within the Sounders FC season-ticket holding fan base. The meaningful difference between subgroups in this relationship warrants a closer look into potential reasons why such a difference exists. Perhaps the data reveal evidence of a "soccer aficionado" segment: A group of well-informed fans who were aware of Major League Soccer's reputation as a league that has long produced low-quality soccer. After watching the success of the Sounders FC in their first year, perhaps this segment decided that the team possessed the skill necessary to justify a season ticket purchase. Additionally, members of this segment had possibly purchased single-game tickets during the 2009 season, and been impressed with the club's passionate fan support, often seen abroad but unrivaled here in the United States. The Sounders FC already cater to this segment through their promotion of "friendly" matches against top European clubs. They can continue to strengthen their support from this segment through emphasis not only on Sounders players' top-flight playing experience, but that of their competitors. Emphasis in marketing campaigns on past playing experience at the International level provides a positive reference point for the well-informed members of this segment that follow the game internationally. The Sounders FC could also benefit from hosting Friendly or CONCACAF qualifying matches in which national teams are involved, as members of this segment have a great appreciation for the sport in general, not just for the Sounders.

### **Limitations**

While this study can be useful to Sounders FC marketers in discovering new market segments within their season-ticket holding fan base, it would not be suitable to apply these attributes to Seattle fans as a whole in reference to other Seattle-based professional franchises without collecting data specific to the different teams. Nor should these results be applied to other MLS markets, as each fan base is motivated differently by community needs, values, and goals.

### **Summary**

In response to the Seattle Sounders FC's unprecedented launch into MLS, we sought to determine what motivated Sounders FC season ticket holders to experience such a high level of attachment to a new team, while traditional MLS teams struggled to attract fans. We found that a great deal of this attachment could be explained by season ticket holders' attachment to the Seattle community, the belief that they are a part of the best fan base in MLS, and the strong attachment to the sport of soccer in second-year season ticket holders. Further research should be conducted by other MLS clubs to determine what motivates each fan base individually to attend matches. If each franchise were to conduct similar studies based on community needs, values, and goals, it could be boon to American soccer as a whole.

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