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Fan Engagement Perceptions within Scottish Football

Author:

Lloyd Gauld

40317142

Supervisor

Mark Passera

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates how supporters of Scottish professional football clubs perceive fan engagement, with particular focus on the role of authenticity, trust, and ownership structure. The literature review spans consumer engagement theory, sport fandom psychology, ownership models, authenticity and trust, culminating in a conceptual framework that positions authenticity and trust as the central mediating constructs between club engagement strategies and supporter outcomes. Survey data was analysed using statistics, while interview data was analysed through thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006).

Three core findings emerged. Fan ownership is the single most significant determinant of engagement perceptions, with fan-owned clubs producing Likert scores over 1.5 points higher than the lowest-scoring privately owned club. Authenticity failures driven by broken promises damage supporter trust more than an absence of communication. The research found the most valued engagement formats as; nostalgia content, open Q&A sessions, and participatory social media. They all share a common quality of inviting supporters into a conversation rather than broadcasting at them. Recommendations are made for clubs, governing bodies, and future researchers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background Context

This dissertation explores how fan engagement has become a critical issue within modern football, with focus on Scottish football, where clubs are increasingly reliant on strong and sustained relationships with their supporter base for financial stability, community identity, and long-term strategic growth. In recent years, football has undergone significant transformation driven by digital technologies. This has shifted supporter expectations, and the clubs are currently adopting a new governance models and strategy to match. These developments have created both opportunities and challenges for clubs looking to understand what truly drives engagement and how value can be created between clubs and their fans.

In Scotland, meaningful fan engagement has become a strategic concern for professional football clubs, shaped by the financial constraints and governance in the Scottish game. Many clubs operate with limited commercial revenues and a heavy reliance on gate receipts and supporter contributions, creating conditions in which the quality of the supporter relationship carries direct financial consequences (Richford & James, 2024). Several clubs have responded to periods of financial mismanagement by adopting supporter-ownership or hybrid governance models, with Heart of Midlothian, Motherwell, and Falkirk representing the most prominent examples. Kennedy and Kennedy (2016) demonstrated that fan ownership in Scottish football has altered the nature of supporter engagement, extending fan influence beyond matchday interaction into governance and long-term club sustainability. Alongside these governance shifts, clubs have increasingly moved from traditional matchday interactions toward multi-channel, season-round engagement strategies, using social media platforms, online membership schemes, and targeted communication to interact with supporters throughout the week (Filo, Lock & Karg, 2015). Understanding what constitutes meaningful engagement for supporters in this context, and whether clubs' strategies are perceived as authentic and responsive, remains under researched.

This topic is currently under researched within Scotland, with most of the research done on the English football leagues and structure. This leaves a gap within the research for Scottish clubs and how fans from the most supported league per capita

perceive fan engagement strategies (BBC Premiership tops Euro Attendances, 2025). It will explore whether fans believe current engagement strategies are authentic, whether they feel represented, and why differences emerge between fans of different clubs. It will also examine whether different groups of fans (e.g., age groups, season-ticket holders versus casual supporters, online versus in person supporters) have varying expectations or experiences of engagement.

The findings of this research have the potential to benefit several stakeholders. Football clubs may gain insights into the types of engagement that genuinely matter to supporters, enabling them to refine strategies that build loyalty, trust, and long-term value. Supporters' groups and fan-owned organisations could use the findings to strengthen advocacy efforts and articulate clear expectations for club fan relationships. This dissertation will contribute to the growing body of research on sport management, digital fan engagement, and supporter governance in football and help fill a gap for fan engagement research in Scottish football.

1.2 Reason for Topic Choice

The researcher experienced a transformation to a supporter ownership model at Heart's when the Foundation of Hearts intervened during the administration crisis of 2013 and noted the shift in the supporter-club relationship that followed. This experience raised questions that academic study then provided the tools to investigate; what makes supporters feel genuinely engaged rather than simply communicated at.

> *'Football is not a matter of life and death but something far more important' – Bill Shankley*

This quote is one that resonates and captures something genuine about the role football plays in personal identity, community belonging, and everyday life for supporters across Scotland. The stakes feel so high for fans that the quality of the club-supporter relationship is incredibly important. Hoping to pursue a career within the football industry, this research is practical alongside its academic contribution, with findings intended to be of use to Scottish clubs and farther afield.

1.3 Research Aim

To examine how supporters of Scottish professional football clubs perceive fan engagement and to identify the factors influencing those perceptions, with particular focus on the role of authenticity, trust, and ownership structure.

1.4 Research Objectives

1 - To examine how supporters perceive the digital, matchday, and community-based engagement strategies implemented by Scottish professional football clubs.

2 - To measure how supporters define engagement and assess the importance of authenticity, trust, communication quality, and participation.

3 - To examine whether perceptions of engagement differ between supporter segments; including season-ticket holders versus casual supporters, and online versus in-person supporters.

4 - To compare engagement perceptions between supporters of fan-owned or hybrid clubs and privately owned clubs through survey analysis and follow-up interviews.

5 - To develop evidence-based recommendations for improving authenticity, trust, effectiveness of fan engagement strategies within Scottish professional football.

Objective	Quantitative	Qualitative	Secondary
One	Survey Items	Journalist Interview	Website and 3rd Party analysis
Two	Likert Scale Measures	Focus Groups	Literature Review
Three	Statistical Comparison	Statistical Contrast	Literature Review
Four	Ownership Comparison	Governance Interview Questions	Online Ownership Data
Five	Analysed Survey Findings	Survey Discussion	Literature Review

Table 1 – Objective table

1.5 Chapter Structure

Chapter 2 presents a review of existing literature, structured as a funnel from broad consumer engagement theory to the Scottish football context, concluding with a conceptual framework. Chapter 3 outlines the mixed methods research design, detailing the philosophical positioning, survey, and semi-structured interviews used to collect and analyse data. Chapter 4 presents and discusses the quantitative and qualitative findings in relation to each research question. Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation with evidence-based recommendations for clubs, governing bodies, and researchers, with a review on limitations and directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter analyses and examines the existing scholarship relevant to fan engagement in Scottish professional football, identifying the key theoretical frameworks, debates, and gaps in knowledge that inform this study's research.

The chapter uses a funnel structure, beginning with broad theoretical foundations in consumer and fan engagement before progressively narrowing toward the Scottish professional football context. This progression allows the key theoretical frameworks underpinning the study's research questions to be established first, building toward the conceptual gap this research addresses (Creswell, 2015).

The chapter is organised into eight sections. The opening sections establish the conceptual foundations of engagement within marketing and sport contexts before examining the specific dynamics of football supporter relationships. The review then narrows to the Scottish football landscape, identifying the contextual pressures that make engagement particularly complex and consequential in this setting. The final sections examine four theoretical pillars that directly inform the research design: ownership models, authenticity theory, trust in sports organisations, and the behavioural and psychological dimensions of supporter engagement. The chapter concludes with a conceptual framework that synthesises these themes and provides a foundation for the methodology presented in Chapter 3.

2.1 Consumer Engagement Foundations

The concept of consumer engagement has emerged as one of the most significant developments in marketing theory over the past two decades, reflecting a shift away from transactional models of exchange and toward an understanding two-way relationship that is complex. Early foundational work by Brodie et al. (2011) defined engagement as a “psychological state characterised by cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components, occurring through interactive customer experiences with a focal agent or object”. Brodie (2011) positioned engagement not as a static attitude but as a process that is shaped by and in turn changes the relationship between consumers and organisations. This definition established a framework that moves beyond satisfaction and loyalty as measures of consumer relationship, but instead meaningful engagement involves active participation and investment from both the consumer and the business.

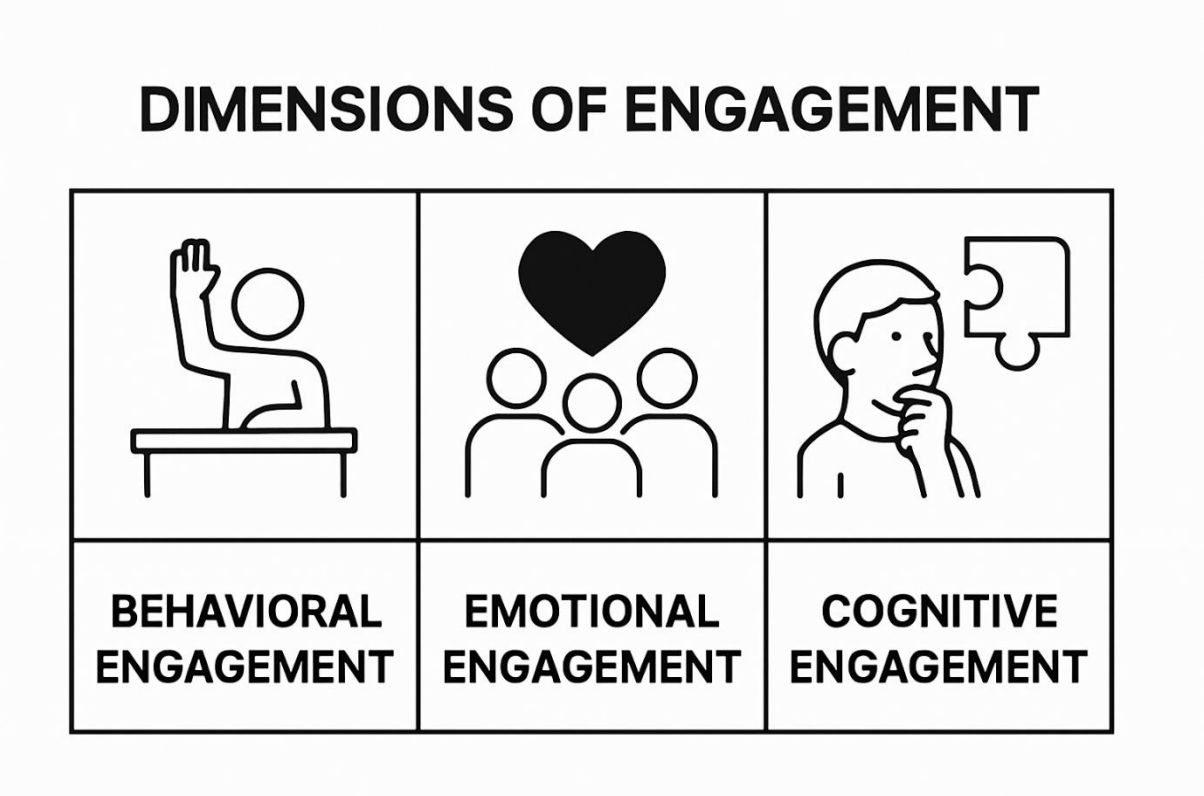

Figure 1 – Diagram of the 3 dimensions of engagement (Brodie et al., 2011)

Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan (2014) proposed that engagement should be understood as a “multidimensional construct incorporating conscious participation, involvement, and emotional connection”. Vivek et al. (2014) argued that engaged consumers do

not receive value from organisations but actively help create it through their interactions, this generates outcomes that can benefit both parties. This theory is particularly significant in the context of sport, where supporter involvement in matchday atmosphere, online discourse, and club culture can contribute to the overall value of the fan experience. Vivek et al. (2014) further emphasised that the depth of engagement varies across individuals and contexts, and that engagement should not be treated as a binary condition but as a spectrum ranging from passive awareness to active participation.

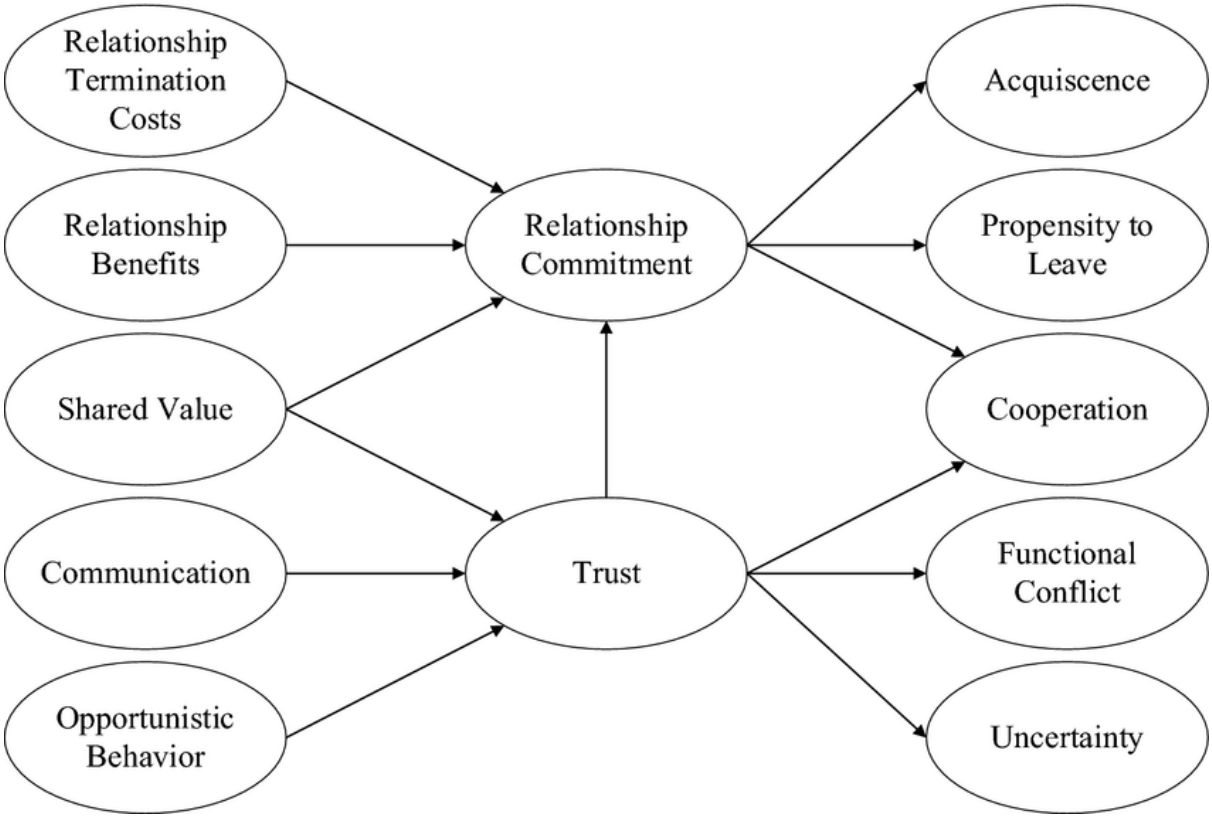

Figure 2 – Trust Commitment Theory Diagram (Morgan and Hunt, 1994)

Morgan and Hunt's (1994) commitment-trust theory provided an influential relational framework for understanding the conditions under which sustained engagement is possible. Morgan and Hunt (1994) argued that long-term relationship marketing success depends fundamentally on two variables: commitment, defined as a person’s belief that the ongoing relationship is important enough to warrant maximum efforts to maintain it, and trust, defined as a belief in the reliability and integrity of the exchange partner. Where trust and commitment are present, consumers are more likely to; remain engaged over time, cooperate with the organisation. These ideas have important implications for supporter-club

relationships, where trust in club leadership and a sense of loyalty to the club values play a role in shaping engagement perceptions.

These foundational frameworks establish that meaningful engagement is built on psychological and relationship foundations, but is further developed by improving trust, participation, and creating mutual value. This provides the conceptual lens through which following sections examine the specific dynamics of sports and football fan engagement.

2.2 Fan Engagement in Sport

The application of engagement theory onto the sports context requires acknowledgement of the intense loyalty and emotion of being a sport fans. Unlike most consumer relationships, which can be characterised by relatively low levels of personal investment, the relationship between sport fans and their clubs is frequently defined by deep psychological attachment, loyalty, and a strong sense of collective identity (Wann et al., 2006). Understanding why individuals engage with sport, and what sustains that engagement over time, is therefore essential to any this analysis of fan engagement strategies.

Trail and James (2001) provided one of the best frameworks for understanding sport fan motivation with the development of the ‘Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption’. Their scale identified nine psychological drivers of sport spectatorship including achievement, acquisition of knowledge, aesthetics, drama, escape, family, physical attraction, physical skill of participants, and social interaction. The multidimension nature of this framework is significant because it shows that fan engagement is not driven by a single motivator but by a combination of internal and external factors that vary across individuals, contexts, and cultures. In football, where clubs are often deeply embedded in local communities and carry strong cultural significance, motivations such as social interaction, group affiliation, and the deep routed loyalty of fans to the sport itself could be the main motivators.

Funk and James (2001) complemented this picture with the development of the Psychological Continuum Model, which conceptualises fan engagement as a progression through four stages: awareness, attraction, attachment, and allegiance. This model shows that fan relationships with clubs are not static but develop over time, with different engagement strategies being appropriate at different stages of a supporter's journey. A supporter at the awareness stage may be reached effectively through digital content and social media, whilst a supporter who has reached the allegiance stage is more likely to be motivated by deeper forms of participation, governance involvement, and a sense of shared ownership of the club's identity.

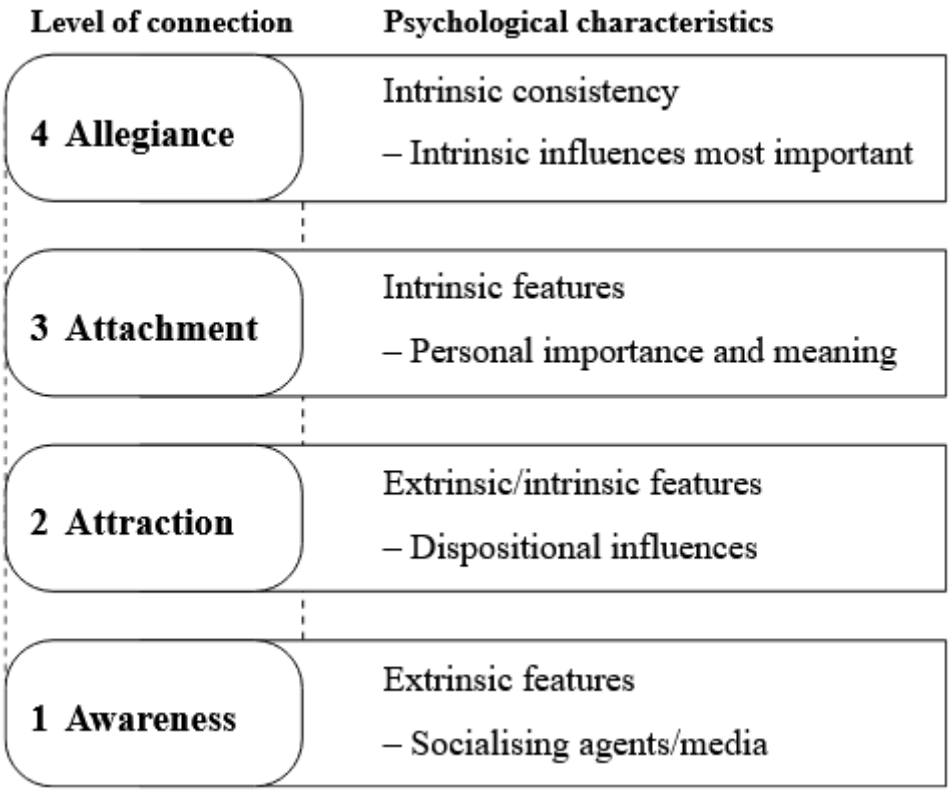

Figure 3 – The Psychological Continuum Model (Funk and James, 2001)

Filo, Lock, and Karg (2015) conducted a review and analysis of sport and social media research, finding that digital platforms fundamentally change the nature of fan engagement by enabling real-time, personalised, and interactive communication. Their review found that social media allows fans to feel connected to their clubs and to other supporters even when not physically present at matches, leading to clubs being able to extend the reach of engagement beyond the stadium. However, Filo et al. (2015) also noted that the effectiveness of digital engagement depends heavily on the quality and authenticity of the content produced, as well as the willingness of clubs to engage in genuine dialogue rather than one-way broadcasting. This

difference between authentic interaction and performative communication is a common occurrence throughout the literature. The recency of this literature is very relevant as it covers the area of research with the ever-developing social media landscape.

2.3 Fan Engagement in Football

Supporter engagement is not only a concern for professional football clubs it is a core business objective with measurable financial consequences. The tension between the commercial side and supporter expectations is a common theme in the football engagement literature and it is especially relevant in understanding why engagement strategies can be perceived as genuine and authentic by fans.

Giulianotti and Robertson (2004) examined the globalisation of football and its consequences for the relationship between clubs and supporters. They argued that the commercialisation of football has been accelerated by increased broadcasting revenue and global brand development, this has fundamentally transformed clubs from community institutions into commercial entities with international fanbases (Gasymov, Afik, 2026). This in turn creates a structural difference between the needs of global commercial audiences and the expectations of local, traditional supporters, who may feel that the cultural identity of the club is being changed. Giulianotti and Robertson (2004) described this process using the concept of ‘glocalisation’, suggesting that clubs navigate global commercial pressures whilst attempting to maintain local cultural authenticity. For Scottish clubs, which operate at a smaller commercial scale than English clubs, this tension takes a different form: financial pressure forces clubs to seek new revenue streams and expand their supporter base, whilst the risk of alienating the main loyal supporter community, where as in England they can afford to take this risk as their ‘tourist’ supporters are large enough that the risk is mitigated (Scotland Coefficient, 2026) (BBC Sport, 2026).

The governance of football engagement was researched by Hamil et al. (2004), who analysed the corporate governance of professional football clubs and found that poor governance practices, including a lack of transparency, accountability, and stakeholder inclusion, are a persistent source of fan mistrust. Hamil’s research showed that supporters who feel excluded from the decision-making process and

who also perceive their clubs as unaccountable to fan interests are less likely to feel engaged in a meaningful sense. This finding is relevant in Scotland, where several clubs have experienced high-profile governance failures, such as Heart of Midlothian going into administration, leading to lasting marks on supporter trust and expectations.

Cleland (2010) offered an important perspective, the research showed that supporter-club relationship had greater success if they had a two-way active participation compared with a one-way passive fandom. His work showed the role of digital media in allowing supporters to challenge club decisions, organise collectively, and demand greater transparency and involvement. Cleland (2010) argued that this shift from passive to active fandom creates both opportunities and challenges for clubs, supporters who are more engaged and informed are potentially more loyal, but they are also more critical and more willing to voice dissatisfaction publicly. This duality of fans is a concern for clubs seeking to develop engagement strategies as they need to be aware of how fans opinions can change.

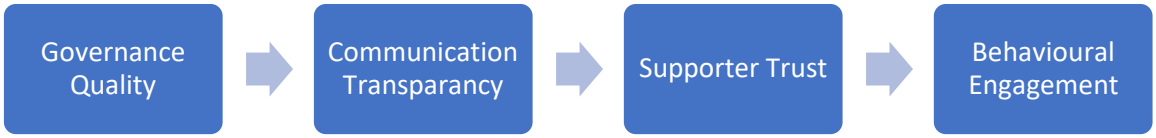

Figure 4 – Engagement value chain adapted from (Cleland, 2010 and Hamil et al., 2004)

2.4 Scottish Football Context and Challenges

Football in Scotland is a massive part of life, with levels of support that are amongst the highest per capita in Europe (BBC Premiership Attendance, 2025). The financial impacts and supporter segments of Scottish football create pressures that shape the game in ways that differ from English football that most academic literature discusses.

The financial fragility of Scottish football clubs has been a contentious topic and there have been a series of high-profile crises. Richford and James (2024) examined the Rangers FC liquidation as a case study in football financial mismanagement, demonstrating how the collapse of a major club can have profound consequences not only for supporters of that club but for the governance credibility of the sport. Their analysis highlighted how supporter trust in club leadership, which had already

been declining by years of financial mismanagement, suffered significant damage during the liquidation process. Richford and James showed the long-lasting consequences of poor governance and the depth of financial harm that can result when clubs treat supporter relationships as peripheral rather than central to their strategic identity.

Kennedy and Kennedy (2012) looked at the response of football supporters to the commercialisation of the sport across Europe, arguing that supporter-ownership (50+1) models is an important and transparent way to fix problems in how football clubs are run. Their research found that supporter-owned or partially supporter-owned clubs tend to have stronger alignment between club decisions and supporter values, greater communication transparency, and a more meaningful sense of fan participation in the running of the club. In Scotland, clubs such as Heart of Midlothian and Motherwell have adopted significant supporter ownership stakes, offering a clear way to compare whether ownership structure affects how fans experience and judge engagement.

Whilst major English clubs have access to larger resources for digital content production and fan experience innovation, Scottish clubs operate with considerably tighter budgets and smaller media teams. This means the quality and authenticity of online fan engagement can differ a lot between clubs, and the gap between what fans expect, often a considerable gap from top clubs to smaller ones, and what they get may be larger (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2018).

2.5 Ownership Models in Football

The way a club ownership is structured has been recognised as a fundamental factor in shaping the quality of supporter engagement in football. Ownership determines not only the strategic priorities of a club, but it also shapes whether supporters are seen as important stakeholders with a real say in club decisions, rather than just customers valued mainly for their money. The literature on football ownership models offers important insight into how different governance structures shape supporter trust, participation, and perceptions of authenticity.

The dominant ownership model in professional football has historically been that of private ownership by wealthy individuals or investor groups. Whilst this model can

provide financial stability and investment, it frequently positions supporters as passive recipients of decisions made by owners whose primary goal is to gain value for themselves or to commercial investors rather than to the fan base. Hamil et al. (2004) argued that the corporate governance standards applied within privately owned football clubs have generally lagged behind those expected of comparable public or commercial organisations. This in turn creates environments where supporters have limited access to information about financial decisions, transfer activity, or club direction. This lack of transparency is a major reason why fans become disengaged and lose trust, as shown in football research.

In contrast, fan ownership models, in which supporters hold majority or significant minority stakes in their clubs through community share schemes or supporters' trusts, have been associated in the literature with more transparent governance, greater supporter empowerment, and stronger alignment between club strategy and community values. Michie and Oughton (2005) examined the role of supporters' trusts in English and Scottish football, finding that fan involvement in governance can produce tangible benefits including greater financial accountability, stronger community relationships, and improved supporter satisfaction with club communication. The success of models such as that adopted by AFC Wimbledon in England and Heart of Midlothian in Scotland is frequently cited as evidence that supporter ownership is not merely ideologically appealing but functionally effective.

Bauers (2019) study on club members in German professional football provides important evidence to support the value of fan-owned governance, particularly in relation to the 50+1 rule that is mandatory in German Football clubs. His research finds that club members generally express strong support for maintaining majority supporter control, viewing it as essential for preserving club identity, democracy, and long-term stability. Bauers highlights that members do not simply value ownership in financial terms, but as a mechanism that legitimises their role as stakeholders with a meaningful voice in decision-making processes. The study also demonstrates that this model fosters higher levels of trust in club leadership, as transparency and accountability are seen to be structurally embedded within the governance framework. Bauers notes that even where tensions exist between commercial growth and member control, supporters tend to prioritise safeguarding influence over

maximising financial returns, reinforcing that ownership structures play a decisive role in shaping supporter attitudes and engagement.

Hybrid models, which supporters hold a significant but not majority ownership stake alongside private investors or commercial partners, represent a growing intermediate category. These models look to combine the financial power of private investment with the governance accountability associated with supporter involvement. However, the literature suggests that hybrid arrangements can create tensions when commercial and supporter interests differ, and that the quality of engagement outcomes in hybrid structures depends heavily on the degree to which supporter representatives are genuinely considered in the decisions rather than consulted to keep the peace (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2012). The distinction between meaningful participation and performative inclusion is one of the central questions this study seeks to investigate in the Scottish context.

2.6 Authenticity Theory

Authenticity has emerged as one of the most significant concepts in consumer and sports marketing research, reflecting a broader cultural shift toward the valuation of genuine, transparent, and value aligned organisational behaviour. In the context of fan engagement, authenticity refers to the degree to which supporters perceive club communications, decisions, and relationships as genuine reflections of the club's stated values and identity, rather than as calculated or commercially motivated performances.

Pine and Gilmore (2007) provided a foundational account of authenticity in consumer experience, arguing that as markets become saturated with standardised goods and services, consumers increasingly seek out experiences and relationships that feel real, original, and personally meaningful. They distinguished between self-directed authenticity, in which an entity acts in accordance with its own values and heritage, and other-directed authenticity, in which it conforms to external expectations of what it should be. In football, this distinction maps onto the tension between clubs that engage with supporters in ways that reflect their genuine community identity and those that adopt engagement strategies modelled on external commercial templates without regard for local culturally norms or heritage.

Morhart et al. (2015) developed a more detailed account of brand authenticity, identifying four dimensions: continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism. Continuity refers to the idea that a brand is consistent over time and have a genuine heritage that they are trying to uphold. Credibility is whether the brand delivers on its promises. Integrity relates to the sincerity of the brand's motivations. Symbolism addresses whether the brand reflects values that are meaningful to its audience. This framework suggests that Scottish football clubs' authentic engagement requires not only that clubs communicate consistently and honestly but that their engagement initiatives are clearly motivated by a genuine concern for supporter wellbeing and community identity rather than by commercial or reputational calculation.

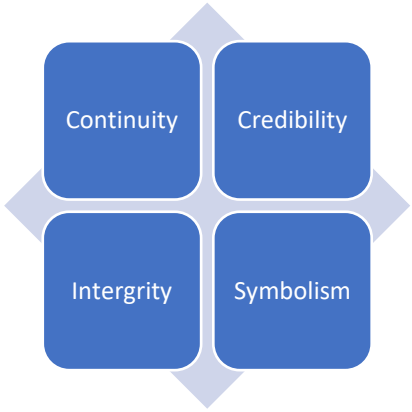

Figure 5 – Four Dimensions of Brand Authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015)

Cleland's (2010) shows that football supporters are particularly aware of the distinction between genuine and performative engagement and this is supported by research. Supporters who perceive engagement initiatives as authentic, which is classed as reflecting a genuine desire to include fans in club life, respond with increased loyalty, support, and tolerance for setbacks. Engagement that is perceived as inauthentic, whether through inconsistency between communication and action, perceived commercial motivation, or a failure to follow through on promised commitments, can actively damage supporter-club relationships and generate public criticism (Cleland, 2010). The concept of authenticity is therefore not only a desirable quality in engagement strategy but a condition that must be met for its effectiveness in marketing.

Beverland (2005) argued that perceived authenticity is not part of an organisation, but a socially constructed judgment formed through observable actions, and that authenticity is therefore managed. Of the six dimensions he identified, sincerity and

heritage are key, sincerity is whether communications appear driven by values rather than commercial goals, while heritage refers to the use of history and cultural continuity as evidence of commitment. Both dimensions apply directly to Scottish football, where supporter trust is tied to the perceived authenticity of club management and the level of which clubs stay true to their community roots., Beverland also observed that authenticity is most seriously damaged not by failure itself but by the perception of inconsistency between public commitments and observable behaviour, this has a direct impact for Scottish clubs where stated commitments to communications are not always followed through.

2.7 Trust in Sports Organisations

Trust is a key part of the relationship between supporters and clubs, acting both as something needed for meaningful engagement and as something that grows from consistently positive experiences with a club. The importance of trust in sports has been analysed from a multiple of angles, reflecting the multifaceted nature of the concept and its relevance across cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions of the supporter relationship.

Morgan and Hunt's (1994) commitment-trust framework, also analysed in section 2.1, established that trust in an organisation is built through consistent demonstration of reliability, benevolence, and honesty over time. In the sport context, Yoshida et al. (2014) applied and extended this framework to investigate how trust links the relationship between service quality and supporter loyalty. Their findings confirmed that supporter trust in club management is a critical determinant of long-term engagement: supporters who trust their clubs to act in their interests are significantly more likely to maintain their involvement, to recommend the club to others, and to remain loyal during periods of poor sporting performance. This resilience dimension of trust is particularly important in football, where the inherent volatility of match outcomes means that clubs cannot rely on sporting success as a consistent driver of engagement.

Funk and James (2001), mentioned in section 2.2, identified psychological attachment to a team as a key factor of sustained engagement, arguing that supporters who have developed deep emotional bonds with their clubs are more

resilient to the decline in trust that may result from poor governance or communication. However, their research also indicated that even strongly attached supporters have thresholds of tolerance, beyond which perceived betrayal of trust can result in disengagement or, in extreme cases, active opposition. The slow decline of trust between the Celtic fans and board members show of how rapidly supporter trust can deteriorate and even turn to opposition when clubs are perceived to have acted dishonestly or incompetently.

Hamil et al. (2004), as mentioned in section 2.3, found that supporters consistently identify honest, timely, and accessible communication from club leadership as one of the most important factors in their assessment of club trustworthiness. This finding aligns with the broader organisational trust literature, which identifies communicative transparency as a critical trust-building tool. In terms of supporter engagement, this shows how clubs communicate including what channels they use, how often they communicate, and how openly they address difficult decisions, this can be just as important in building trust as it is in damaging it.

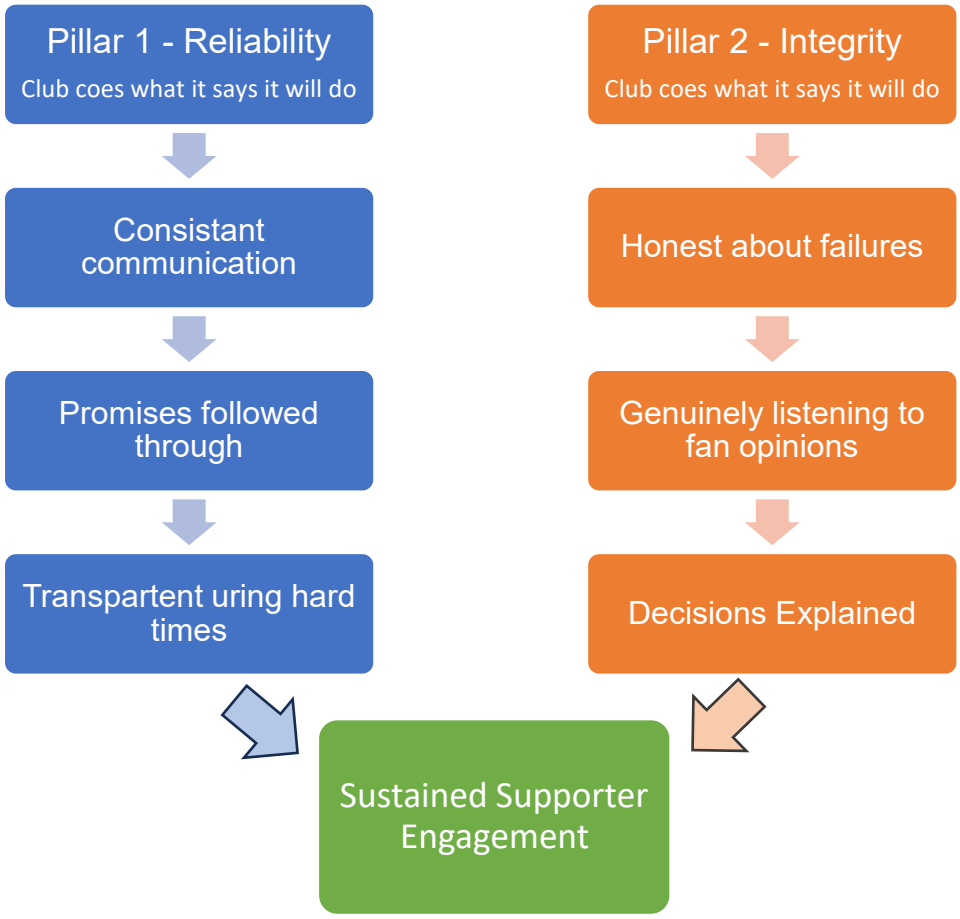

Figure 6 – Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Hamil et al. (2004) adapted to football context

2.8 Behavioural and Psychological attitudes in Sports Engagement

To fully understand supporter engagement requires examination of both its behavioural signs, the observable actions supporters take in relation to their clubs, and its psychological basis, the attitudes, emotions, and motivations that drive those actions. The distinction between behavioural and psychological engagement is important because high levels of behavioural engagement, such as regular match attendance or active social media participation, do not necessarily indicate genuine psychological investment, and vice versa.

Behavioural engagement encompasses a wide range of supporter actions including matchday attendance, merchandise purchase, participation in supporter groups, engagement with club social media content, and financial contributions through membership schemes or supporter trust shareholding. Trail and James (2001) stated that behavioural engagement in sport can become habitual for some particularly long-standing supporters, meaning that attendance and consumption patterns may continue even when psychological satisfaction with the club is declining. This disconnection between behaviour and psychology highlights the risk of clubs relying on behavioural metrics, such as attendance figures or social media follower counts, as statistics for genuine engagement when the underlying psychological relationship may be significantly less healthy.

Psychological engagement is the internal dynamics that motivate supporter behaviour, this includes emotional attachment, a sense of identification with the club, perceived belonging to a supporter community, and feelings of trust towards club leadership. Brodie et al. (2011) argued that psychological engagement is the deeper and more a meaningful dimension, as it determines the resilience of the supporter relationship over time and shapes the quality of the two-way relationship that engages supporters make to club culture. Wann et al. (2006) similarly emphasised the importance of psychological identification with a sport team, finding that high levels of team identification are associated with greater social wellbeing, stronger community bonds, and more sustained behavioural engagement, even during periods of poor club performance.

The difference between these two dimensions has direct implications for the design and evaluation of fan engagement strategies. An engagement strategy that

generates high levels of behavioural participation without showing genuine psychological investment may produce short-term metrics that appear positive whilst leaving the underlying supporter-club relationship fragile. Strategies that prioritise psychological dimensions, including authentic communication, meaningful participation opportunities, and visible respect for supporter values, are more likely to produce the durable loyalty and support that clubs depend on for long-term sustainability.

2.9 Conceptual Framework

The theoretical ideas reviewed in this chapter can be converted into a conceptual framework that identifies the key pillars of meaningful fan engagement in football. This framework uses the multidimensional engagement model of Brodie et al. (2011) and Vivek et al. (2014) to show engagement as a construct, including cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components. The framework then identifies four sets of variables that the literature suggests will significantly influence the quality of engagement experienced by supporters.

The first is ownership structure, drawn from Kennedy and Kennedy (2012) and Michie and Oughton (2005), which is hypothesised to shape the way which supporters feel empowered to participate in club decision-making and the extent to which governance is perceived as transparent and accountable. The second is authenticity of communication, informed by Pine and Gilmore (2007) and Morhart et al. (2015), which is how the club engagement initiatives are perceived as genuine reflections of club values rather than commercially motivated performances. The third is institutional trust, grounded in Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Yoshida et al. (2014), which reflects supporters' broader confidence in the reliability and integrity of club leadership and governance. The fourth is the psychological identification of supporters with the club, informed by Funk and James (2001) and Wann et al. (2006), which shapes both the intensity of engagement and the resilience of the supporter relationship across changing circumstances.

The framework also considers differences between supporter groups, recognising that perceptions of engagement are likely to vary based on attendance frequency, mode of engagement (digital versus in-person), and level of supporter involvement.

These differences directly respond to the gap identified in the Scottish football literature, where variation in engagement perceptions across supporter types has received little attention.

Together, these elements form a framework that positions meaningful supporter engagement as shaped by the interaction between ownership structure and including authenticity, trust, and psychological identification, but also influenced by differences in supporter groups. This framework provides the theoretical foundation for the research questions, survey design, and interview schedule presented in Chapter 3, and will serve as the primary analytical lens through which the findings presented in Chapter 4 are interpreted.

Figure 7 — Conceptual framework for meaningful fan engagement in Scottish football, adapted from Brodie et al. (2011) Vivek et al. (2014) Michie and Oughton (2005) Morgan and Hunt (1994)

2.10 Chapter Summary

The literature has also revealed an ongoing gap: whilst fan engagement in English football and European contexts has received growing scholarly attention, empirical investigation of how supporters of Scottish professional clubs perceive and evaluate engagement strategies remains limited. The conceptual framework developed in section 2.9 brings together the key theoretical variables identified throughout the review and provides the analytical foundation for the mixed methods research design detailed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted for this study and research on fan engagement in Scottish football. The chapter begins by identifying the key research questions that emerged from the literature review, before presenting the philosophical underpinnings of the research design. The rationale for adopting a mixed methods approach is then provided, followed by a detailed account of the data collection methods employed: an online fan survey and semi-structured interviews. Considerations of validity, reliability, generalisability, ethical principles, and limitations are discussed in the concluding sections of this chapter.

3.2 Key Research Questions

The literature review conducted in Chapter 2 identified several gaps in the existing understanding of supporter engagement within Scottish football. While considerable research has explored fan loyalty, digital engagement, and governance structures in broader football contexts, investigation into how supporters perceive the authenticity and effectiveness of engagement strategies at Scottish club level remains limited. Building upon the theoretical frameworks of Brodie et al. (2011), Morgan and Hunt (1994), and Cleland (2010), and in response to the gap identified in the Scottish context, the following research questions were developed to guide the data collection process:

RQ1: How do Scottish football supporters perceive the authenticity and value of their club's engagement strategies?

RQ2: Do perceptions of fan engagement differ across supporter segments, such as season-ticket holders versus casual supporters, and online versus in-person attendees?

RQ3: To what extent do specific club ownership models impact supporter engagement perceptions?

These questions are directly aligned with the research objectives established in Chapter 1 and informed the design of both the quantitative and qualitative data collection methods.

3.3 Research Paradigm

3.3.1 Philosophical Positioning: Pragmatism

The research was conducted within a pragmatist philosophical paradigm. Pragmatism is a worldview that focuses on the practical consequences and real-world application of research, challenging the idea that objectivism and subjectivism are separate instead favouring the most appropriate method for answering the research question at hand (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2019). This paradigm was selected because the research aim requires both measurable patterns of supporter sentiment across a broad fan base and an in-depth understanding of the reasoning, attitudes, and lived experiences that underlie those patterns. A positivist or interpretivist stance would not have provided the breadth and depth required to address the range of research questions identified from the literature review.

3.3.2 Ontology

From an ontological perspective, this study adopts a position that acknowledges multiple outcomes. Supporter perceptions of fan engagement are not uniform or objective but are shaped by individual backgrounds, club affiliations, demographic characteristics, current performance, and personal histories with their clubs. The

research does not seek to establish a single definitive truth about fan engagement, but rather to understand the range of perceptions held across different supporter groups and to identify any correlations (O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015).

3.3.3 Epistemology

Epistemologically, the study draws on both positivist and interpretivist assumptions, which is consistent with a pragmatist paradigm. The quantitative survey component is informed by a positivist stance, seeking to measure attitudes objectively through Likert-scale items and identify patterns across a larger sample. The qualitative interview component is informed by an interpretivist stance, seeking to understand how and why supporters form opinions about engagement, trust, and authenticity. Combining these two approaches provides a more complete understanding of the research problem than either alone or helps address the gap in linking measurable engagement perceptions with the reasoning behind them.

3.4 Research Approach: Mixed Methods

A mixed methods research design was selected as the most appropriate approach for this study. Mixed methods research involves the collection, analysis, and integration of both quantitative and qualitative data within a single study, with the purpose of providing a more complete understanding of a research problem than either method could provide by itself (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2019). This approach was particularly suited to this study because fan engagement is multidimensional, encompassing measurable behaviours and attitudes as well as complex psychological and social dimensions that are better explored through interviews.

Mixed methods were also identified as the most appropriate design given the specific gaps in the literature. Existing research on Scottish football engagement has tended to be theoretically driven and being narrowly focused on single-method data collection. This research adopted a sequential design instead, whereby quantitative data was collected first through the online fan survey, providing a broad overview of supporter attitudes and identifying patterns across the sample. The findings from the survey then informed the development of targeted interview questions in the qualitative phase, enabling a deeper exploration of the themes that emerged. This

integration of methods strengthens the overall credibility of the findings by allowing quantitative trends to be contextualised and interpreted through participant accounts (Heyvaert et al., 2017).

3.5 Research Strategy and Design

3.5.1 Quantitative Phase: Online Fan Survey

The first phase of data collection involved creating and distributing an online survey to supporters of Scottish football clubs. The survey was designed to collect both structured and semi-structured responses, allowing for the measurement of supporter attitudes at scale while still getting some open-ended reflection. The survey was designed on Microsoft Forms and included four structured sections.

The first section gathered demographic and profile information including age, gender, club supported, self-assessed level of support, and frequency of match attendance. The second section explored supporter behaviour, including the platforms used to follow clubs, types of media engaged with, and frequency of interaction with club social media content. The third section employed a five-item Likert scale, with response options ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, to measure perceptions of club communication, transparency, authenticity, supporter value, participation opportunities, and the meaningfulness of supporter voice. These six items were designed directly in response to the theoretical dimensions of engagement identified in the literature review, specifically the constructs of authenticity (Beverland, 2005; Gilmore & Pine, 2007) and trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Yoshida et al., 2014), ensuring that the quantitative instrument measured the variables most relevant to the gaps identified in Chapter 2. The final section consisted of open-ended questions exploring the perceived influence of ownership structure on engagement, the forms of engagement found most valuable, and suggestions for improvement for clubs. These open-ended questions provided qualitative texture to the quantitative findings, which in turn enabled more targeted interview questioning in the qualitative phase.

3.5.2 Qualitative Phase: Semi-Structured Interviews

The second phase of data collection involved conducting semi-structured interviews with a purposively selected sample of fans and football journalists. Semi-structured interviews were identified as the most appropriate qualitative strategy for this study as they combine a prepared framework of key questions with the flexibility to explore responses in greater depth through follow-up probing (Saunders et al., 2020). This format was particularly well suited to this study, as perceptions of authenticity, trust, and governance are intricate topics that benefit from an open conversational approach that is flexible to allow for a deeper discussion of specific points that are discussed rather than fixed-response questioning.

Interviews with supporters allowed for personal and reflective accounts of engagement experiences that could not be captured through a survey instrument alone. Interviews with a football journalist provided an externally informed perspective on the communication strategies employed by Scottish clubs, as well as insight into the gap between club narratives and supporter perceptions. This combination of participant types enriched the data and enabled a more critical analysis of engagement practices within Scottish football. Each interview was conducted on a one-to-one basis and lasted approximately 20 to 40 minutes. A consistent interview question guide was used across all sessions, developed in response to themes identified during survey analysis, ensuring comparability while retaining flexibility (O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015). All interviews were recorded with participant consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

3.6 Sampling

3.6.1 Survey Sampling Strategy

The target population for the survey consisted of supporters of Scottish professional football clubs. Participants were recruited through non-probability sampling via online football communities, including supporter forums, club-affiliated social media groups, and fan discussion platforms. This approach was selected to ensure that participants were actively engaged with Scottish football culture and could meaningfully respond to questions about club communication and engagement (Etikan & Alkassim, 2016). Online recruitment also enabled access to a geographically distributed sample,

including supporters who engage with their clubs primarily through digital channels rather than in person which was important given that digital engagement is one of the main dimensions of engagement explored in Chapter 2.

The survey received 54 responses. This sample size was considered appropriate for an undergraduate dissertation-level mixed methods study, providing a sufficient dataset to identify broad patterns and themes across supporter groups while remaining manageable for a single researcher to analyse (Saunders et al., 2020). Responses were collected across multiple clubs and supporter types, including season-ticket holders, casual attendees, and digital-only followers, to capture variation across the target population mentioned in Research Question 3.

3.6.2 Interview Sampling Strategy

Interview participants were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability approach in which participants are deliberately chosen based on their ability to provide relevant and informative data in relation to the research questions (Suri, 2011). A total of three interviews were conducted, comprising supporters with varying levels of engagement and a football journalist with professional knowledge of Scottish club communication strategies. This sample size reflects the scope of an undergraduate research project and is consistent with the principle of data saturation in qualitative research, whereby further interviews were deemed unlikely to produce substantively new themes (Suri, 2011).

The selection of a journalist as one of the interview participants was a deliberate methodological decision. The existing research on Scottish football engagement shows the supporter perspective, leaving the gap between how clubs intend their communications to land and how they are perceived largely unexplored. The inclusion of a journalist who regularly observes and reports on club-supporter relationships provides a degree of triangulation and external perspective that supporter interviews alone cannot offer and directly addresses this gap in the existing evidence base.

3.7 Data Collection

3.7.1 Survey Pilot Testing

Prior to full distribution, a draft survey was pilot tested with three individuals meeting the study's eligibility criteria. Pilot testing was conducted to assess the clarity of question wording, the appropriateness of response options, the logical flow of the survey, and the average time required to complete it. Feedback obtained during this process informed minor revisions to the phrasing of several questions, the removal of one question, and an order change in some of the initial questions this ensured that the final survey was answering the questions it was designed to do so. It identified potential sources of respondent confusion before data collection begins at scale, allowing for a non-turbulent launch of the survey (Saunders et al., 2020).

3.7.2 Interview Conduct

All interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis via video calls; this was chosen at it allowed for the interviews to be recorded easily and transcribed with little friction. Prior to each interview, participants were provided with an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study and what their participation would involve. A signed consent form was obtained from all participants before the interview commenced. The interviews were recorded using a screen recorder on a team’s call, with participant permission, and subsequently transcribed on word to facilitate thematic analysis. Transcripts were reviewed against the original recordings to ensure accuracy (Bryman et al., 2023).

3.8 Data Analysis

3.8.1 Quantitative Analysis

Survey data was analysed using descriptive statistics to identify the distribution of responses across each Likert-scale item and open-ended question. Frequency counts and percentage distributions were calculated to summarise supporter perceptions of communication, transparency, authenticity, and participation. Responses were further examined by supporter segment, including by club supported and level of engagement, to identify whether meaningful differences in

perception existed across groups. This segmented analysis was designed to address Research Question 2, which compares engagement perceptions across different supporter types.

3.8.2 Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Each transcript was read in full before analysis commenced, and relevant passages were assigned to categories. Themes were then reviewed and compared across participants to identify consistent patterns and differences. The qualitative findings were integrated with the quantitative survey results to provide a more complete answer to each of the research questions, with particular attention to points of and corresponding and contradiction data between the two sets (Heyvaert et al., 2017). This integration was essential for addressing Research Questions 1 and 3, which require not just measuring what supporters think but also explaining why.

3.9 Validity, Reliability, and Generalisability

In mixed methods research, the concepts of validity, reliability, and generalisability are evaluated differently across the quantitative and qualitative strategies. For the quantitative survey, internal validity was supported using theoretical frameworks to help inform question design and supported further through pilot testing. Reliability was enhanced using standardised Likert-scale items, which reduce the scope for ambiguity in responses (Saunders et al., 2020). However, as a non-probability sample was employed and some participants were selected through convenience leading to some clubs having a higher weighting in the results, this means the findings cannot be generalised to the entire population of Scottish football supporters.

For the qualitative interviews, validity was assessed in terms of credibility and trustworthiness rather than statistical reliability. The use of a prewritten structured interview guide ensured consistency across sessions, while the semi-structured

format allowed for sufficient flexibility to the prewritten prompts to explore individual experiences in depth. Triangulation was achieved by combining interview data with survey findings and by including participants from two distinct groups, fans and a journalist, allowing for comparison and cross-verification of findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2019). In qualitative research, the aim of generalisation is analytical rather than statistical, meaning that the findings are intended to contribute to theoretical understanding rather than to represent a statistically defined population (Suri, 2011). The findings of this study are therefore most appropriately understood as analytically generalisable to the theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter 2.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

All aspects of this research were conducted in accordance with Edinburgh Napier University's Code on Research Integrity and Ethics (Edinburgh Napier University, 2025). All participants, both survey respondents and interviewees, were fully informed of the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any point without consequence. Informed consent was obtained from all interview participants prior to their involvement using an interview consent form, and all participants were assured of anonymity. No individual will be identified by name or any other identifying characteristic in the presentation of findings. Data were stored securely in password-protected folders on the researcher's university network drive and will be deleted following the completion of the examination process, in line with university data retention guidelines. Survey responses were collected and stored through Microsoft Forms, which operates in compliance with Napier’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements.

3.11 Limitations

There are several limitations of the methodology that should be acknowledged. First, the use of convenience and purposive sampling introduces the possibility of selection bias. This mean the people who actively participate in online supporter communities that where selected for the survey might already have strong views about fan engagement and are overrepresented in the sample. This limits the extent

to which the findings can be considered representative of the broader Scottish football supporter population.

Second, the relatively small number of 3 interviews reflects the time and resource constraints of this project and means that the qualitative findings. While the interviews are informative, they are also narrow in scope. A larger qualitative sample would strengthen the analytical breadth of the findings.

Third, the self-reported nature of survey data introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, this is when participants respond in ways they consider more acceptable rather than reflecting their true opinions. This is a recognised limitation of surveys and was mitigated where possible through the inclusion of anonymous response options and clearly worded pilot tested question framing (Saunders et al., 2016).

Finally, the geographical and demographic scope of the study was limited to supporters accessible through online platforms or supporter groups, meaning that older supporters or those who aren't as involved with technology may be underrepresented.

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the foundations and practical design of the research conducted for this dissertation. A pragmatist paradigm was adopted to justify a mixed methods approach, combining an online fan survey with semi-structured interviews. The quantitative phase collected broad attitudinal data from 54 supporters of Scottish football clubs, while the qualitative phase enabled deeper exploration of engagement perceptions through interviews with fans and football journalists. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis respectively, with findings integrated to address all three research questions. Ethical principles were observed throughout, and key limitations of the study have been acknowledged. The following chapter presents the findings and analysis from both phases of data collection.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from both phases of data collection and discusses them in relation to the existing literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data are presented in an integrated manner, with each theme discussed in relation to each of the three research questions identified in Chapter 3. The structure of this chapter starts with a description of the sample sizes and quantitative results, then through the key themes that emerged from thematic analysis of the interview data to a final analysis addressing each research question. This approach is consistent with the design outlined in the methodology section, in which quantitative patterns are contextualised and explained through the qualitative findings.

4.1 Sample Characteristics

The online survey received a total of 54 responses from supporters of Scottish professional football clubs. The sample was predominantly male, with 50 male respondents (93%) and 4 female respondents (7%), this could be due to some sampling bias in the online football communities which the survey was distributed. In terms of age distribution, the largest group was supporters aged 55 and over (30%), followed by those aged 25-34 (22%), 18-24 (20%), 45-54 (15%), and 35-44 (13%). The sample included representation across all adult age groups, though skewed slightly towards older supporters.

The clubs represented in the sample were led by Heart of Midlothian (35%), followed by Aberdeen (20%), Hibernian (19%), Rangers (11%), Celtic (7%), Falkirk (4%), with single responses from Raith Rovers and Dunfermline Athletic. In terms of self-assessed level of support, 34 respondents (63%) described themselves as heavily invested supporters while 20 (37%) described themselves as casual fans. Three semi-structured interviews were also conducted with two heavily invested fans supporting Hearts and Aberdeen respectively, and one with a Scottish football journalist who is also a Motherwell supporter. The combination of survey and interview data allowed for both breadth and depth in the analysis.

4.2 Quantitative Survey Findings

4.2.1 Supporter Perceptions of Club Communication and Engagement

The six item Likert scale measured supporter perceptions across communication effectiveness, transparency, authenticity, how much supporters think clubs value supporter opinions, participation opportunities, and the meaningfulness of supporter voice. Table 4.1 presents the overall mean scores across all 54 respondents.

Table 4.1: Overall Likert Scale Mean Scores of 54 responses.
1 = Strongly Disagree - 5 = Strongly Agree.

3.0 - 3.69 = Moderate

3.70 – 3.79 = Positive

3.8 – 4 = Very Positive

Likert Scale Item	Mean Score (1–5)	Interpretation
My club communicates effectively with supporters	3.96	Very positive
My club provides sufficient information about important decisions	3.67	Moderate
My club communicates in an authentic and transparent way	3.70	Positive
My club values the opinions of its supporters	3.69	Moderate
My club provides opportunities for supporters to participate	3.72	Positive
I feel that supporters have a meaningful voice in the club	3.76	Positive

Table 2 – Likert Results

The overall scores sit between 3.67 and 3.96 across all six questions, indicating a broadly moderate to positive perception of engagement across the sample. Communication effectiveness scored highest at 3.96, suggesting that supporters acknowledge that their clubs make some effort to communicate, while the items relating to transparency, authentic communication, and the sufficiency of information around important decisions all scored lower, between 3.67 and 3.70. This pattern aligns with Beverland's (2005) findings, he distinguished between the volume of communication an organisation produces and the extent to which that communication is perceived as genuine and value aligned. The data suggests that while Scottish clubs are communicating, the quality, authenticity, and depth of that communication is perceived as more limited. This aligns with Cleland's (2010) argument that supporters have moved from passive consumers to active contributors who expect more than one-way communication.

4.2.2 Supporter Perceptions by Club

Likert scores by club reveal a different picture than the aggregate results suggest.

Table 4.2: Mean Likert Scores by Club and Ownership Model.

Club	Mean Score (all 6 items)	Ownership Model	n
Falkirk	4.50	Fan-owned (Falkirk Supporters Society)	2
Hearts	4.28	Fan-owned (Foundation of Hearts)	19
Rangers	4.00	Private/consortium (49er's Enterprises)	6
Hibernian	3.48	Private (Gordon Family)	10
Aberdeen	3.33	Private (Dave Cormack)	11
Celtic	2.71	Private (PLC/ Dermot Desmond)	4

Table 3 – Ownership Perceptions

The most obvious pattern in Table 4.2 is the relationship between ownership model and supporter perception scores. The two fan-owned clubs in the sample, Falkirk and Hearts, record the highest mean scores at 4.50 and 4.28 respectively, while the privately owned clubs return lower and more varied scores. Celtic, whose board has faced sustained criticism from supporters in the 2024-25 and 2025-26 seasons, records the lowest mean score of 2.71, reflecting a breakdown in the perceived relationship between ownership and supporter base. Aberdeen sits at 3.33, reflecting

the internal divisions within that supporter group, while Hibernian records 3.48 and Rangers 4.00. These findings provide initial quantitative support for the argument presented by Michie and Oughton (2005) and Kennedy and Kennedy (2012) that fan ownership models are structurally better positioned to generate more positive perceptions of authentic engagement.

4.2.3 Ownership Structure and Supporter Engagement

Of the 54 respondents, 37 (69%) said that they believed the ownership structure of their club affects supporter engagement, while only 5 (9%) said it did not, and 12 (22%) were unsure. The majority position that ownership structure matters is consistent with the theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The open-ended responses following this question provided a qualitative texture within the survey data. Hearts supporters consistently attributed their positive engagement experiences to the role of the Foundation of Hearts, with one respondent noting that ‘the club's fan ownership model gives supporters direct representation through a spokesperson who brings fan perspectives to the board’. A Falkirk supporter felt similarly, describing how the fan-owned model ‘makes updates regular’ and ‘makes fans feel involved’, specifically noting the contrast with a previous ownership regime and model which was described as ‘less responsive.’ By contrast, Celtic supporters expressed the most critical responses, with one noting that fans are ‘unhappy with the decisions being made within the club’ and there was a sentiment of perceived lack of ambition, and that the club appears ‘defensive’ and ‘guarded’ in its responses to supporter concern.

4.2.4 Digital Platform Usage

Twitter/X appeared as the most widely used platform for following clubs, cited by 31 of 54 respondents (57%), followed by club websites (25, 46%), Instagram (21, 39%), fan forums (14, 26%), and Facebook (14, 26%). TikTok was mentioned by 9 respondents (17%), with usage mainly in the 18-24 age group. These findings reflect a dispersed digital landscape in which clubs must keep a presence across multiple platforms to reach their full supporter base. The dominance of Twitter/X is consistent

with its function as a real-time information platform, which aligns with the finding from the qualitative data that supporters particularly value timely and instant updates from their clubs especially during match days.

4.3 Qualitative Findings and Discussion

Analysis of the three interview transcripts produced five core themes, each of which speaks to one or more of the research questions. These themes are presented below with supporting evidence from the interview data and supported with the open-ended survey responses. Each theme is analysed in relation to the existing literature from Section 2 to build a full picture to support the theme.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Authenticity, Trust, and the Role of Ownership

The most prominent and consistent theme across all three interviews was the relationship between perceived authenticity, trust, and the ownership model of a club. The contrast between the experiences of the Hearts supporter and the Aberdeen supporter was particularly revealing in this regard, and follows the same quantitative themes identified in Table 4.2.

The Hearts fan described the Foundation of Hearts' board representation as the main reason for his trust in the club, explaining that the Foundation has enough members that it would ‘kick up a stink if the club was doing something wrong, so we would all know about it.’ This sense of collective accountability, enabled structurally by fan ownership, represents what Morgan and Hunt (1994) describe as the reliability of trust, the belief that the other party is dependable and will act consistently in the interests of the relationship. He further highlighted the unfiltered nature of fan Q&A sessions at Hearts events, noting that ‘there is no filtering of the questions, and it is just a case of hand the mic out to the crowd and see what comes up’, a practice he perceived as evidence of genuine openness. This aligns with the authenticity framework proposed by Pine and Gilmore (2007), they say that consistency between stated values and observable actions as the core of perceived authenticity.

> *"I suppose the foundation makes that so much more easy considering we're all kind of invested. (Hearts supporter)"*

By contrast, the Aberdeen fan described a club whose stated commitment to transparency but has repeatedly been undermined by the behaviour of senior figures. He cited the example of the club's director of football, Lutz Pfannenstiel, who publicly committed to regular social media updates and transparency with supporters before going silent, generating exactly the kind of gap between promise and delivery that Beverland (2005) identifies as most damaging to perceived authenticity.

> *"If you come out and say you're going to be transparent and you're not transparent, that's when people start pointing the finger. (Aberdeen supporter)"*

The Motherwell Journalist introduced a further and particularly insightful point; there is a difference between a club that hears supporter feedback and one that listens to it. He described his experience as the club hearing him but not listening to him, a phrase that highlights the gap between simply acknowledging supporter voices and genuinely responding to them. This maps directly onto the work of Yoshida et al. (2014), who found that trust in sports organisations is driven not simply by communication frequency but by the perception that the organisation is genuinely responsive. The survey data reinforces this theme across the broader sample, with one Aberdeen respondent identifying too many undelivered promises as the core driver of disengagement, and a Celtic supporter calling for the club to listen to fans instead of being defensive and guarded.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Communication Timing, Tone, and the Risk of Detachment

A second major theme to emerge from both the interview and survey data was the importance of the timing and tone of club communication, particularly during periods of poor on-pitch performance. The Aberdeen interviewee raised this issue with considerable passion, describing incidents in which Aberdeen had communicated corporate and commercial messages, including season ticket renewal calls and Player of the Year voting promotions, immediately following heavy defeats.

> *"Asking for people to phone to see if you want to renew your season ticket just after you've been beaten 3-0 by St Mirren is not a great time to do that. (Aberdeen supporter)"*

He did note that the content of such messages is not inherently problematic, all clubs promote season tickets and commercial activities. The issue he identified was one of contextual blindness, the failure to read the emotional state of the supporter base and adjust the timing of communications accordingly. He drew a distinction between a club that monitors the mood of its fanbase and one that operates on a predetermined content calendar without sensitivity to context. This reflects the argument of Beverland (2005) that perceived authenticity is undermined when organisations communicate in ways that appear disconnected from the values and concerns of their audience. He further noted that the owner of Aberdeen is more visible in the media during successful periods than during difficult ones, a pattern described by the survey respondent for Aberdeen as being quick to engage when doing well, then silence when it's not going well.

This theme of contextual communication aligns with the commitment-trust theory of Morgan and Hunt (1994), which holds that sustained relationships require consistent behaviour across different conditions, not just when on field performances are going well. The willingness to communicate honestly and openly during difficult periods is exactly what defines genuine engagement from performative engagement and appears to be a significant driver of the trust, that was identified in the quantitative data.

He also acknowledged that results have a significant moderating effect on supporter perception of engagement, noting that if the club is winning every single game, people are not going to complain about the timing of messages. This observation raises an important point, that poor engagement practices may be masked by positive results and only become visible when performance declines, at which point they compound existing frustration. This contextual dependency suggests that clubs which invest in genuine engagement infrastructure during successful periods are better positioned to maintain supporter trust when results deteriorate.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Nostalgia and Community-Based Content as Engagement Drivers

Both fan interviewees independently identified nostalgia-based content, including throwback videos, historical tributes, and anniversary posts, as among the most effective forms of engagement produced by their clubs. The Heart's fan described Hearts' publication of historic goals and famous moments as a way of the club joining in the kind of conversation that supporters have with each other at social gatherings. The Aberdeen fan similarly highlighted Aberdeen's tributes to historic figures including Joe Harper, the club's record goalscorer, and Neil Simpson, as a form of engagement that connects the club to its community and introduces younger supporters to its history.

> *"It gets the fanbase engaged because it's the club celebrating its history. (Aberdeen supporter)"*

Filo, Lock, and Karg (2015) described digital platforms as tools for real-time, personalised communication, and much of the literature on social media engagement has focused on immediacy and interactivity. What the data suggests is that for Scottish football supporters, whose attachment to their clubs is deeply rooted in local identity and shared cultural memory, historically grounded content that resonates with existing emotional connections can be as powerful an engagement mechanism as real-time interaction and should be used alongside each other. Trail and James (2001) identified the sense of belonging to a cultural tradition as one of the most powerful motivational drivers of sport consumption, and nostalgia content appears to align with this part of the supporter relationship.

The Heart's fan also identified a preference for video and multimedia content over text-based posts, noting that video is more eye-catching while scrolling. He further described the appeal of joke-based and humorous posts even if they are from other clubs, which he characterised as content that can easily get shared in the group chat even though it's a completely different team. This finding points to the viral potential of culturally resonant content that travels beyond the supporter base, raising the profile of the club in the wider Scottish digital ecosystem.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Variation in Fan Experience Across Supporter Segments

One of the explicit research questions for this study was whether perceptions of fan engagement differ across supporter segments. The quantitative data produced a somewhat unexpected result in this regard: the mean Likert scores for heavily invested supporters (3.77) and casual fans (3.72) were almost identical, suggesting that level of involvement does not produce meaningfully different perceptions of engagement quality. This finding challenges the intuitive assumption that more engaged supporters would have stronger or more differentiated views on club communication.

The qualitative data complicates this picture considerably. The Aberdeen fan, as a geographically distant Aberdeen supporter who attends matches occasionally rather than every week, showed an understanding of why season ticket holders and regular match attendees should receive priority access to tickets and certain communications, describing this as absolutely fair and noting that the person travelling to every away game should get priority over someone like him. The Heart's fan expressed a similar position on the priority of local, committed supporters over tourist-market attendees, arguing that Scottish clubs are part of the community and should look after their local people. Both perspectives align with Wann's (2006) finding that highly identified fans develop a qualitatively different relationship with their clubs.

What the qualitative data therefore suggests is that while casual and heavily invested fans may produce similar average Likert scores, the reasoning behind those scores and the expectations that underlie them differ. Highly identified supporters apply more demanding standards of authenticity and responsiveness, are more sensitive to failures of trust, and are more vocal in expressing dissatisfaction. This is consistent with Bauer et al. (2008), who found that fan identity strength predicts both the intensity of engagement and the intensity of reaction to perceived mistreatment. The near identical aggregate scores may reflect the fact that casual fans apply lower expectations, while the qualitative texture of the interviews reveals the depth and complexity of heavily invested supporters' engagement demands.

The Motherwell journalist's account introduced a further dimension of variation, the experience of fan media creators who occupy an unusual position between supporter

and journalist. His attempt to apply for a social media role at Motherwell, which he described as something of a closed shop, and his experience of creating independent vlogs about the club with no formal connection to or support from the club itself, points to an underexplored segment of the supporter base whose creative investment in the club is not being harnessed. His observation that some clubs need to open the door to fan media reflects a broader opportunity for clubs to co-create content with supporters in the way described by Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan (2014), who characterised engaged consumers as active co-creators of value.

4.3.5 Theme 5: Ownership Structure and How It Influences Engagement Perceptions

Ownership structure emerged as the most significant variable in both the quantitative and qualitative data. As Table 4.2 demonstrates, fan-owned clubs produce the highest mean engagement scores in the survey sample, and the interview data provides an account of why this relationship exists. The quantitative difference between fan-owned clubs (Hearts: 4.28, Falkirk: 4.50) and privately owned Celtic (2.71) is the most intriguing finding of the study and is directly connected to the theme of authenticity and trust discussed in Section 4.3.1.

The Heart's Fan said the structural mechanism at work, the Foundation of Hearts has representation on the board and represents supporters because they are the ones putting money in. This structural link between supporter contribution and governance representation creates a form of accountability that privately owned clubs cannot replicate through communication alone. As Michie and Oughton (2005) argued, the alignment of interests between ownership and fanbase in supporter-owned models is structural rather than depending on the goodwill or priorities of an individual owner.

The Aberdeen fan extended this analysis beyond Scottish football, using the German 50+1 model as an international example of the principle in action, saying that 'fan engagement in Germany is visible even down to the third division where clubs attract tens of thousands of supporters.' He also offered a direct comparison between fan ownership and private ownership in terms of risk, saying that he does not ever see fan ownership going as badly as a single owner coming in and sinking a club, a

reference to the kind of governance failure that has occurred at multiple Scottish clubs in recent decades.

> *"Fan ownership probably will see greater involvement to an extent because you'll have more people who are willing to actively engage because they own the club. (Aberdeen supporter)"*

The Hearts fan introduced the idea that, ‘some supporters misinterpret ownership as entitlement to veto every board decision, and this can generate its own tensions.’ This aligns with Kennedy and Kennedy's (2012) finding that supporter ownership models are not without internal challenges, and that managing the expectations of a fanbase requires careful governance. The overwhelming themes of both the quantitative and qualitative data is that fan ownership, when functioning as intended, creates a structural basis for trust, transparency, and genuine engagement that privately owned clubs find it considerably harder to replicate.

The Rangers case provided an interesting counterpoint within the privately owned category. Multiple Rangers survey respondents noted an improvement in engagement quality following the recent change of ownership, with one specifically saying the new owners as far better at communicating future plans. This suggests that ownership model alone does not determine engagement quality in absolute terms, the values and priorities of specific owners also matter, and changes in private ownership can produce meaningful shifts in engagement culture. This is consistent with Giulianotti and Robertson's (2004) observation that the relationship between commercialisation and supporter engagement is not fixed but dependent on the priorities of the governing body at any given time.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented and discussed the findings from the online fan survey and semi-structured interviews. Three core discoveries stand out. First, ownership structure is the single most significant determinant of supporter engagement perceptions, fan-owned clubs produced Likert mean scores over 1.5 points higher than the lowest-scoring privately owned club. Fan ownership builds accountability into governance by design, whereas private ownership relies on the goodwill of whoever is in charge.

Secondly, Broken promises cause more lasting damage to supporter trust than a lack of communication. The data consistently shows that supporters can tolerate silence more readily than they can tolerate inconsistency between what a club says and what it does.

Thirdly, the most valued engagement formats across all supporter segments are nostalgia content, Q&A sessions, and participatory social media. They share a common characteristic; they invite supporters into a conversation rather than broadcasting at them.

The conclusions and recommendations that follow in Chapter 5 are built directly on this evidence.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.0 Introduction

This final chapter brings together the findings and analysis from Chapter 4 to produce conclusions that address the overall aim of the dissertation. The chapter also shows how each research objective was achieved, presents key findings by addressing each research question, and provides recommendations for clubs, the industry, and future researchers. The limitations of the study and directions for future research are then discussed, followed by a final summary.

5.1 Aim, Objectives, and Accomplishments

The aim of this dissertation was to investigate supporter perceptions of fan engagement within Scottish professional football, with particular attention to the role of authenticity, trust, and ownership structure. A mixed methods design combining an online survey with three semi-structured interviews achieved this aim across six objectives. Firstly, reviewing existing literature on engagement, authenticity, and trust, was achieved in Chapter 2 through a funnel structured review. Secondly, examining ownership models and their relationship to supporter engagement, was addressed in Sections 2.4, 2.5, and 4.3.5. Thirdly, investigating perceptions of authenticity and trust, was addressed through the Likert scale analysis and findings in Sections 4.2 and 4.3. Fourthly, examining variation in engagement perceptions

across supporter segments, was addressed in Section 4.3.4 and Research Question 2 below. Fifthly, collecting and analysing primary data using a mixed methods approach, was fulfilled through the survey and three interviews. Finally, generating evidence-based recommendations, is fulfilled in Section 5.3.

5.2 Key Findings: Research Questions Addressed

5.2.1 RQ1: How do Scottish football supporters perceive the authenticity and value of their club's engagement strategies?

The most important finding for RQ1 is that authenticity is perceived not as a part of communication frequency but consistency between what is stated and if the behaviours that follow match. The Aberdeen case shows this, public commitments to transparency followed by silence produced greater damage to trust than if no commitment had been made at all, reflecting Beverland's (2005) argument that the gap between promise and behaviour is the most damaging form of authenticity failure.

> *"If you come out and say you're going to be transparent and you're not transparent, that's when people start pointing the finger. (Aberdeen supporter)"*

A second key finding is that the timing and contextual sensitivity of communications affects how engagement is received. Commercially motivated communications delivered during periods of poor results and supporter frustration, regardless of their content, are experienced as tone deaf and actively damage trust This points to a gap in how Scottish clubs currently approach content planning, communications appear to be scheduled around commercial calendars rather than in response to the emotional state of the supporter base. Incorporating basic sentiment monitoring, through social media listening and tracking, into the content planning process would allow clubs to adjust both the timing and tone of messaging in a way that demonstrates awareness of the supporter relationship rather than indifference to it.

The study findings show the importance of how messages are framed and what kind of picture they build. Cialdini's (2001) principles of influence are shown here, supporters respond most strongly to communications that appeal to social proof

(showing that other fans are invested and involved), to commitment and consistency (clubs that follow through on what they say), and to liking (communications that feel human, warm, and aware rather than corporate). A club that builds a coherent seasonal narrative, showing the journey of a campaign as a shared story between club and supporter rather than a series of disconnected announcements, is likely to generate considerably stronger engagement than one that produces reactive, one-off content. The most effective engagement strategies identified in this study, nostalgia content, open Q&A formats, and banter-driven posts, all share this narrative quality, they create a sense of ongoing cultural conversation rather than broadcasting information at supporters.

The findings also strongly support the value of unpaid user-generated content (UGC) as an engagement mechanism that clubs are currently underutilising. The study identified independent fan content creators, including vloggers, podcasters, and social media video makers, as a segment whose creative investment in the club is not being harnessed. Nash (2019) found that UGC is perceived as significantly more trustworthy than brand-generated content among sports audiences, and this credibility gap means that a supporter-created video or matchday vlog will typically reach and resonate with audiences that official club content cannot easily access. The experience of the journalist participant in this study, who described his attempts to build a relationship with his club's media operation as encountering a closed shop, points to a structural failure in how clubs manage their relationship with fan creators.

5.2.2 RQ2: Do Perceptions of Fan Engagement Differ Across Supporter Segments?

The quantitative data produced very similar mean Likert scores for heavily invested (3.77) and casual supporters (3.72), suggesting perceptions are similar. Heavily invested supporters have a higher standard of authenticity and are quicker to lose trust, while casual fans report similar scores based on lower baseline expectations. This is consistent with Wann (2006) and Bauer et al. (2008), who found that fan identity strength predicts both the intensity of engagement and the severity of reaction to perceived mistreatment. The implication is that engagement strategies must meet the expectations of the most invested segment, since this group

represents the greatest financial commitment to Scottish clubs and the most influential voice in supporter communities. The study also identifies fan media creators as an underserved segment, the Motherwell's Journalists experience of being treated as a closed shop at Motherwell could suggest an untapped creative resource that clubs are currently failing to use.

5.2.3 RQ3: To what extent do specific club ownership models impact supporter engagement perceptions?

Ownership structure is the single most significant variable in the study. Fan-owned clubs, Hearts (4.28) and Falkirk (4.50), produced the highest Likert scores while Celtic (2.71) produced the lowest, a divergence of over 1.5 points that represents the study's most stark quantitative finding.

The qualitative data explains it in more depth; fan ownership creates structural governance accountability that does not depend on the goodwill of individual owners. As the Hearts fan described, the 'Foundation of Hearts' board representation means there would be enough people kicking up a stink if the club was doing something wrong that we would all know about it.' This structural alignment of interests is exactly what Morgan and Hunt (1994) identify as the basis for relational trust, the belief that the other party will behave consistently and in the interests of the relationship. Under private ownership, this reliability is more unpredictable rather than structural, it depends on whoever is in charge. The Rangers case demonstrates that private ownership can produce strong engagement perceptions when the ownership group prioritises communication, but it also demonstrates that this is conditional and can change with any change of owner.

Kennedy and Kennedy's (2012) observation that fan ownership models carry their own internal governance challenges is also supported by the data, the Hearts supporter noted that some fans misinterpret ownership as entitlement to veto every board decision, suggesting that managing supporter expectations within fan-owned structures requires its own careful governance. The overwhelming direction of the evidence is that the structural alignment of ownership and supporter interests, whether modelled on the Foundation of Hearts approach or the German 50+1

principle referenced in the interviews, produces engagement outcomes that privately owned clubs find considerably harder to replicate through communication alone.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 For Scottish Football Clubs

The most significant recommendation from this study is that Scottish clubs should prioritise the quality, consistency, and contextual sensitivity of their communications over their volume. The evidence suggests that supporters are more damaged in their trust by broken promises and poorly timed messaging than by an absence of communication. Clubs should conduct regular monitoring of supporter sentiment through social media listening tools and fan forum tracking and build this awareness into content planning decisions so that commercial communications, season ticket renewals, merchandise promotions, and similar messaging, are not deployed during periods of supporter frustration following poor results or controversial decisions.

Clubs should also move away from reactive, one-off content and towards building a seasonal picture of the club's journey as a shared story with supporters. This means opening the season with a clear statement of intent and values, maintaining a consistent communicative voice throughout the campaign, and acknowledging difficulties honestly when they arise rather than retreating into silence or corporate defensiveness. Second, platform-specific content strategy should reflect the distinct audiences and expectations of each channel. Twitter/X is most effective for real-time, reactive content including match updates and injury news. Instagram performs best for short form video content including nostalgia, player features, and behind-the-scenes access. YouTube is more suited to longer-form video formats like documentary-style content and matchday vlogs.

Thirdly, clubs should structure content around the match week cycle rather than a fixed commercial calendar. The 24 to 48 hours immediately following a heavy defeat is a less receptive window for any commercial communication, and clubs should build a simple operational rule that delays non-essential commercial messaging during this period. This is not a complex or costly adjustment, but the data suggests it would meaningfully reduce the frequency of tone-deaf communications that damage the supporter relationship.

The study showed a clear gap between the investment that fan vloggers, podcasters, and social media commentators make in their clubs and the support they receive in return. Clubs should develop a structured fan media programme offering creators opportunities to collaborate on official content. Nash (2019) found that user generated content is perceived as significantly more trustworthy than brand-generated content, meaning that an independent creator will reach audiences the club itself cannot easily access. For clubs operating with limited marketing budgets, this represents one of the highest-return engagement investments available.

5.3.2 For the Industry and Governing Bodies

The quantitative evidence that fan-owned clubs produce significantly higher engagement perceptions provides empirical support for policy discussions around governance reform in Scottish football. The Scottish FA and SPFL should consider how governance frameworks can better incentivise supporter involvement in club ownership, with the domestic examples of Hearts and Motherwell and the international precedent of the German 50+1 model offering practical reference points.

5.3.3 For Researchers

A study tracking engagement perception across multiple seasons at the same clubs, particularly before and after ownership changes, would provide stronger evidence for how the club-fan relationship changes when the ownership model gets restructured. Research specifically investigating the growing role of fan content creators in shaping supporter perceptions represents an under researched area.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

Online recruitment introduced self-selection bias, overrepresenting digitally engaged supporters and underrepresenting older or less digitally active fans. Club-level sample sizes are small for certain clubs, particularly Falkirk, limiting the robustness of club-level comparisons. The study captures only supporter perspectives, and misses management viewpoints, also perceptions were collected at a single point in

time, meaning findings may be influenced by on-pitch performance or governance circumstances during the data collection stage. With 93% of respondents identifying as male, the study cannot speak to how female supporters experience engagement.

Future research should deliberately target under-represented segments through targeted sampling. Three areas that could be investigated by future researchers could be; tracking perceptions across single club during ownership changes, cross-league comparisons with models such as the German 50+1, and targeted investigation of fan content creators as an emerging influence on supporter perceptions.

5.5 Chapter Summary

The findings establish ownership structure as the most significant structural determinant of engagement quality, with fan owned clubs generating substantially higher perceptions of authenticity and trust than privately owned equivalents. Authenticity and trust are confirmed as central pillars through which ownership and communication practices shape supporter experience. The study contributes an account of a topic underexplored at Scottish professional football level and provides a foundation for future research and practical improvement in this area.

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APPENDIX 1 – Heart's Fan Interview Transcribed

Transcript

00:00:01 Speaker 1 – Interviewer

Okay, so this is fan engagement in Scottish football.

00:00:09 Speaker 1 -

The first questions are all simple and then we get into more complex questions about understanding fan engagement.

00:00:16 Speaker 1

So the first question, is can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with the club you support?

00:00:24 Speaker 2 – Interviewee

Yeah, so I support parks.

00:00:27 Speaker 2

I've had a season ticket for

00:00:29 Speaker 2

almost 20 years now.

00:00:30 Speaker 2

So I've tried to go to as many home games as possible.

00:00:33 Speaker 2

I don't tend to go to many away games.

00:00:36 Speaker 2

But yeah, I'll keep up with all the sort of latest news and goings on.

00:00:42 Speaker 2

Like when I check sort of Twitter every day or a few podcasts to listen to a couple of times a week, something like that.

00:00:50 Speaker 2

So yeah, die hard jambo as some would put it.

00:00:54 Speaker 1

Good.

00:00:54 Speaker 1

to know.

00:00:55 Speaker 1

And

00:00:57 Speaker 1

Do you follow your club online and what sort of platforms do you follow them on?

00:01:00 Speaker 1

So you mentioned you watch some podcasts there on YouTube, Spotify.

00:01:06 Speaker 2

Spotify is the one I tend to use most for the podcasts, but there's a lot of them do post on both.

00:01:12 Speaker 2

So sometimes if I'm out walking, I'll have headphones and I'll be in Spotify.

00:01:18 Speaker 2

Other times if I'm about the house, like doing some washing or something, I'll put it on my tablet and have the video on YouTube.

00:01:22 Speaker 2

So a bit of books for that.

00:01:25 Speaker 2

Perfect.

00:01:26 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:01:27 Speaker 1

And what, how do you engage with your club on social media?

00:01:31 Speaker 1

What platforms do you use?

00:01:32 Speaker 1

Is it X, TikTok, Instagram, mixture?

00:01:36 Speaker 2

Yeah, Twitter or X is the main one I would tend to use.

00:01:40 Speaker 2

Just don't really reply or engage.

00:01:44 Speaker 2

Obviously, I'll read what they post and maybe like a few things, but I don't tend to reply.

00:01:49 Speaker 2

That's only certain type of people get involved in that kind of stuff.

00:01:54 Speaker 2

It's not me.

00:01:56 Speaker 1

Right.

00:01:58 Speaker 1

So this is on to the next sort of section, is understanding fan engagement of the club.

00:02:05 Speaker 1

So what does fan engagement mean to you?

00:02:08 Speaker 1

So what makes you feel connected to the club and what makes you feel sort of disconnected?

00:02:14 Speaker 2

Well, it's good, I think, when they'll post like throwback memories, which is this kind of stuff, like a goal from 20 years ago, a famous cup final goal or a famous moment.

00:02:25 Speaker 2

They'll post that stuff and that's kind of the stuff that we'll always just reminisce with our mates in the pub about anyway.

00:02:31 Speaker 2

So it's like they're joining in that kind of like, yeah, historic, always been a fan kind of, they get involved with that, which is good.

00:02:43 Speaker 1

So they're kind of on this day type of post.

00:02:49 Speaker 1

And is there anything that makes you feel disconnected when you see, so any sort of posts?

00:02:57 Speaker 2

Not really.

00:02:58 Speaker 2

If there's anything that I'm not really that fussed about, I don't think too much about it.

00:03:02 Speaker 2

I'll just keep scrolling by and won't give it a second thought.

00:03:05 Speaker 2

So no, nothing that would put me off them.

00:03:08 Speaker 1

Perfect.

00:03:09 Speaker 1

And so what kind of experiences do you have of fan engagements from your club?

00:03:15 Speaker 1

So

00:03:17 Speaker 1

You obviously mentioned social media engagements and stuff like that, but have you ever had any match day sort of experiences or events or community initiatives or anything like that?

00:03:26 Speaker 1

Been involved with them, like for example with Hearts, they have the Big Hearts Foundation and they have the Big Hearts sort of match day or like certain players go to the shop or anything like that.

00:03:37 Speaker 1

Have you been involved or been engaged by any of these?

00:03:40 Speaker 2

Yeah, sometimes if I'm free enough that the event falls on a certain day, I will go to

00:03:48 Speaker 2

various things like, for example, I did go to the Big Hearts raid event just with my pal because it was a bit of a laugh when we went.

00:03:57 Speaker 1

So was there anything in particular that made you want to go to that?

00:04:03 Speaker 1

Was it like a social media post or was there anything in particular or was it just...

00:04:09 Speaker 2

Yeah, I think we saw it advertised on social media and it's just kind of...

00:04:14 Speaker 2

Two of us were sat there and just kind of like, Well, I'll go with that.

00:04:18 Speaker 2

Would you use it?

00:04:19 Speaker 2

Yeah, and we're both off, so yeah, we can go by the sort of social media advertising.

00:04:26 Speaker 1

And do you know if that was the Big Hearts account that posted that, or the Hearts Foundation, or the club itself?

00:04:31 Speaker 2

Would have been Big Hearts, that one.

00:04:33 Speaker 1

Cool.

00:04:34 Speaker 1

Perfect.

00:04:36 Speaker 1

And what forms of engagement do you find the most valuable?

00:04:41 Speaker 1

Like what?

00:04:42 Speaker 1

as we mentioned before about the reminiscent videos, but what makes them stand out or how do you, how can you describe how they stand out compared to something else?

00:04:54 Speaker 1

Is it more than a small factor of it?

00:04:56 Speaker 2

I guess they're just kind of eye-catching while I'm just reading a wee bit.

00:05:03 Speaker 2

Video and media content certainly is more easy to come across than just reading text, for example.

00:05:13 Speaker 2

And obviously it comes from the main parts account in this example, that's kind of the one that you pay most attention to.

00:05:20 Speaker 1

And then do you pay any attention to, say for example, during transfer windows, does that change your engagement?

00:05:27 Speaker 1

Are you more engaged or less engaged then?

00:05:29 Speaker 1

And for example, the video content, are you more likely to engage with video interviews or sort of text posts like transcripts of the interview?

00:05:38 Speaker 2

I would tend to watch, say, if it's like a new player sign and they've had an interview with them, I would tend to watch that as a video rather than just read about it.

00:05:46 Speaker 1

Okay, perfect.

00:05:47 Speaker 1

And then this sort of leads into the next section, which is on perceptions of authenticity and trust, which is one of my research questions.

00:05:58 Speaker 1

So do you feel that your club communicates with support?

00:06:01 Speaker 1

Do you feel that your club communicates with supporters in an authentic and transparent way?

00:06:09 Speaker 2

I think so, yeah.

00:06:11 Speaker 2

Because they've always got obviously the daily sort of updates about the smaller goings on, but we do get the sort of once a month sort of update from the CEO himself.

00:06:23 Speaker 2

And I find he seems like genuine enough in some of the questions.

00:06:27 Speaker 2

The answer, it's not like they're putting out propaganda, which is going to

00:06:32 Speaker 2

Some people off off, there will be sort of a few called moon hailers that will just not believe a word.

00:06:36 Speaker 2

They say it from anyone because a guy they know that hairdressers, cousins, dogs, knows someone and all these rumour mill nonsense.

00:06:44 Speaker 2

So I tend to believe what comes out of the club as word has given.

00:06:50 Speaker 1

And do you feel that there's anything forced by the club or anything that could make it more genuine?

00:06:58 Speaker 2

No.

00:07:00 Speaker 2

Not especially.

00:07:01 Speaker 2

I know there's a lot of, there's some sort of fan Q&A at certain events, whether it's hospitality or shareholder meetings, and they're like legitimate people asking any, there's no filtering of the questions.

00:07:16 Speaker 2

It's just that kind of hand the mic out to the crowd and see what comes up.

00:07:19 Speaker 2

So there's, yeah, I feel like they're really as open as they could be.

00:07:24 Speaker 1

Perfect.

00:07:24 Speaker 1

That's, I think, for hearts, it's a pretty easier.

00:07:30 Speaker 1

on the authenticity scale compared to some other clubs of people I've interviewed for example of Celtic and at the moment isn't great.

00:07:39 Speaker 2

Yeah, I suppose the foundation makes that so much more easy considering we're all kind of invested.

00:07:44 Speaker 1

Exactly.

00:07:45 Speaker 1

And that's and Gogsy from Motherwell said the same.

00:07:47 Speaker 1

He was pretty open with like the Motherwell Foundation and stuff.

00:07:56 Speaker 1

How much do you, this is kind of the same question, but how much do you trust your club when it comes to communication with the fans?

00:08:03 Speaker 1

Is there any examples of where this was strengthened or damaged?

00:08:07 Speaker 1

So talking about hearts, we can look back to sort of 2010s and the Romanov era and like the club going into administration.

00:08:15 Speaker 1

Was there anything around that time or from there to now that sort of strengthened why you have this trust in the club?

00:08:23 Speaker 2

It just kind of went a bit wild from one day there was a article out saying we've got a week to save the club, we've got no money kind of thing, as opposed to now where we're getting lost.

00:08:35 Speaker 2

Yeah, we're up to 10,000 or how many thousands of foundation pledgers and it's, yeah, it would be, there'd be enough people in the foundation of hearts.

00:08:47 Speaker 2

kicking up a stink if the club was doing something wrong that we would all know about it.

00:08:51 Speaker 2

So that's what makes me trust them more is that the foundation does have representation on the board, but they also obviously represent us because we're the ones putting the money in essentially.

00:09:01 Speaker 1

And that's our strength in numbers kind of factor.

00:09:03 Speaker 1

Like there's so many people in the foundation and...

00:09:06 Speaker 1

Perfect.

00:09:09 Speaker 1

And do you feel that your opinion as a supporter is valued by the club?

00:09:14 Speaker 1

And have you ever had a chance to give this feedback and did it kind of feel meaningful?

00:09:20 Speaker 2

I don't think I could say I've really ever really given feedback.

00:09:26 Speaker 2

There might be sort of surveys and things, but I tend to ignore these for a lot of companies or places, whether I like them or not.

00:09:32 Speaker 2

Yeah, I wouldn't, I couldn't say that I really didn't.

00:09:37 Speaker 2

I've never had to voice a complaint about anything either, so I, yeah, very happy with it.

00:09:44 Speaker 1

And do you feel that the club values the supporters as a whole?

00:09:49 Speaker 2

I definitely would say that, yeah.

00:09:51 Speaker 2

They're always trying to do different initiatives, whether it's easier access for different seating or various different days for disabilities or whatever.

00:10:04 Speaker 2

There always tends to be some sort of representation for everyone.

00:10:09 Speaker 1

And moving on, this is into my second research question at three.

00:10:13 Speaker 1

This is sort of the differences in fan experience.

00:10:16 Speaker 1

So this kind of links into what you're talking about is, do you think that different types of fans experience engagement differently, like season ticket holders versus like armchair supporters versus online supporters, people that are out in the country versus people that are in more casual fans, et cetera, et cetera?

00:10:37 Speaker 2

And no, probably a lot of the points is always going to be a thing for trying to get tickets, whether you're

00:10:42 Speaker 2

That's, but that's going to be the only fair way of doing it, because people would want to go to say a final or semi-final.

00:10:52 Speaker 2

Realistically, they all can, or say a European away trip, it realistically not everyone's going to get to get a ticket, but you have to kind of prioritize the ones that have been doing it.

00:11:04 Speaker 2

Put the money, put the time in kind of thing.

00:11:06 Speaker 2

Otherwise, that's the way we do it.

00:11:08 Speaker 1

And do you feel like the sort of foundation members

00:11:12 Speaker 1

their voices would be valued more, and if so, do you think that's fair?

00:11:20 Speaker 1

Or, for example, season ticket holders, if their voices would be of more value.

00:11:24 Speaker 1

So, for example, just now there's a big thing with English football clubs.

00:11:29 Speaker 1

talking about how they want tourism rather than season ticket holders.

00:11:33 Speaker 1

They want one like fans that come to one match day and spend big at the store, etcetera.

00:11:38 Speaker 1

Do you feel like that's the same in Scottish football or do you feel like it's more season ticket holders are valued higher?

00:11:44 Speaker 2

I think it would be the season ticket holders would get priority over tourist markets, that kind of thing.

00:11:50 Speaker 1

And do you think that's fair?

00:11:55 Speaker 2

Yeah, I don't know the English league, that's...

00:11:59 Speaker 2

all about the show and the amount of TV money and everything, they've got to try and appeal to everyone.

00:12:03 Speaker 2

Whereas our clubs here tend to be more, we're part of the community, so you've got to look after your local people and prioritise them, but I mean, obviously, we would not, tourists wouldn't be unwelcome, obviously, it would be, but it just tends to be that, yes, more local people tend to care more about the club as well.

00:12:24 Speaker 2

So we're not as big a reason to go on a football holiday as, say,

00:12:29 Speaker 2

one of the English Premier League teams.

00:12:31 Speaker 1

Do you feel like that makes the club more authentic to you?

00:12:37 Speaker 2

Yeah, I would say so.

00:12:38 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:12:39 Speaker 1

Perfect.

00:12:40 Speaker 1

And do you feel...

00:12:46 Speaker 1

Do you feel that some groups...

00:12:48 Speaker 1

Hold on.

00:12:50 Speaker 1

I think you've answered this one as well.

00:12:53 Speaker 1

Moving on to section 4 is more on ownership and influence.

00:12:59 Speaker 1

So do you think the ownership of a club affects how its fans engage with it?

00:13:05 Speaker 1

So this is more talking about the broad generalisation in Scottish football.

00:13:09 Speaker 1

So for example, do you think fan-owned clubs have a different perception than privately owned clubs or consortium-owned clubs?

00:13:19 Speaker 2

Yeah, they probably do.

00:13:22 Speaker 2

For good and bad reasons, obviously we're a fan-owned club and we get to be part of the whole thing and we're making sure that it's got a safe future.

00:13:30 Speaker 2

But then there's also some people out there that being fan-owned makes them think they can make decisions or say if they don't agree with what the board's doing, they'll kick off and go crazy when it's, that's not how it works, but it feels like that's how it should work to some people.

00:13:47 Speaker 1

And from your experience, do you think that

00:13:51 Speaker 1

supporters of other clubs, do they feel like they have less trust or more trust if their ownership is a different model?

00:13:57 Speaker 1

Or do you not think it matters?

00:14:00 Speaker 2

I think it would definitely matter.

00:14:03 Speaker 2

The Celtic example there is this is completely different, whereas they've had the same owner for however many years now, but they just seem to be all about generating profit, generating money, and the trust is completely gone.

00:14:16 Speaker 2

Whereas in our example, we're

00:14:19 Speaker 2

Also, we're trying to make money just to spend more money, but at the end of the day, there's not shareholders trying to make money from the club.

00:14:26 Speaker 2

It's the fans and all they want is success.

00:14:32 Speaker 1

Perfect.

00:14:33 Speaker 1

And would you expect a club that is fan owned?

00:14:38 Speaker 1

So what would you expect the differences from a club that is fan owned compared to privately owned in terms of a fan engagement way, so not the way that the club's run.

00:14:51 Speaker 2

I think so many clubs now just have a focused social media team that will all try and do similar things, just engage with as many people as possible because that's the name of the game.

00:15:04 Speaker 2

So I wouldn't see as much of a difference in terms of what they would put out.

00:15:07 Speaker 2

Social media, obviously there might be certain statements that get put out by people that get read different ways or that comes back down to the do you trust what you're reading kind of thing.

00:15:16 Speaker 2

And I suppose the fan owned clubs should definitely

00:15:18 Speaker 2

tend to trust what comes out as gospel a bit more.

00:15:24 Speaker 1

Perfect.

00:15:25 Speaker 1

This is sort of the last section on your improvements and your thoughts about improvements and recommendations.

00:15:32 Speaker 1

So you can kind of run anywhere with these questions that you want.

00:15:38 Speaker 1

So what do you think your club does well in terms of fan engagements?

00:15:43 Speaker 1

Is there anything you've not covered that you think that's really good or they're doing that well?

00:15:49 Speaker 1

Can be mass experience, it can be online, it can be social media.

00:15:55 Speaker 2

Yeah, they do tend to run a lot of events for people, whether I can make them or not.

00:16:00 Speaker 2

For example, they've got the opportunity to pay to play at Tyne Castle coming up soon as well.

00:16:08 Speaker 2

So they're always getting people involved.

00:16:10 Speaker 2

We're getting a lot of youngsters involved.

00:16:12 Speaker 2

which is also looking after the future of the club.

00:16:14 Speaker 2

So that's obviously the best way of engaging just to get people and get them in young, get them hooked and build the future.

00:16:22 Speaker 1

And what do you think that your club could improve at?

00:16:25 Speaker 1

Any communication, transparencies, opportunities, et cetera.

00:16:33 Speaker 2

It's not, it's not.

00:16:35 Speaker 2

solely at heart, but when it comes to things like transfer windows, you do see a lot of rumours or leaks or ITK people.

00:16:42 Speaker 2

And sometimes you just want the club just to clear things up and just say, that's a load of rubbish, that's a load of rubbish.

00:16:48 Speaker 2

And obviously they can't talk about the ins and outs of every deal, but reading things from journalists an hour before a club will post something, for example, it's just all such the leaks are going to be there and that's what the journalists are trying to do, but to keep everything a bit more harsh with

00:17:04 Speaker 2

maybe be a better idea for certain things, but obviously just to say that's nonsense, another ways to be a bit more open.

00:17:11 Speaker 2

So I kind of contradict myself there, but does that make sense?

00:17:15 Speaker 1

Yeah, coming from the club first rather than the journalist.

00:17:18 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:17:19 Speaker 1

Perfect.

00:17:20 Speaker 1

And if you could change one thing about how your club engages with supporters, what would it be?

00:17:26 Speaker 1

That you've kind of covered that in the same question as before.

00:17:31 Speaker 1

Is there anything else you'd like to add about your experiences as a football supporter?

00:17:38 Speaker 2

No, I do quite enjoy that a lot more of the admins, a lot of clubs are going for a lot more banter posts kind of things.

00:17:50 Speaker 1

Yeah, Does that make you feel more engaged with...

00:17:54 Speaker 1

another club, for example, maybe at the moment a lot of clubs that are in the lower leagues are trying to adopt the strategy to try and gain more social media attraction.

00:18:03 Speaker 1

Is that something that would appeal to you?

00:18:06 Speaker 2

Yeah, because it's just kind of adapt sort of humour that I enjoy and that we would go and sit in the pub and talk about with as well.

00:18:13 Speaker 2

So it's obviously it can easily get shared in the group chat, even though it's a completely different team, it gets shared on people like and react.

00:18:20 Speaker 2

So yeah, it's

00:18:22 Speaker 2

Kind of more funny, pattern-based posts.

00:18:26 Speaker 1

Perfect.

00:18:27 Speaker 1

Thanks for your time, and I'll stop my recording.

Appendix 2 – Aberdeen fan Interview Transcribed

00:00:09 Speaker 1 – Interviewer

All right, let's go.

00:00:12 Speaker 1

So, this is fan engagement in Scottish football.

00:00:16 Speaker 1

The first section, the interview is split into four sections.

00:00:19 Speaker 1

The first section is more of an opening section to discuss.

00:00:23 Speaker 1

what your relationship with your club is like.

00:00:26 Speaker 1

So can you tell me a little bit about what club you support, how long have you supported them and how you watch the games?

00:00:34 Speaker 2 - Interviewee

I support Aberdeen Football Club.

00:00:38 Speaker 2

I've supported them for two decades, 20 years.

00:00:44 Speaker 2

You try to go up to as many games as possible.

00:00:46 Speaker 2

I live in Edinburgh, so going up to Aberdeen week in, week out is quite difficult, but

00:00:52 Speaker 2

I've tried to go up to a few games every year and go to a few away games as well.

00:00:58 Speaker 2

I watch all the games on TV, mostly, most of the games on TV.

00:01:05 Speaker 2

Yeah, so I try to go to as many games as possible, but it's quite hard.

00:01:10 Speaker 1

And how would you describe your sort of level of involvement with the club?

00:01:14 Speaker 1

Would you say you're more of a ******** fan or would you say you're more casual?

00:01:20 Speaker 2

I'm much more engaged, I would say.

00:01:23 Speaker 2

They're very engaged on social media and on, yeah, social media.

00:01:29 Speaker 2

I'm actually mainly engaged on that and I try and watch all the games.

00:01:33 Speaker 2

I would say I'm more towards hardcore than casual.

00:01:37 Speaker 2

I'm not a casual fan.

00:01:39 Speaker 1

Okay.

00:01:39 Speaker 1

And what platforms do you use to follow your clubs?

00:01:45 Speaker 2

Twitter, Instagram, those are the main two.

00:01:49 Speaker 2

Me too.

00:01:50 Speaker 1

And do you interact with the posts or do you just sort of like and repost?

00:01:54 Speaker 2

Interact.

00:01:55 Speaker 2

Interact with the posts.

00:01:57 Speaker 1

Perfect.

00:01:59 Speaker 1

So that's section one.

00:02:00 Speaker 1

So section 2 is on understanding fan engagement.

00:02:04 Speaker 1

So what does fan engagement mean to you?

00:02:06 Speaker 1

So how do you feel connected or disconnected from the club?

00:02:13 Speaker 2

I think fan engagement with Aberdeen is about kind of

00:02:18 Speaker 2

connecting to the community through displays, through the club, trying to get the opinions of the fans on side, trying to engage with them as much as possible.

00:02:38 Speaker 2

I think that's really the key for me in connecting with the club and connecting.

00:02:45 Speaker 2

to the players, et cetera, et cetera.

00:02:47 Speaker 2

I think trying to get the club to involve the fans as much as possible is the key in that.

00:02:59 Speaker 1

And what types of engagement have you experienced with Aberdeen?

00:03:05 Speaker 1

So like social media, campaigns, sort of matchday experiences, events or anything.

00:03:12 Speaker 1

So for example,

00:03:14 Speaker 1

with Hearts, the club that I support, they post sort of throwback clips and these sort of gain a lot of engagement.

00:03:21 Speaker 1

So like on this day kind of social media campaigns.

00:03:25 Speaker 1

Is there anything with Aberdeen that sort of has grabbed your attention before?

00:03:29 Speaker 2

Yeah, they do that a lot.

00:03:30 Speaker 2

They always talk about stuff that's happened back in the day, they do all that stuff, but they also do when it's a big player back in the day, like recently it was Joe Harper's.

00:03:41 Speaker 2

Joe Harper's

00:03:43 Speaker 2

birthday.

00:03:44 Speaker 2

They did like a big Tifo for him because he's Aberdeen's top goal scorer of all time.

00:03:48 Speaker 2

They did a big Tifo for him because he was part of the team that won the European Cup against Real Madrid.

00:03:54 Speaker 2

And that gets the fan base engaged as well because it's the club celebrating its history.

00:04:02 Speaker 2

The fans obviously get involved with the Tifo, you know, the ultras, et cetera.

00:04:06 Speaker 2

They bring their own stuff as well.

00:04:08 Speaker 2

So stuff like that, the club tries to do as often as possible.

00:04:11 Speaker 2

They did it for Neil Simpson last year as well.

00:04:15 Speaker 2

So which I think is pretty good.

00:04:17 Speaker 1

So do you feel like nostalgia is like a key contributor to engagement?

00:04:23 Speaker 2

Yeah, I would say so.

00:04:24 Speaker 2

I mean, for a club like Aberdeen that's got great history, it's certainly a key to get the fans on board.

00:04:33 Speaker 2

It also gets younger fans intrigued as well into the club and

00:04:38 Speaker 2

and the history of the club.

00:04:40 Speaker 2

I think it's a good way to get people to engage, not just go to a game and watch it or watch it on TV, et cetera, but actually think about the history of the club and the meaning of it as well.

00:04:52 Speaker 1

So in some of my other interviews, people have brought up like a similar idea or topic and they described it as

00:05:01 Speaker 1

if they can, the club feels involved with them at the pub.

00:05:05 Speaker 1

Like that's the kind of mentality that they bring when you bring up the nostalgia.

00:05:08 Speaker 1

Or do you remember when this happened?

00:05:10 Speaker 1

And they can use that in their own conversations.

00:05:13 Speaker 1

Do you feel like that's true?

00:05:16 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:05:17 Speaker 2

I would say so.

00:05:19 Speaker 1

Perfect.

00:05:20 Speaker 1

So this is section 3.

00:05:21 Speaker 1

So this is your perception of authenticity and trust of the club.

00:05:27 Speaker 1

So why do you feel, or so do you feel that your club communicates with supporters in an authentic and transparent way?

00:05:34 Speaker 1

So does anything feel forced or what would try to make it more genuine if so?

00:05:40 Speaker 2

Yeah, I mean it's mixed probably.

00:05:42 Speaker 2

I think the club can be quite tone deaf sometimes.

00:05:48 Speaker 2

we've not had a great season this season and the Cubs posting about Player of the Year ceremonies and stuff like that and votes and I think it's a bit like with the room guys, the fan base are really not on site at the moment.

00:06:02 Speaker 2

So posting about stuff like that when we've just been beaten by six games in a row is not a great look and then asking for season tickets etcetera and stuff like that.

00:06:12 Speaker 2

I think

00:06:14 Speaker 2

The club sometimes can be too focused on corporate stuff that's, obviously important for a club the size of Aberdeen to get the cash in.

00:06:23 Speaker 2

You need all that stuff to generate income.

00:06:27 Speaker 2

But I think sometimes they need to read the room, they need to see what the fan base is feeling and how what's going on and they don't do that enough.

00:06:40 Speaker 1

And do you feel

00:06:42 Speaker 1

Do you feel like it's the tone of the messages or the messages themselves that are that are causing this disconnect?

00:06:50 Speaker 2

It's not, it's not the tone, it's and the message itself, like listen, not every club tries to promote its season ticket sales, of course it does, but it's about the timing, like asking for people to, you know, phone people phoning to see if you want to buy, renew your season ticket just after you've been beaten 3-0 by Saint Martin.

00:07:09 Speaker 2

It's not, it's not a great time to do that.

00:07:14 Speaker 2

If you have to wait until an international break or something, though you've got a couple of weeks to be, for people to calm down effectively, you can just come across as tone deaf.

00:07:25 Speaker 2

And I know from seeing on social media, etc., that a number of the fan base are frustrated by that.

00:07:34 Speaker 1

And do you sort of trust your club when it comes to fans or is there sort of a loss of trust?

00:07:42 Speaker 1

from these messages when it comes to communication with the fans.

00:07:49 Speaker 2

Trust, I'm not sure.

00:07:53 Speaker 2

I think in the long run, I think in the long run, trust is, there is that trust, but it's tested, certainly tested.

00:08:08 Speaker 2

I don't think the fan base, I don't think the club necessarily lies to the fan base or is dishonest about things, but I think they can be swayed by...

00:08:21 Speaker 2

They can be negatively swayed sometimes by the fan base, so they're hesitant to say things when maybe as fast as they should.

00:08:31 Speaker 1

And, sir, do you feel that then your opinions are valued by the club?

00:08:37 Speaker 1

So do you feel like that they take the feedback, any feedback on board, or if so, they have support or meetings or anything?

00:08:44 Speaker 1

Do you feel like they're meaningful or they listen to the fans, like the responses that they get on, for example, you mentioned the season ticket post.

00:08:52 Speaker 2

Yeah, I think they do listen to the fans.

00:08:55 Speaker 2

I don't think, I think, they definitely do.

00:08:58 Speaker 2

I mean, I compare it to somebody like Celtic, where I think the board don't really care.

00:09:05 Speaker 2

one way mouth about the fans.

00:09:06 Speaker 2

I do think the Aberdeen board do care because when you come from a small club, smaller club, you can really not care.

00:09:15 Speaker 2

It's the lifeblood of the club.

00:09:16 Speaker 2

You can't rely on Champions League money or anything, or TV money, etc.

00:09:20 Speaker 2

You've got to have fans on board to make cash.

00:09:22 Speaker 2

So if you weren't valuing the fans, you would be pretty silly from a marketing perspective.

00:09:30 Speaker 1

And perfect.

00:09:31 Speaker 1

That's on to section 4.

00:09:32 Speaker 1

So this is fan experiences.

00:09:36 Speaker 1

Sorry, difference in fan experiences.

00:09:38 Speaker 1

So do you think that different kinds of fans experience engagement differently?

00:09:42 Speaker 1

So season ticket holders versus sort of more online or armchair fans or sort of regular match or home and away ticket, home and away fans that go to every game or more casual fans that maybe go to two or three games a season.

00:09:59 Speaker 1

Do you think that they can experience engagement differently?

00:10:02 Speaker 1

If so, how?

00:10:07 Speaker 2

Yeah, of course.

00:10:08 Speaker 2

I think there's different engagement fans.

00:10:09 Speaker 2

I think just going to watch a game in the flesh is much more of a vivid experience than sitting and watching it on the TV or watching a live stream of it.

00:10:17 Speaker 2

I think you get much more invested to see

00:10:20 Speaker 2

fans of all walks of life at the stadium.

00:10:23 Speaker 2

You see people who have maybe only just started supporting the club, maybe you see people who have supported the club for decades.

00:10:31 Speaker 2

I think it is, you do see a big massive difference in the way that, in how people engage depending on if they're not necessarily somebody who goes at weekend, week out and if the Arsenal goes weekend, week out, I think.

00:10:46 Speaker 2

From a club point of view, you need to try and to try and capitalise on the people who are regulars because they're the lifeblood of the club.

00:10:57 Speaker 2

They'll give you the they'll give you your cash effectively.

00:10:59 Speaker 2

They'll buy shirts, they'll buy season tickets, they'll buy promos, whatever.

00:11:03 Speaker 2

They'll do all that stuff because Scotland is maybe

00:11:07 Speaker 2

not a bigger, as big a league as the Premier League, etc.

00:11:11 Speaker 2

You can't rely on tourists, you can't rely on casuals who will buy shirts, etc.

00:11:16 Speaker 2

You've got to focus on the fans who will do it every single year, basically, with, you know, without fail, will buy a shirt year in, year out.

00:11:26 Speaker 2

You've got to focus on them.

00:11:29 Speaker 1

So coming on to that is, do you feel like the club prioritises more, like some sections of supporters more than others?

00:11:35 Speaker 1

And do you think it's fair if they do?

00:11:45 Speaker 1

So for example, do they prioritise maybe people who are going to every match more or the ultras more or different sections of the stadium?

00:11:55 Speaker 2

I would say they do prioritise season ticket holders more and people who go to away games more often, but I think that's fair because the person who's travelling up and down to Motherwell or Ross County or something like that, or is going to every single game, should get priority over somebody like me who doesn't go to every game.

00:12:11 Speaker 2

I think that's absolutely frank.

00:12:13 Speaker 2

I have no issue with that.

00:12:16 Speaker 2

So yeah, they do prioritise the sections of supporters, but they should.

00:12:21 Speaker 2

So I don't have an attitude with it.

00:12:22 Speaker 1

Does that affect your perception of the club positively or negatively that there's like prioritizing people who, as you say, maybe follow the club more home and away than people who don't?

00:12:33 Speaker 1

Does that give you, and does that make you feel more authenticity for the club or not?

00:12:39 Speaker 2

I think it's a positive.

00:12:43 Speaker 2

I mean, my biggest criticism of the English Premier League is

00:12:46 Speaker 2

that they prioritise the one-off tourists rather than somebody who's maybe followed the clubs week in, week out, year by year.

00:12:54 Speaker 2

I think it's a positive that Scottish football has that you've got so many season ticket holders that will follow the club.

00:13:01 Speaker 2

You know, you've got Hearts, Hibs, Aberdeen, Celtic, Rangers.

00:13:06 Speaker 2

Dundee United to an extent as well, and even Falkirk, etcetera.

00:13:11 Speaker 2

They've got such fan bases that will go everywhere.

00:13:13 Speaker 2

You know, Falkirk will take 1000 and a half fans to Aberdeen away, and that's a three-hour drive from Falkirk.

00:13:20 Speaker 2

You know, that's it's a decent journey on a Saturday or a Sunday, so fair play.

00:13:25 Speaker 2

I think it is a good thing.

00:13:26 Speaker 2

I think it is a positive for clubs to focus on the fans who give their all.

00:13:32 Speaker 2

I think I have no issue with that.

00:13:35 Speaker 2

I don't see how you can have an issue with that, to be honest.

00:13:38 Speaker 1

Perfect.

00:13:39 Speaker 1

So this is on to the next section, which is about ownership and influence.

00:13:43 Speaker 1

And do you think the ownership of a club affects how their fans engage with it?

00:13:50 Speaker 1

So for example, privately owned clubs versus fan owned clubs versus consortium owned clubs.

00:13:58 Speaker 2

I think fan owned clubs probably will see.

00:14:04 Speaker 2

greater involvement to an extent because you'll have more people who are willing to actively engage because they own the club.

00:14:18 Speaker 2

if you, I know that in Germany there's obviously the 51-49, which means that they've got massive fan engagement and that's what you see.

00:14:27 Speaker 2

You know, you see it's even down to the third division, you've got teams

00:14:31 Speaker 2

getting 10, 20, 30,000 people in a stadium.

00:14:34 Speaker 2

Of course, they're a much bigger country than us, but it shows that because you've got that fan engagement model, people will be more inclined to turn up in numbers because they care more about the club because they are part of it, you know, even, you know, they're not just buying a shirt, you know, they're part of it legally.

00:14:56 Speaker 2

So I get, it probably is a positive.

00:15:00 Speaker 2

I think

00:15:01 Speaker 2

Having an owner, if you get a great owner, it's great, it's fantastic.

00:15:06 Speaker 2

You get a bad owner, it's horrendous.

00:15:08 Speaker 2

And I don't see the fan ownership ever going as badly as, you know, an owner who comes in and sinks a club.

00:15:17 Speaker 2

You know, like we had Barry, Barry, obviously, a few years ago, owner comes and sinks the club.

00:15:23 Speaker 2

I don't see that happening under fan ownership.

00:15:26 Speaker 2

Hearts were obviously saved by it, so...

00:15:28 Speaker 1

Yeah.

00:15:31 Speaker 2

I don't ever see that happening under fan ownership where a club can be sunk just because of the sheer amount of people who will come and support it.

00:15:38 Speaker 1

And do you think that the transparency of the ownership model is important to fan engagement?

00:15:46 Speaker 1

So, for example, Celtic's owners at the moment aren't too transparent with their fans, so they've...

00:15:55 Speaker 1

your fans are unhappy.

00:15:56 Speaker 1

Do you think this affects engagement or positive engagement?

00:16:01 Speaker 2

Yeah, definitely.

00:16:02 Speaker 2

I mean, you see with Celtic, they are an absolute revolt.

00:16:06 Speaker 2

I mean, I know it's the board have basically been forced into a corner to allow the Green Brigade back in because they're that unpopular.

00:16:13 Speaker 2

And if they don't, they're, you know, and that's a total political move.

00:16:18 Speaker 2

I think fan fan engagement

00:16:22 Speaker 2

If you're if you're transparent as the owners, you're more likely to have the fans on site, because they'll respect you, at least for being honest, even if it's not good.

00:16:29 Speaker 2

They'll at least respect you for being honest.

00:16:32 Speaker 2

If you do like what the Celtic board did and throw a tantrum in a and storm out of an AGM, well, you've seen the results.

00:16:43 Speaker 2

And obviously, some fan behaviour is not acceptable, but I think the majority of folk can recognise that.

00:16:50 Speaker 2

And as long as you're open and honest, I don't think anybody can have any real, can really point any fingers at you.

00:16:58 Speaker 1

Perfect.

00:16:58 Speaker 1

So this is on to the last section, which is sort of your thoughts on improvements and recommendations about your club.

00:17:05 Speaker 1

So what do you think Aberdeen does well in terms of fan engagement?

00:17:09 Speaker 1

Is there anything that you see that they're doing better than other clubs?

00:17:16 Speaker 2

I'm not sure about doing better than other clubs because I don't follow other clubs as close as I follow Aberdeen.

00:17:21 Speaker 2

So as you say, Hearts obviously do.

00:17:23 Speaker 2

Hearts, Hibs, they probably do do similar things to Aberdeen.

00:17:27 Speaker 2

I mean, I know that Aberdeen have really put, they've really got behind the ultras in recent years and trying to improve fan engagement because I know season tickets have just have increased year on year on, even though we've been pretty poor.

00:17:40 Speaker 2

in certain seasons, which is obviously, a success of the ownership because they've obviously prioritised that.

00:17:49 Speaker 1

So would you say that support in the Ultras group is a real positive for in terms of getting fans engaged is back in these sort of subsections of fans?

00:18:00 Speaker 2

Oh yeah, they made a huge difference in the Ultras because they now exclusively sit in the red shed, which used to be the family stand.

00:18:10 Speaker 2

until 2022, until we came back from COVID and it got moved over, the family stand got moved into the Richard Donnell.

00:18:17 Speaker 2

And that's made a huge difference to the atmosphere of Pitodri and I think everybody is appreciative of it.

00:18:25 Speaker 2

So the fans obviously are engaged with that because it's made a difference to the team as well as the atmosphere of Pitodri and everybody in the ground appreciates it.

00:18:37 Speaker 1

And then what do you think your club could do to improve?

00:18:40 Speaker 1

So we touched on earlier, they were talking about like timing of messages, sort of losing a bit of authenticity or being a bit tone deaf.

00:18:52 Speaker 1

Is there anything else or you could develop that and anything else that you think they could improve on?

00:18:58 Speaker 2

I mean, it's probably linked to other issues.

00:19:01 Speaker 2

I mean, I think

00:19:02 Speaker 2

I think Dave Cormac, the owner, is he's out of touch.

00:19:06 Speaker 2

He's an old, he's an old, rich businessman who lived in America for almost his whole life.

00:19:11 Speaker 2

So he's so he's out, he's out of his depth in terms of he's probably not got no idea what life in Scotland is like.

00:19:19 Speaker 2

So his ideas of what will be good in terms of marketing, etcetera, and he's done well with the corporate side.

00:19:26 Speaker 2

Don't get me wrong, but the corporate side is much more intrinsically linked to the American

00:19:31 Speaker 2

American way than maybe the majority of fans.

00:19:36 Speaker 2

I think, the tone deafness of the messaging is just really, really ****** people off.

00:19:43 Speaker 1

And does Dave Cormack have sort of quarterly updates and stuff like that, and how are they?

00:19:50 Speaker 1

Are they the same tone?

00:19:54 Speaker 2

Yeah, I mean, to be honest with you, he's there much more often when we're doing well than when we're doing poorly.

00:20:00 Speaker 2

He's all for being in the spotlight when it's going well and having messages and blah, blah, blah.

00:20:05 Speaker 2

But when it's not going well, there's less and less spoken about.

00:20:10 Speaker 2

I know that our, we just, director of football came in recently and he was meant to be, you know, always on social media, giving updates, etcetera, with transparency, and then he's been silent.

00:20:23 Speaker 2

So

00:20:25 Speaker 2

Stuff like that.

00:20:26 Speaker 2

If you're going to, if you don't come out and say you're going to be transparent and you're not transparent, people might be critical, but they're not going to go fine, whatever.

00:20:34 Speaker 2

But then when you come out and say you're transparent and you don't be transparent, that's when people start pointing the finger.

00:20:40 Speaker 2

So I think that's the issue, Aberdeen, is there's too many undelivered promises.

00:20:44 Speaker 2

And I think it just needs to go back to a basic, a model of simplicity rather than trying to promise everything and underdelivering on everything.

00:20:54 Speaker 1

So too many promises that they're not delivering on loses their trust or loses your...

00:21:02 Speaker 2

Loses the belief, belief in what they're trying to do and what they're trying to say in the projects, et cetera.

00:21:08 Speaker 2

And then when you lose belief in the projects, you just start thinking, do they even have a clue what they're doing?

00:21:13 Speaker 2

And that's what stops.

00:21:14 Speaker 2

That's what starts fan, fan and disengagement.

00:21:18 Speaker 1

And is there anything else you'd like to add about your experience as a football supporter?

00:21:23 Speaker 1

Or do you think that, for example, results make a huge impact on the fan engagement?

00:21:28 Speaker 1

Like, would you still be facing these same issues if Aberdeen were doing well?

00:21:40 Speaker 2

Probably not.

00:21:41 Speaker 2

I think probably the club doing well masks a lot of things.

00:21:46 Speaker 2

If the club's winning every single game, I don't think people are going to moan about timing and messages.

00:21:51 Speaker 2

So that obviously, you know, that's just football.

00:21:54 Speaker 2

Football fans are fickle.

00:21:55 Speaker 2

So that's just what it's like.

00:21:59 Speaker 1

Do you feel like if the club is winning, it can paper over the cracks of these issues, so when they stop doing well, these issues become apparent?

00:22:07 Speaker 2

Of course, yeah, definitely.

00:22:09 Speaker 2

100%.

00:22:11 Speaker 1

Okay, perfect.