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BRAND ASSOCIATIONS WITH A NEW SPORT FRANCHISE: SPECTATOR
PERCEPTIONS OF TORONTO FC

(Spine title: Spectators' Brand Associations with a New Sport Franchise)

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by

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Graduate Program in Kinesiology

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Faculty of Graduate Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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**Brand Associations with a New Sport Franchise: Consumer Perceptions
of Toronto FC**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine spectators' level of brand associations toward Toronto FC, a new professional soccer franchise. A secondary purpose was to determine the demographic and consumer profiles of Toronto FC spectators and whether differences in brand associations exist within these groups. Four hundred and sixty-eight spectators at a Toronto FC game completed a written survey adapted from Ross, James, and Vargas (2006) that involved rating 32 brand association items corresponding to nine subscales: commitment, concessions, brand mark, organizational attributes, on-field success, non-player personnel, stadium community, social interaction, and team play. Commitment was found to be the highest rated brand association followed by organizational attributes, brand mark, and social interaction. Age, season ticket status, games attended, and supporter group status were the only variables that had significant effects on the brand association factors. Implications for sport managers involved in establishing brand equity for their product are discussed.

Keywords: brand, branding, brand associations, brand equity

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Agostino and Rose, for all of their love, support, and direction in life.

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The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the help, support, and encouragement of many individuals.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CERTIFICATE OF EXAMINATION.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	ix
LIST OF APPENDICES.....	x
 CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION.....	 1
Statement of Purpose.....	5
 CHAPTER II – REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	 7
Branding.....	7
Brand Equity.....	8
Brand Associations.....	13
Brand Association Measurement Instruments.....	15
Soccer in Canada.....	20
The North American Soccer League (NASL).....	22
The Canadian Soccer League (CSL).....	23
The United Soccer League (USL).....	24
Major League Soccer (MLS).....	25
Origins and Structure.....	25
Fans.....	27
Media.....	28
Facilities.....	28
Expansion.....	29
Toronto FC.....	30
Ownership.....	30
Fans.....	31
Branding.....	33
Rationale for Study.....	36
 CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY.....	 39
Research Instrument.....	39
Participants.....	41
Procedure.....	41
Data Analysis.....	42
Limitations.....	43
Delimitations.....	44
 CHAPTER IV – RESULTS.....	 45
Demographic Profile.....	45

Consumer Profile.....	47
Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability Coefficients of the TBAS.....	49
Effects of Demographic Variables on Brand Associations.....	51
Effects of Consumer Segment Variables on Brand Associations.....	51
Season Ticket Holders and Brand Associations.....	55
Home Games Attended and Brand Associations.....	55
Supporter Group Members and Brand Associations.....	61
Soccer Involvement and Brand Associations.....	61
CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION.....	62
Level of Brand Associations.....	63
Participant Profile.....	73
Demographic Variables and Brand Associations.....	76
Consumer Profile.....	77
Consumer Segments and Brand Associations.....	79
Season Ticket Holders and Brand Associations.....	79
Number of Home Games Attended and Brand Associations.....	81
Supporter Group Members and Brand Associations.....	83
Conclusions.....	84
Practical Implications.....	87
Recommendations for Future Research.....	89
REFERENCES.....	91
APPENDICES.....	101
Letter of Information and Questionnaire	102
Team Brand Association Scale Subscales and Items.....	106
The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Approval Notice.....	108
Intercept Scripts.....	110
Respondents' Ethnic Backgrounds.....	112
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	114

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Description	Page
1	Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents by Frequencies and Percentages	46
2	Consumer Profile of Survey Respondents by Frequencies and Percentages	48
3	Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach Alphas of the Team Brand Association Scale	50
4	Means and Standard Deviations of the Team Brand Association Scale by Demographic Variables	52
5	Means and Standard Deviations of the Team Brand Association Scale by Consumer Segments	56
6	Results of Multivariate and Univariate Significant Tests of Brand Associations by Consumer Segments	59

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Description	Page
1	Framework for Spectator-Based Brand Equity	12
2	Team Brand Association Scale Factor Names and Descriptions	19

LIST OF APPENDICES

	Page
Appendix A Letter of Information and Questionnaire	102
Appendix B Team Brand Association Scale Subscales and Items	106
Appendix C The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Approval Notice	108
Appendix D Intercept Scripts	110
Appendix E Respondents' Ethnic Backgrounds	112

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Sport spectators have a vast array of options from which to choose when selecting a sport experience. The numerous sport options and new franchises in new venues have created a highly competitive environment (James, Kolbe, & Trail, 2002). These numerous offerings are further compounded with aggressive advertising and sales promotion, which leads to over-saturation of markets and information overload (Nandan, 2005). With the overwhelming number of organizations competing for consumers, and considering a team's financial success is largely dependent on the creation of a devoted fan-base, sport teams must attract, develop, and maintain a relationship with a substantial number of consumers (James et al.). It is widely understood that winning has a profound positive impact on a sport franchise, which may lead to a loyal fan following. However, given the unpredictable nature of sports, sport managers are generally unable to control the outcome of events. As a result, many sport organizations have begun focusing on the long-term objective of establishing a strong brand and creating a positive brand image in the eyes of their consumers with the hope of increasing brand equity (Gladden & Milne, 1999).

Keller (1993) suggested that brand equity consists of brand awareness, and the favourability, strength, and uniqueness of brand associations formed by consumers. Brand associations, commonly referred to as consumer perceptions, are anything in a consumer's memory linked to a specific brand (Aaker, 1991). Additionally, brand associations in a consumer's memory represent the basis for purchase decisions and ultimately brand loyalty (Aaker). The team sport consumer forms a wide variety of brand

associations through the numerous experiences, feelings, and thoughts he or she encounters during the consumption experience. Further, individuals may react differently to the exact same event. It is therefore important to understand what benefits a consumer receives when attending a sporting event, especially given that the benefits provided by a sport product are intangible (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2000). Knowledge of consumers' brand associations can help organizations determine the factors that are most influential in developing strong brand associations, providing a clear identity, establishing strong positioning, facilitating the development of new fans, and strengthening relations with existing fans (Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006).

Although the "world's game" is generally considered to be soccer—commonly referred to as football around the globe—a lack of interest and mainstream media exposure has seemed to plague the game in a North American context. A study related to brand associations and the game of soccer in North America would aid sport marketers in gaining a greater understanding of the perceptions of sport consumers, and assist the growth of the game at the professional level.

Soccer is the most highly participated sport in Canada (Richelieu, 2007). However, soccer does not possess a mainstream, major professional sport profile like other sports in Canada, such as hockey, football, baseball, and basketball. Additionally, soccer has been unsuccessful in an historical context in Canada, first with the failure of the North American Soccer League (NASL) that operated from 1968-1984, and later with the Canadian Soccer League (CSL) that existed from 1987-1992. Major League Soccer (MLS), the current premier soccer league in the United States, awarded an MLS franchise to Toronto in October of 2005. The franchise, Toronto Football Club (FC), was

purchased by Maple Leaf Sport and Entertainment (MLSE). MLSE is an ownership group with significant resources and experience that also owns and manages the Toronto Maple Leafs National Hockey League (NHL) team, the Toronto Raptors National Basketball Association (NBA) team, the Toronto Marlies American Hockey League (AHL) team, the Air Canada Centre, Ricoh Coliseum, and General Motors Centre. Toronto FC began play in April of 2007 in a brand new soccer-specific stadium named BMO Field. Prior to the franchise's first match, the club sold all 14,000 seats it had allocated for season ticket sales—far more than the initial goal of 7,000 and more than the well established Toronto Raptors (“Going for goal”, 2007).

Through their first nine home games, the club experienced a sell-out for each game, averaging over 20,000 fans per match. The fans of Toronto FC also established an early reputation around the league as having the most passionate supporters in the MLS. The fans sing and chant throughout the duration of the games, and also travel to follow their team in other cities (“Toronto FC asks”, 2007). Additionally, through the first half of the season the club ranks among the leaders in merchandise sales, with replica team jerseys completely sold out and back-ordered (“adidas and Toronto FC”, 2007). The multicultural landscape of Toronto, which has deep ties to the game of soccer, and high levels of soccer participation in Canada, are considered to be central antecedents to the early success the club has experienced.

For decades, researchers have noted that it is imperative for an organization to evaluate its current public image, and the differences seen by important consumer groups (e.g., Gardner & Levy, 1955). Similarly, Ross (2007) discussed the importance of segmentation and stated that groups within a sport organization's fan-base must be

identified so that they can be managed appropriately. Differences in brand associations have been found to exist in previous studies based on the demographic variables of gender, education level, and household income (Darley & Smith 1995; Ross). Ross noted that this information is useful for marketers in a number of ways. For example, if a marketer is able to recognize that females identify with a certain brand association frequently, they will be able to target those female sport consumers. Additionally, sport managers can use brand association information to solicit sponsorships if certain segments of consumers hold favourable perceptions of a brand, such as those in an upper socio-economic class (Ross). A final implication from Ross's study was the importance of understanding season ticket holders in greater depth through segmentation. It is well documented that a loyal following is an important goal for many organizations (e.g., James, Kolbe, & Trail, 2002), as typically 80 percent of an organization's sales come from 20 percent of consumers (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2000). Ross highlighted this point stating, "marketing strategies may aid managers in the quest for increased retention and renewal rates among season ticket holders, and could be employed to promote advancement in loyalty rates" (p. 23).

Despite a very promising start, many question whether a professional soccer franchise can subsist in the heavily crowded Toronto sports and entertainment market, given the previous failures of professional soccer clubs and leagues in Canada, and the traditionally non-mainstream following of soccer. As common with most expansion franchises, Toronto FC encountered troubled times on the field of play early in their first season, winning just five times over their first 20 matches, and suffering extended droughts without scoring a goal. Many media personnel also question the support the

club has been receiving and dismiss the followers as “fair-weather fans”, implying their support will be short lived. Additionally, a meeting with Toronto FC’s Marketing Manager revealed the club was interested in understanding the fans’ perceptions toward Toronto FC during their inaugural season. Therefore, it was deemed useful to conduct a study to analyze the level of brand associations spectators hold toward the Toronto FC brand. While previous research has analyzed the brand associations of sport franchises, none have done so with an expansion franchise. The unique opportunity to evaluate initial level of brand associations held by consumers of the newly formed soccer club will assist the organization in better understanding their consumers, and potentially aid in enhanced brand equity and the long-term creation of a loyal fan following.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the current study was to examine spectators’ brand associations of Toronto FC, a professional sports franchise in its inaugural year. This franchise is based in a heavily crowded marketplace, in a sport that has traditionally failed at the professional level in Canada, and more specifically in the city of Toronto. A secondary purpose was to determine the demographic and consumer profiles of Toronto FC spectators. Therefore, five research questions guided the present study:

1. What is the level of spectators’ brand associations toward Toronto FC in its inaugural year?
2. What is the demographic profile of the Toronto FC spectators according to gender, age, household income, level of education, and ethnicity?
3. Are there any differences in the level of brand associations according to the spectator demographic variables?

4. What is the consumer profile of the Toronto FC spectators according to season ticket holders, number of home games attended, supporter group members, and involvement with the game of soccer?
5. Are there any differences in the level of brand associations according to the spectator consumer profile variables?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following review of literature begins with an examination of the concept of branding, specifically brand theory, research, and measurement models. The second part of the review provides an historical overview of soccer in Canada, leading up to a discussion of Major League Soccer (MLS), and Toronto FC—the newest professional soccer franchise in the MLS and the focus of this thesis.

Branding

A brand, according to Kotler (1991) is defined as “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (p. 442). In essence, a brand serves to provide an identity to a product or organization and to distinguish itself from other similar products or organizations. For example, Nike and adidas are both global leaders in the manufacturing of athletic shoes, sports apparel, and equipment; however, the two organizations can be easily distinguished through their brand names and respective symbols—the “Swoosh” for Nike and the three stripes for adidas. The management of brands has been noted to be of great importance due to consumers’ tendency to base purchase decisions on their awareness, perception, and attachment to brands (Gladden & Milne, 1999). Gardner and Levy (1955), who conducted some of the seminal research on branding, suggested that the long-term success of a brand relies on the selection of a brand meaning, determining the target market—as it is rare for a product or brand to be all things for all people—developing an image, and maintaining the image over time.

Professional sports teams have recently begun positioning themselves as brands and have undertaken branding strategies (Richelieu, 2004). Furthermore, Richelieu noted that, “becoming a brand can enable a sports team to position itself against other teams and entertainment offers in the market”, and can also “help a team capitalize on the emotional attachment with the fans, in order to instil trust and trigger fan loyalty” (p. 6). As such, it is implied that sport organizations must take a long-term approach to build, manage, and strengthen these relationships. The foundation for these claims lies in the fact that the benefits that fans of a sport team experience are primarily intangible or emotional. Unlike a manufactured good, a sport team offers a service and the encounters that the consumer experiences are for the most part uncontrollable. Sport managers are unable to control the outcome of events. Given this uncertainty, and the volatility of success that most teams experience, a long-term strategic plan must be initiated (Gladden & Funk, 2002; Richelieu, 2004; Ross, 2006). Most notably, this has led sport managers to turn their focus to an area that is considered more controllable—brand equity.

Brand equity. Researchers have focused a tremendous amount of attention recently on the brand equity construct (e.g., Berry, 2000; Faircloth, Capella, & Alford, 2001; Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998; Ross, 2006). Brand equity is defined as “the positive or negative associations with a particular brand name (or logo/mark) that adds to or subtracts from the value provided by the product or service” (Aaker, 1991, p.15). Keller (1993) stated one of the principle reasons for studying brand equity is to improve the marketing productivity by firms, given increased costs, and greater competition. As a result, marketers need to better understand their consumers to make well-guided decisions directed at their target market, in terms of positioning and marketing.

Both consumers and the organization benefit from the added value a brand endows. From the organization's perspective, a successful brand can enable it to maintain a high level of consumer acceptance, even in the wake of considerable competition. From the consumer's perspective, a brand can aid in triggering differences between competitors, and can signify quality and trust (Nandan, 2005). Ross (2006) noted that favourable brand equity increases the "the probability of brand choice, customer retention, profit margins, willingness to pay premium prices, marketing communication effectiveness, positive word-of-mouth, brand licensing opportunities, and brand extensions" (p. 23).

In the business literature, the work of Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) form the foundation for brand equity research. Aaker designed a model that suggests there are four main components that contribute to brand equity: (a) perceived quality, (b) brand awareness, (c) brand associations, and (d) brand loyalty. Keller created a conceptual model of brand equity similar to Aaker's and emphasized the importance of studying consumers' perspectives toward brands, rather than financial valuations, to understand brand equity. Keller noted that "customer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favourable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory" (p.2). Keller's conceptualization of brand equity stems from the concept of brand knowledge. Knowledge of the brand is defined in terms of two components: (a) brand awareness, and (b) the favorability, strength, and uniqueness of brand associations in consumer memory. Although Keller's conceptual framework for brand equity included two of Aaker's components—brand awareness and brand

associations—Keller considered the component of perceived quality as a product-related association, and brand loyalty a consequence of high brand equity.

Gladden, Milne, and Sutton (1998) developed a model for sport brand equity that built upon Aaker's (1991) framework, specifically in the Division I college athletic setting. The model proposed by Gladden et al. suggests that team-related (i.e., success, star player, head coach), organization-related (i.e., reputation and tradition, conference and schedule, product delivery), and market-related (i.e., media coverage, geographic location, team support) antecedents lead to the creation of four dimensions of brand equity as defined by Aaker—perceived quality, brand awareness, brand association, and brand loyalty. Based on a team's brand equity, six forms of marketplace consequences result: media exposure, merchandise sales, individual donations, atmosphere, ticket sales, and corporate support. The product of the antecedents, brand equity, and consequences subsequently shape a marketplace perception, and through a feedback loop, the perception impacts the antecedents and brand equity. Gladden and Milne (1999) later expanded the conceptual understanding of brand equity to include professional sport teams and recognized two additional antecedents: the design of a team's logo, and the stadium/arena in which the team plays. Additionally, the consequence of donations was expanded to "additional revenues". In their study, Gladden and Milne examined the consequences of success and brand equity as separate constructs of Major League Baseball (MLB), NBA, and NHL teams and analyzed their impact on merchandise revenues. Results indicated that both winning and brand equity significantly contributed to merchandise sales. Winning was more important to the sales of merchandise in the NBA, whereas brand equity was more important in the NHL and MLB. This is not

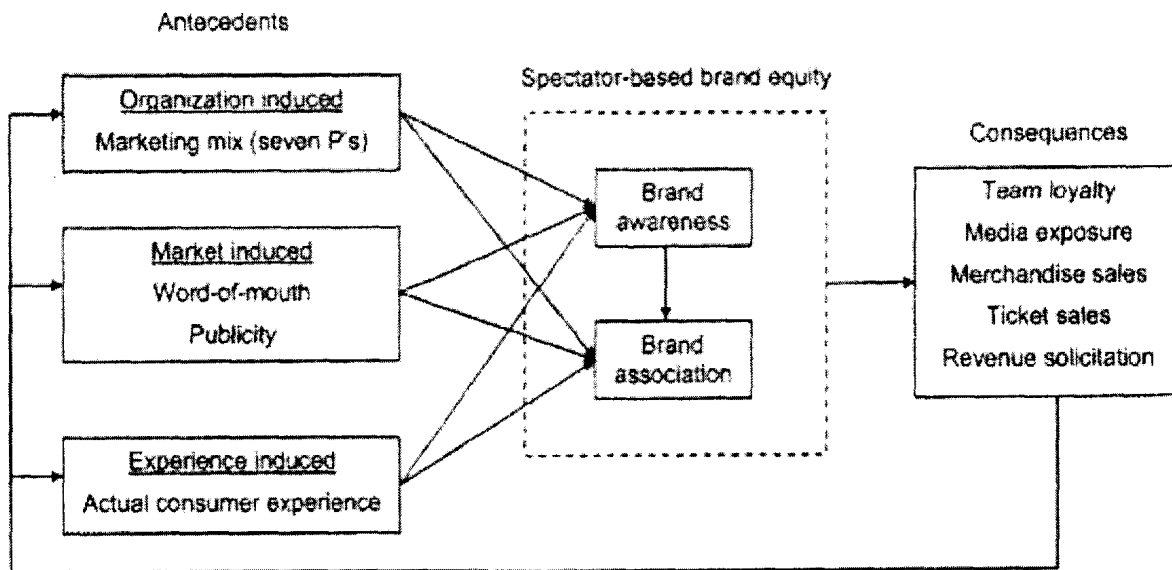
surprising, as many storied franchises with long histories, such as the New York Yankees, Chicago Cubs, Los Angeles Dodgers in MLB, and Montreal Canadiens in the NHL, are consistently leaders in merchandise sales despite not always having winning records (Gladden & Milne).

A qualitative study by Robinson and Miller (2003) incorporated the model developed by Gladden et al. (1998) in assessing the impact that the controversial hiring of basketball coach Bobby Knight had on the brand equity of the Texas Tech basketball program. Results indicated that media exposure, merchandise sales, donations and corporate support, and attendance all increased following the hiring of Knight as the men's basketball coach.

Although Gladden et al.'s (1998) conceptual model significantly contributed to sport brand equity literature, Ross (2006) suggested there remained some limitations with the framework outlined by these authors. Most significantly was the fact that this framework was based on Aaker's (1991) model of brand equity, which pertained to a physical good's brand equity and did not take into account the effect the experience of viewing a sporting event had on a spectator's brand associations. Berry (2000) noted the importance of understanding service brand equity and the inherent differences it has with a physical or packaged good. A service, such as a sporting event, lacks the tangibility that allows packaging, labelling, and displaying; however, brand development in the services is critical due to the experiential nature associated with it and the impressions generated through this experience (Berry). Additionally, service-encounter information is used by consumers in their decision-making process (Berry).

Recognizing that team-based sport organizations represent a service, Ross (2006) developed a model that incorporates Berry's (2000) service brand equity antecedents and recognizes the unique characteristics and experiences of spectator sport (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Framework for Spectator-Based Brand Equity (Ross, 2006, p. 28).



In Ross's model, organization-induced (i.e., the marketing mix), market-induced (i.e., word-of mouth, and publicity), and experience-induced (i.e., actual consumer experience) antecedents contribute to the creation of spectator-based brand equity, which is comprised of brand awareness and brand association. The combined result of these brand equity components contribute to team loyalty, media exposure, merchandise sales, ticket sales, and revenue solicitation. Similar to the model constructed by Gladden et al. (1998), Ross' model incorporates a feedback loop where the consequences of brand equity impact the antecedents.

The main difference between Ross's (2006) conceptual model and the one proposed by Gladden et al. (1998) is the heavy emphasis placed by Ross on the experiences of sport consumers in addition to the organization and market-induced

factors. As a result of their experiences, consumers develop perceptions of the brand, commonly referred to in the branding literature as brand associations. Additionally, similar to Keller's (1993) conceptualization, team loyalty is considered a consequence of brand equity rather than a component, and perceived quality is a type of brand association.

Brand associations. Perhaps the most important element in the understanding of brand equity is brand associations (Aaker, 1991; Keller 1993). According to Aaker, brand associations are anything in a consumer's memory linked to a specific brand. Similarly, Keller noted that "customer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favourable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory" (p. 2). Favourability occurs if a consumer forms positive brand associations. Strength refers to the quantity and quality of a consumer's information reception and processing. Lastly, a brand that is considered to be distinct from its competitors holds unique associations. The sum of all brand associations that a consumer connects to a brand is described as the brand image (Biel, 1992; del Rio, Vazquez, & Iglesias, 2001; Keller, 1993; Nandan, 2005).

Knowledge of consumers' brand associations or image toward a brand can greatly assist marketers. An organization can, through its branding strategies and advertising messages, seek to create a brand identity by portraying itself in a certain manner. Consumers may, however, evaluate the organization's message and interpret it differently—the brand image—which may cause a communication gap between the identity the organization is seeking and the image consumers form (Nandan, 2005). It is therefore vital for organizations to understand whether such a gap exists. Furthermore,

Ross (2007) explained that given the experiential nature of sport as a service, understanding the brand associations held by spectators is paramount in determining their various needs and desires.

Although there is a wealth of information on the area of brand equity, research on the areas of brand associations and brand image is somewhat more limited. Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, and Donthu (1995) examined the effect of brand equity on brand preferences for two competing hotel chains, and two similar household cleaners. Results showed that brands with higher brand equity generated significantly greater preferences (attitudes) and positive image.

While Cobb-Walgren et al. (1995) attempted to determine the effect of brand equity on brand attitude and perceptions, Faircloth, Capella, and Alford (2001) examined the opposite, more conventional theory, of brand attitude and perceptions (brand image) on brand equity. The study examined individuals' brand associations to fleece sweaters, which possessed different features (e.g., different colours, fabric types). Results showed that different combinations of brand associations resulted in positive brand images that significantly enhanced the likelihood of purchase intentions and willingness to pay premium prices, indicators of brand equity.

A study conducted by del Rio et al. (2001) examined the effects of brand associations on consumer response in the Spanish sports shoe market. It was found that varying brand associations led to consumers' willingness to accept brand extensions, recommend the brand to others, and also pay a price premium for the brand.

Gladden and Funk (2001) examined the relationship between 13 brand association dimensions and brand loyalty in United States professional sport. The study revealed

positive relationships between four of the brand associations and brand loyalty.

Specifically, fan identification, escape, nostalgia, and product delivery had a positive relationship with brand loyalty.

Ross (2007) used a cluster analysis to identify segments of spectators based upon the brand associations held for a sport team. The study was also used to determine if variations existed between the segments based on demographic variables. Results showed that two clusters of spectators existed that differentiated from each other based on demographic variables.

Brand association measurement instruments. Cobb-Walgren et al. (1995) noted that the measurement of brand equity fell into two groups: those involving consumer perceptions (e.g., awareness, brand associations) and those involving consumer behaviour (e.g., brand loyalty). While both have their advantages, Biel (1992) suggested, “consumer behaviour is, at root, driven by perceptions of a brand. While behavioural measures of purchase describe the existence of equity, they fail to reveal what is in the hearts and minds of consumers that is actually driving equity” (pp. RC7-RC8). For example, Coca-Cola is one of the world leaders in cola sales; however analyzing consumers’ purchase behaviour alone does not explain what drives consumers to purchase a product.

Cobb-Walgren et al.’s (1995) study on two competing hotel chains and two similar household cleaners examined the frequency of associations rather than analyzing specific categories of associations. Respondents were asked to list the names of brands in the category under investigation. Each time a respondent mentioned the name of one of the brands being studied the researcher would make a note. The researchers also asked

respondents about their experiences with the brands and recorded the total number of positive and negative brand associations. This technique measured the impact of brand equity on brand attitudes and perceptions. No psychometric testing was employed by the researchers, and there was no development of a scale to measure consumer brand associations.

Faircloth et al. (2001) adapted existing scales from other researchers to measure brand associations. Research subjects were presented with a package that contained experimental materials—fleece sweaters—and were asked to review each of the products and answer questions specific to brand image, brand attitude, and brand equity, which lasted approximately 45 minutes. While this study attempted to gauge initial perceptions and their subsequent effect on brand equity, it would be difficult to draw conclusions from the responses based on such a limited amount of time that the subjects had with the products and minimal product usage.

The research conducted by del Rio et al. (2001) examined brand associations' effect on consumer response in the consumer goods category of athletic shoes. Face-to-face interviews along with previously developed scales were employed by the researchers. However, the scales utilized in this study strictly measured only four brand functions—guarantee of quality, personal identification with brand, social identification, and status—and their effects on consumers' willingness to accept brand extensions, recommending the brand to others, and also paying a price premium. Furthermore, some of the scales employed in this study were old, and pertained to measuring a packaged good. A study of this nature would be difficult to replicate for a brand in the service setting.

Gladden and Funk (2001; 2002) provided the first attempt at examining the brand associations of sport consumers through the development of the Team Association Model (TAM). Following a literature review, 16 types of brand associations that may exist in consumers' minds were identified. The 16 brand associations were: star player, product delivery, nostalgia, tradition, logo design, affective reactions, success, knowledge, head coach, importance, pride in place, venue, management, fan identification, escape, and peer group acceptance. Focus groups were conducted to seek open-ended feedback about why individuals follow particular teams and why particular team brands were strong. Following pilot testing, 50 items representing the 16 brand associations were decided upon and placed on a survey questionnaire along with demographic and behavioural measures. A random national mail survey was sent out to subscribers of a sports magazine, who were asked to list their favourite sport team and respond to the 50 items on a seven-point Likert scale.

Gladden and Funk's (2002) framework greatly contributed to the literature regarding sport brand associations and equity; however, some limitations existed with the TAM. Ross et al. (2006) illustrated these limitations upon the development of their own scale to measure team brand associations. Ross et al. noted one concern with the TAM related to the wording of items used to measure sport brand associations, such as "the stadium enhances the enjoyment of *attending games*". This may present a conflict as the wording may indicate factors for influencing attendance and consumer motivations, not necessarily brand associations. Additionally, focus groups were conducted for feedback from participants about why they follow particular teams and why team brands were strong. Factors determining why individuals follow specific teams might, once again, be

related to consumer motivation and not brand associations. Lastly, the 16 brand association measures were created based on categories identified by the researchers through a literature review and not consumers. As such, the items on the TAM may not accurately represent the thoughts of consumers.

Given these shortcomings, Ross et al. (2006) developed the Team Brand Association Scale (TBAS). Eleven dimensions underlying professional sport team brand associations were identified through a comprehensive process that began with the use of a free-thought listing technique where individuals listed the first thoughts that occurred to them in regard to their favourite professional sport team. The researcher and two coders conducted a content analysis on the individual thoughts provided to identify the initial items for the TBAS by identifying broad categories in which the data were believed to fit. A confirmatory factor analysis followed, along with an expert panel review in order to minimize the subjectivity of the labelling process and establish content validity. The resulting formation of the instrument included 11 brand association factors with three to four items measuring each factor, for a total of 41 items. The 11 factors identified were non-player personnel, team success, team history, stadium community, team play characteristics, brand mark, commitment, organizational attributes, concessions, social interaction, and rivalry. A brief description of each factor is provided in Figure 2.

Understanding the strength of these brand associations can prove to be of extreme value to a sport organization. Knowledge of brand associations is vital information for sport marketers, as marketing and positioning strategies can be altered to enhance image and awareness. Important associations can be emphasized and less important brand associations can be de-emphasized (Ross, 2007). Additionally, given that a sporting

Figure 2. Team Brand Association Scale Factor Names and Descriptions (Ross et al., 2006)

Factor Name	Factor Description
Non-player Personnel	Thoughts toward individuals such as coaches of the team, the team management, and the owners of the team.
Team Success	Includes thoughts such as the team's success in competition, the perceived quality of the players, and the perceived quality of the team itself.
Team History	Historical thoughts regarding the team, the history of success, and the history of the team's personnel.
Stadium Community	Thoughts of the stadium in which the team calls "home", the community and area surrounding the stadium in which the team plays its games.
Team Play	Thoughts regarding specific characteristics that a team displays upon the field of play, how the team goes about scoring, and specific characteristics that may be ascribed to the team's play.
Brand Mark	Thoughts regarding the identifying mark such as the logo, symbol, and the colours.
Commitment	Thoughts regarding individual's affiliation to a particular sport team; regarding the length, continued regularity, and general notion of affiliation.
Organizational Attributes	Thoughts regarding specific attributes that characterize the sport organization as a whole; the organization's loyalty to fans, management actions, and brand personality.
Social Interaction	The idea of associating with others is reflected in social interaction with friends and other fans of a particular sport team.
Concessions	Thoughts regarding eating and consuming beverages at the stadium of a sport team; actual concessions at the facility, and the act of consuming concessions at the facility.
Rivalry	Thoughts regarding the competitive nature of sport, specifically competition among teams that are known to be historically significant competitors.

event is intangible and a unique experience for each spectator, the meaning and perceptions of the event may vary among various consumer and demographic groups. As such, Ross noted “it becomes crucial for managers to investigate and examine the brand associations across distinct subgroups of their customer base” (p. 22).

Although much sport marketing research in North America has been conducted on the traditional professional sports of baseball, hockey, basketball, and football, there is a dearth of literature on the sport of soccer. While soccer is considered to be the “world’s game”, it has failed to make an impression on the heavily crowded professional sports scene in North America. A study related to brand associations and the game of soccer in North America would provide great insight into sport consumers’ perceptions, and assist sport marketers in their objective toward the growth of the game in a North American context.

Soccer in Canada

With approximately 850,000 participants, soccer is the most highly participated sport in Canada (Richelieu, 2007). Despite these high participation figures, Canada remains one of the few nations in the world without a professional domestic soccer league. The extremely vast geographic area of Canada and distance between major cities has plagued the ability for a national league to immerse. It has been argued that the absence of a formidable domestic league has caused the development of Canadian players to suffer, despite the extraordinarily high participation numbers, as the country’s top players are forced to play in foreign leagues, making it difficult, and costly, to have the men’s national team training together for extended periods of time. The lack of on-field success for the Canadian men’s national team is evidence of this lack of development,

and poor infrastructure for the game, as they have qualified only one time for the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup—more than 20 years ago in 1986.

Unlike the men's national program, the Canadian women's soccer program has flourished. This is largely attributed to the top Canadian female talent developing close to home with some of the top players and coaches, and being able to train more frequently together. More specifically, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in the United States is considered to be one of the premiere development systems in the world for female soccer players. This has translated into success at the international level as the United States has been consistently recognized as one of elite nations in women's soccer winning two Women's World Cups. Many of the top Canadian players have been recruited to play in the NCAA and provided the opportunity to develop with great coaching and talented players. Moreover, a residency program financed by Vancouver millionaire Greg Kerfoot, has afforded the Canadian women's team to train almost year round prior to major competitions (Morris, 2007).

While the game of soccer is considered the world's most popular sport, and is the most participated sport in Canada, it does not possess the mainstream, major professional sport profile that other sports in Canada enjoy, such as hockey, football, baseball, and basketball. Rather, it is a game that is considered to be foreign, low scoring, and merely an inexpensive option for physical activity (Brown, 2007). Furthermore, Markovits and Hellerman (2001) noted in their book, *Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism*, that sporting culture revolves around what people follow and consume as spectators rather than the sport in which they participate. The game does have its share of followers, the

majority of whom are immigrants or have ethnic backgrounds with deep ties to the game (Brown). However, these individuals generally follow the professional game in foreign leagues and the national teams of other countries. Professional soccer has previously existed in Canada but has been largely unsuccessful in an historical context, first with the North American Soccer League (NASL), and later with the Canadian Soccer League (CSL).

The North American Soccer League (NASL). The NASL was founded in 1968 after a soccer fervor overtook the United States in the mid-1960's, primarily from interest generated from the broadcast of the 1966 FIFA World Cup. The NASL had a turbulent first few years as a league; however, improved attendance and a solid core of teams led to a sudden burst of expansion from nine teams in 1973 to 20 teams in 1975 (Allaway, Jose, & Litterer, 2001). Canadian franchises existed in Toronto, Montreal, Edmonton, Calgary, and Vancouver. This overexpansion brought in owners who did not have a common vision or the knowledge of soccer or sport marketing. A spending race followed this expansion to pay for the world's biggest stars to play in the league, highlighted by New York's acquisition of Pelé. The signing of star players and rapid expansion accelerated both the rise and fall of the league. Smaller market teams lost vast amounts of money paying ageing stars, and expensive rental agreements for American football stadiums that were much too large for the crowds the clubs were able to attract (Pons & Standifird, 2007). By the 1984 season, only nine teams remained and the NASL officially folded on March 28, 1985 (Allaway et al.).

At its height, the NASL received a level of media exposure soccer had never experienced before in North America. This exposure led to a considerable increase in the

number of both Canadian male and female soccer participants (Jose, 1998). In addition, the NASL gave many Canadian soccer players the opportunity to play and develop their skills against world-class competition. The Canadian national soccer team benefited significantly from the development of these players and for the first time Canada had an experienced pool of soccer players. This development led to improvements in international play, and Canada narrowly missed qualifying for the FIFA World Cup in 1978 and 1982. By 1986, Canada had finally qualified for the World Cup for the first time (Jose). The goal to improve upon this achievement was severely hampered with the loss of the NASL in 1985. Former Chief Operating Officer (COO) of The Canadian Soccer Association (CSA), Kevan Pipe, addressed the lack of quality ownership and professional soccer in Canada by referring to the NASL:

The NASL allowed us to develop high-caliber Canadian soccer players because these players were facing the best in the world, even though they were not in their prime anymore (e.g., Beckenbauer, Neeskens, Pelé, etc.). However, the NASL was not financially structured to survive (Richelieu, 2007, p. 438).

The Canadian Soccer League (CSL). The creation of a domestic league in Canada—the CSL—attempted to offset the loss of the NASL and continue the development of Canadian soccer players. The CSL began play in 1987 and was the first attempt to form a truly national league in Canada with an Eastern and Western Division. In the league's inaugural year, franchises were located in Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg, North York, Toronto, Hamilton, and Ottawa. The league began full of promise as a television agreement was made with The Sports Network (TSN), and the

league secured sponsorship agreements with Air Canada, Gatorade, and Hyundai.

However, high travel expenses and low attendance figures led to the league's termination following the 1992 season (Jose, 1998).

The United Soccer League (USL). After the loss of the NASL and CSL, the highest level of soccer played in Canada was in the USL, formerly known as the A-League. The USL is the second highest level of professional soccer in the United States and Canada, below the MLS, outlined in the next section. A total of five Canadian teams have been members of the USL with franchises existing in Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Toronto, and Montreal. Both the Edmonton and Calgary franchises enjoyed only brief stints in the league with Calgary competing in the league from 2002-2004 and Edmonton competing in its lone season in 2004. The franchises of Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto have encountered varied success in the league.

The franchise in Vancouver, known as the Whitecaps, has received relatively strong support from its fans during its tenure in the USL. The club averaged over 5,000 fans in the 2006 season (USL First Division, n.d.) in which they were crowned league champions. The Montreal "Impact", perhaps the most successful Canadian team in the USL, claimed the division title four straight years from 2003 to 2006, and averaged over 11,000 fans in its past two seasons (USL First Division). The successes of Vancouver and Montreal have led both clubs to initiate plans for the development of soccer-specific stadiums, both of which are expected to be constructed by 2010. Lastly, unlike Vancouver and Montreal, the Toronto Lynx experienced extreme difficulty developing a fan-base, averaging a meager 1,500 spectators per game in the 2006 season—the lowest in the USL (USL First Division). The team, which had trouble creating an identity in the

crowded Toronto sports market, also suffered considerable financial woes and was led to drop out of the league upon the announcement of an MLS franchise being awarded to the city of Toronto in 2005.

Major League Soccer (MLS)

Origins and structure. When FIFA awarded the United States the right to host the 1994 FIFA World Cup, FIFA created a stipulation that called for the US Soccer Association to establish a 'Division 1' national professional soccer league in the United States (Pons & Standifird, 2007). Founded in 1996, the MLS was determined not to make the same mistakes the NASL had made. Unlike the NASL's unruly and non-strategic approach, the structural decisions regarding MLS were always made with the overall survival and prosperity of the league in mind (Pons & Standifird). Specifically, the league implemented a single-entity structure to retain control of expenses—particularly player salaries, which are paid by the league. As Zimbalist (2005, cited in Southall & Nagel, 2007) noted,

In a single-entity model there are no individual team owners. Investors may be assigned a particular team, but ultimate authority for player movement, marketing strategies, television contracts, and sponsorship acquisition and retention lies with the league office (p.56).

Even with a single-entity structure, the MLS accumulated significant losses during their first three seasons amounting to over \$100 million (Southall & Nagel, 2007). However, the league was fortunate to have investors with vast resources and commitment. Among the league's initial investors were Lamar Hunt and Philip Anschutz. Hunt, who passed away in late 2006, is considered to be one of the greatest American sport entrepreneurs,

as he founded the American Football League (AFL), and maintained ownership positions with the Chicago Bulls and the World Championship Tennis (WCT) Tour (Southall & Nagel). In addition to Hunt, Anschultz, of Anschultz Entertainment Group (AEG), invested over \$100 million to maintain the league.

Until 2004, Hunt and Anschultz controlled nine of 10 MLS teams; however, their willingness to sustain losses stabilized the league and attracted new investors and ownership. Investors included adidas-Saloman AG, which signed a 10-year partnership agreement in 2004 worth \$150 million to be the sole official athletic sponsor of the MLS (Collins, 2006), and Austrian energy drink company, Red Bull, purchased the New York MLS franchise from AEG for \$100 million in 2006 (Holmes, 2006). Entering the 2007 season, there were 10 MLS team owners—compared to three in 2002—for the newly expanded league of 13 teams. Perhaps the greatest strength of the league's ownership group is its diversity, infusing the league with new perspectives and the expertise necessary to succeed (Mickle, 2007a).

As a result of this new found stability, the league implemented what is termed the "Designated Player" rule, which "will allow MLS teams to sign players whose salary will fall outside of the team salary budget and whose cost above the salary budget charge will be the financial responsibility of the club" ("MLS implements", 2006). The rule provides teams the ability to sign top players from around the world, to improve on-field talent, credibility, and visibility. The Los Angeles Galaxy took advantage of this new rule almost immediately and announced in January of 2007 the signing of arguably the world's most recognizable soccer player, David Beckham.

Fans. Both the United States and Canadian populations are largely comprised of a diverse ethnic makeup. Soccer is deeply engrained in the roots of these individuals, and for many is their home country's national sport. From its inception, the MLS made an effort to build an attachment with soccer fans and provide a soccer product domestically as an alternative to watching international leagues on television (Pons & Standifird, 2007). Many MLS clubs have conducted market research to seek information about their consumers and to better understand their specific needs and motives (Pons & Standifird). Soccer United Marketing (SUM), the marketing arm of the MLS, claim there are an estimated 80 million Americans supporting the growth of American soccer, with 22 million attending matches during the league's first eight seasons of 1996-2003 (Collins, 2006).

Between 1996 and 2004, the average per-game attendance for the MLS was 15,008 (Southall & Nagel, 2007). In its most recent season, in 2006, the MLS averaged 15,504 fans (Team Attendance Report, 2006), which placed them closely behind the NHL's 2006 average of 16,955 ("NHL Sets Records", 2006) and the NBA's 17,558 ("NBA Sets All-Time", 2006). Research conducted by the National Sporting Goods Association (NSGA) in 2006 provided insight into the demographic profile of MLS fans. The study found that the majority of MLS fans were male (63.7%), between the ages of 18 to 34 (61.1%), and had a annual household income of \$50,000 or higher (83.6%) (MLS Attendance Profile, n.d.).

Although attendance figures for the MLS appear to be healthy, a lack of media coverage in past years has not given the league very good visibility. Also the league is still considered a second or even third-tier proposition in the North American sporting

landscape (“Going for Goal”, 2007). Wilson (2007) highlighted this point, stating the 2005 MLS championship game drew only 854,000 television households in the United States. By comparison, the 2005 Super Bowl drew 45 million households. As a result, the league and teams are very reliant on gate revenues for profitability, and the development of a loyal fan-base to survive (Jewell & Molina, 2005).

Media. Media coverage of the MLS has been dismal in most major media outlets since the league’s inception; however, it appears that the league’s fortunes have turned. For the first 11 years of its existence, Major League Soccer never received TV rights fees; however, that changed in 2007 as ESPN, Univision, Fox Soccer Channel and HDNet combined to pay the league more than \$20 million (Mickle, 2007b). ESPN has promoted its coverage of the MLS under a newly branded night, “MLS Primetime Thursday”, which occupies an exclusive 7:30 pm timeslot for games scheduled to be shown on ESPN2 (Mickle). The ESPN deal was signed for eight years and is worth between \$7 and \$8 million per season (Mickle). It is hoped that the deal will assist in reaching a wider audience and provide the legitimacy the league needs by being aired on the nation’s top sports network.

Facilities. When the league began play in 1996, most clubs played in American football stadiums—much like teams did in the NASL—due to a lack of soccer-specific stadiums. These large football stadiums came with expensive lease deals, fan-bases not established enough to fill out the seats, and a resulting poor game day atmosphere due to the size of the stadiums. League owners had long sought new soccer-specific stadiums, which would be smaller in size (primarily between 20,000 and 30,000 seats), and could enhance revenue from the sale of merchandise, concessions, and parking (Herzog, &

Jung, 2007). The first soccer-specific stadium was built in 1999 by the Columbus Crew. Since that time, five more franchises have built soccer-specific stadiums in Chicago, Los Angeles, Colorado, Dallas, and Toronto. Two more stadiums in Washington D.C. and Salt Lake City, Utah are planned to be ready by 2008, and another in New York by 2009. The MLS now requires expansion teams to play in a soccer-specific stadium, or have plans to build one (Herzog & Jung, 2007). Ultimately, these soccer-specific stadiums indicate the continued long-term investment in the MLS (Collins, 2006).

Expansion. The MLS expanded from 10 teams to 12 teams in 2005 and 2007 with the additions of Real Salt Lake in Utah, and Chivas USA playing out of Los Angeles. This expansion has signaled that soccer is still developing, reaching new fans and markets. Both Real Salt Lake and Chivas USA tactically undertook branding strategies to identify better with their fan-base.

Former New York Knicks and Utah Jazz General Manager, Dave Checketts, a man with a wealth of experience in professional sports, purchased the Real Salt Lake expansion franchise in 2005. Real Salt Lake General Manager, Steve Pastorino, noted the Spanish name 'Real' was chosen because it is a very traditional soccer name and also because "Real stands for royalty, it stands for greatness, for certain expectation of aspiration..." (Pons & Standifird, 2007, p.408). Real Salt Lake attempted from the outset to make everything they do, from their stadium, hospitality, team jersey, and customer service a reflection of this statement. In addition, Real Salt Lake reached a 10-year agreement with world renowned Spanish club, Real Madrid, that brings them many advantages, including the joint training of young players, biennial games between the two

clubs, and the stigma of being affiliated with one of the world's top soccer clubs ("Real and Real", 2006).

The second entry into the MLS in 2005, the aforementioned Chivas USA club, was brought into the league by the legendary Mexican organization, Club Deportivo Guadalajara—commonly known as Chivas. This move signified the growth and acceptance of the MLS in North America (Southall & Nagel, 2007). Chivas USA, based out of Los Angeles, California appeals to the extremely large Mexican population in the area through its affiliation with the popular Mexican Chivas club. Initial attendance projections for Chivas were optimistic and the club averaged 19,840 spectators for the 2006 season (Team Attendance Report, 2006). However, following two disappointing seasons, the team's Mexican-American fan-base remained unimpressed with the on-field product and the club struggled to fill their seats in the 2007 season, despite winning more games ("MLS franchise notes", 2007).

In the spring of 2007, the MLS expanded its boundaries even further, appealing to an entirely new market with the addition of its 13th franchise, and first Canadian team—Toronto FC—playing its first match.

Toronto FC

Ownership. MLS officials announced in October 2005 that Toronto had been granted the rights to the first expansion franchise outside of the United States for a cost of \$10 million U.S. ("Soccer stadium starts", 2006). The investors behind Toronto FC were Maple Leaf Sport and Entertainment (MLSE), an ownership group with significant resources and experience that also own and manage the Toronto Maple Leafs, Toronto

Raptors, Toronto Marlies, the Air Canada Centre, Ricoh Coliseum, and General Motors Centre.

The awarding of the franchise was contingent on the construction of a new soccer-specific stadium. The building of a new stadium was also influenced by the need for a stadium in Toronto to host the FIFA U-20 World Cup in 2007. An agreement was struck between the federal government, provincial government, city of Toronto, Canadian Soccer Association, and MLSE for a new soccer-specific stadium. The 20,000 seat stadium was built at an estimated price of \$62.8 million, with the federal government contributing \$27 million, the provincial government paying \$8 million, the city of Toronto agreeing to contribute \$9.8 million and land worth \$10 million near the lakefront at Exhibition Place, and MLSE providing the remaining \$18 million, although MLSE recovered much of these costs through a 10 year naming rights deal with BMO Financial Group estimated at over \$20 million (“Toronto soccer stadium”, 2005; “Soccer stadium starts”; “Going for goal”, 2007). The agreement lists the city of Toronto as the owner of the stadium, while MLSE is the operator (Mickle & Muret, 2007). As part of the agreement, a domed bubble will cover the playing surface during the winter months, with the field split into three. The indoor area will be available for rentals and community use (Millson, 2007). Toronto FC began playing their home games in the brand new soccer-specific stadium named BMO Field in April of 2007.

Fans. Toronto FC experienced a very promising start to the season in their inaugural year. Prior to the season beginning play, Toronto FC sold out the stadium’s 14,000 season tickets by March of 2007—far beyond MLSE’s early goal of 7,000 (“Going for goal”, 2007), and later sold out the 30 club suites available (Mickle, 2007c).

This success was significantly aided by the announcement on January 11, 2007 that David Beckham, arguably the most recognizable soccer player in the world, had signed to play with the Los Angeles Galaxy of the MLS. In what has been termed “the Beckham effect” (“Going for goal”), Toronto FC sold 3,400 season tickets during the two days following this announcement.

Several Toronto FC fan clubs were established prior to the start of the season and created websites for the new team. The fans also met with each other to practice singing songs at the games, organized trips for the team’s away games, played in friendly soccer matches against one another, and discussed the day-to-day happenings of the team on their message forums among other things. This is consistent with what Wilson (2007) noted regarding the reliance of MLS fans on the Internet and Internet discussion boards to build virtual communities around teams lacking strong identities and traditions. The two largest fan clubs, “Red Patch Boys” and “U-Sector”, occupy a significant portion of the 2,600 supporter section seats in the south end of the stadium, and earned the reputation of the loudest most passionate fans in the entire league. Don Garber, the commissioner of the MLS, commented on the fans after viewing a game in Toronto stating, “we don't have too many stadiums that rock like this one. We don't have too many teams who have supporter groups that fill an entire end-zone. ... That's a pretty electric environment out there” (Molinaro, 2007a).

Another fan segment that Toronto FC capitalized on early is the very large number of soccer participants, and soccer community as a whole, including coaches and parents of soccer participants. One of the inherent benefits of having a professional soccer team in Toronto is the development of Canadian talent due to league imposed

Canadian player quotas. The quota calls for eight of the 18 players on the team's game-day roster to be Canadian. As such, the team has become a goal of sorts for young Canadian players to strive towards. A grass roots approach was undertaken by the team in building partnerships with soccer clubs throughout the province with the hopes of the development of a young fan-base—one that the club will hope to sustain for years to come.

Branding. Sport team nicknames, such as the Yankees and Maple Leafs, are commonplace in the North American sports landscape. However, MLSE deliberately chose not to create a nickname for Toronto FC. The acronym FC, representing 'Football Club', "is synonymous with soccer and great soccer clubs around the world choose to emphasize their cities' names" (About Toronto FC, n.d.). Given the very multicultural landscape of Toronto, Executive Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer at Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment, Tom Anselmi, noted, "we wanted the whole city to feel ownership and we want to provide the opportunity for a meaningful nickname to emerge over time." (About Toronto FC). Anselmi further commented, "Toronto provides the perfect backdrop for the world's number one sport given our city's diversity and affinity for soccer" (About Toronto FC, n.d.). In light of this perceived fit, Toronto FC appropriately chose "All for One" as their team slogan, indicating that although there are many different ethnic cultures in Toronto, and many existing alliances with numerous soccer clubs around the world, Toronto FC is a team for people from all walks of life to support (About Toronto FC, n.d.).

The logo of the team "integrates a traditional shield with contemporary imagery", and has the wording Toronto FC placed above it. (About Toronto FC, n.d.). Moreover,

MLSE appropriately chose the patriotic colours, red and white, as the official team colours “that reflect a strong Canadian identity” (About Toronto FC). This strategic move provided the opportunity to capitalize on being the only MLS team in Canada and gives individuals from all over the country a sense of ownership of the team. Their strategy appeared to work immediately as Toronto FC’s adidas designed team products experienced product sales three times higher than any other MLS team launch (“adidas and Toronto FC”, 2007). Demand at both BMO Field and sporting goods retailers across Ontario quadrupled adidas’ initial forecasts (“adidas and Toronto FC”). This is consistent with the findings of Gladden and Milne (1999), which states expansion teams experience high merchandise sales after unveiling their logos.

The combination of these many factors, and given that there are approximately 500,000 soccer participants in Ontario, make Toronto FC a promising brand (“Going for goal”, 2007). However, despite the franchise’s encouraging start, there are still many doubts regarding the existence and long-term success of a professional soccer team in Canada. To begin, professional soccer, in an historical context, has not been successful in Canada as previously outlined. Several other start-up sport franchises have attempted and failed to enter the Toronto sport market, such as the Toronto Phantoms of the Arena Football League (2001-2002), and others have been unsuccessful at generating and maintaining a strong fan-base, such as the Toronto Lynx, and Toronto Maple Leafs AHL affiliate, the Toronto Marlies. Unlike these franchises, Toronto FC has built a strong base of season ticket holders very early. However, many attribute this success to “the Beckham effect”, and the “honeymoon effect” most teams experience during their first season. Richard Powers, executive director of MBA programs at the Rotman School of

Management in Toronto, noted, “They are a novelty this year and to sustain that momentum, they are going to have to win.” (“Going for goal”). Andy Harkness, Vice-President of Sports with Toronto-based SDI Marketing, echoed this sentiment and stated, “I think their biggest challenge will be ...when the Beckham effect is over and the stadium is not brand new. If the team isn’t winning, or they’re playing 0-0 ties, Toronto FC might not attract 15,000 fans every week” (“Going for goal”).

Many contend one of the principal downfalls of the NASL was immigrants’ reluctance to follow the game due to the disparity in the quality of play compared to that back in their native lands. Bruno Hartrell, owner of the Toronto Lynx, who had been unsuccessful in finding a place for the Lynx in the Toronto marketplace, cautioned MLSE prior to their entry into the league noting fans “want the best soccer” (Buffery, 2005). Hartrell admitted that given the diversity of the city of Toronto, soccer is generally many Torontonians’ first sport. Despite the fact that the game is very popular among a large population of sports fans in Toronto, Hartrell stated that soccer “diehards” support teams from the “old country” —teams in countries such as Italy, England, and Spain – and will not necessarily follow a local team with less talent (Buffery). However, with the early success of Toronto FC, some believe that the time is finally right for soccer to succeed in Canada. Mike D’Abramo, of Youthography, a youth research marketing firm explained, “there’s no legacy for someone, say 35 and younger, of the (failed) history of soccer in this city (Toronto)” (Ormsby, 2007). Additionally, D’Abramo stated “they don’t have any baggage. They’ve grown up in an era where...most of their conscious life they’ve known there’s a North American-based soccer league (MLS) that isn’t embarrassingly bad and has produced some decent players” (Ormsby). In light of these comments, it

would be of particular interest to examine both the ethnic makeup of Toronto FC spectators and also differences in brand associations among various age groups.

Pons and Standifird (2007) noted that the power of the brand (i.e., brand equity) often determines the degree to which spectators will turn into paying consumers or fans, buying items such as memorabilia or clothing items that enable them to identify with the team. Similarly, Gladden, Irwin, and Sutton (2001), noted “the key for professional teams will be to differentiate their brand by developing and/or strengthening positive associations with team brands in the minds of consumers” (p.301). Pons and Standifird also stated that developing loyalty and turning spectators into avid fans and season ticket holders are key priorities for MLS teams, as loyal fans provide a steady flow of revenue, and guarantee the stadium atmosphere and experience to newcomers. A study examining the initial brand associations of fans toward Toronto FC would significantly benefit the organization in its pursuit of a loyal fan following in a heavily crowded market.

Rationale for the Study

Toronto, Ontario remains the most crowded sports market in Canada with numerous entertainment options for consumers such as the Toronto Raptors (NBA), Toronto Maple Leafs (NHL), Toronto Blue Jays (MLB), Toronto Argonauts of the Canadian Football League (CFL), and Toronto Rock of the National Lacrosse League (NLL) (Field, 2006). In fact, with the addition of Toronto FC, Toronto joins the metropolitan areas of Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, New York, and Washington as the only cities to hold professional teams in every major sport. As a result, the expansion of the MLS to Toronto raises questions of whether or not a soccer franchise can survive due to the crowded marketplace. Furthermore, there are concerns given the relatively

low profile of soccer compared to other major sports, and the previous failures of professional soccer in Canada. It was deemed of interest to study consumer's initial level of brand associations of this new product/franchise—Toronto FC. In addition, a meeting with Toronto FC's Marketing Manager prior to the season revealed that the club was pleased with the response from consumers, but they were interested in understanding the fans' perceptions and expectations of Toronto FC once the team had begun playing (Marketing Manager, personal communication, March 13, 2007).

Brand associations have been said to be the most important element in understanding an organization's brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Keller 1993). Given that sport managers are unable to control the outcome of events, it would be of great assistance to understand brand associations to help better position the brand against other forms of entertainment, and also to help capitalize on the emotional attachment of fans (Richelieu, 2004). As a result, the purpose of this study was to investigate the level of spectators' brand associations toward Toronto FC. More specifically, given the importance of recognizing various consumer segments within a fan-base, the brand associations of pre-determined consumer segments and demographic groups were examined to provide a clearer understanding of the differing perceptions of the club.

As stated earlier, Keller (1993) suggested that brand associations should be measured by their favourability, strength, and uniqueness. Furthermore, Bauer and Sauer (2005) suggested integrating measures of expertise when investigating customer-based brand equity. As such the consumer groups of season ticket holders, number of home games attended, supporter group members, and those involved with the game of soccer were included in the present study. Additionally, given the multicultural makeup of the

city of Toronto, and research indicating differences in level of brand associations based on demographic groups (Darley & Smith, 1995; Ross, 2007), the demographic variables of gender, age, education, income, and ethnic background were operationalized.

Knowledge of these associations may assist the organization in better understanding their consumers, and potentially aid in enhanced brand equity, and the long-term creation of a loyal fan following, increased ticket and merchandise sales, and greater power when soliciting sponsorships.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This chapter presents a detailed account of the research method, specifically, the research instrument that was used to collect the data, the participants that were targeted for the study, the procedure utilized to engage the participants, the data analysis, and the limitations and delimitations of the study.

Research Instrument

A paper and pencil survey consisting of three parts was constructed to determine the level of brand associations held by Toronto FC spectators, the various consumer segments, and demographic information (see Appendix A). Part A of the survey focused on investigating the brand associations of respondents using an adaptation of the TBAS developed by Ross et al. (2006). The TBAS identifies dimensions of brand associations, a major contributor to the creation of brand equity. The original scale consists of 41 items containing 11 subscales: *on-field success*, *non-player personnel*, *stadium community*, *social interaction*, *team play*, *commitment*, *concessions*, *brand mark*, *organizational attributes*, *rivalry*, and *team history*. Each subscale contains three to five items in the form of statements that pertain to the subscale. A review of the TBAS psychometric properties confirmed that internal consistency measures for each subscale ranged from $\alpha = .79$ to $\alpha = .89$, and had adequate content validity, discriminant validity, concurrent validity, and construct validity (Ross et al., 2006). Two subscales from the TBAS, rivalry and history, were not included in the survey for this study as the franchise being studied, Toronto FC, was in its inaugural season. Additionally, one item from the commitment construct was removed because it questioned whether fans had followed the

team for a long time. As a result, a total of nine subscales and 32 items comprised the modified TBAS for the current study. Similar to the original instrument, the subscales for the modified instrument contained three to five items, and the items were organized in accordance to how they were arranged on the original instrument. Participants were asked to rate each of the 32 items on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). To view the nine subscales and corresponding items please see Appendix B.

Part B of the survey contained questions that segmented the team’s fans into groups that could be used to look for differences in brand associations. Participants were requested to identify their ticket purchase behaviour (i.e., whether they were a season ticket holder, and also the number of home games they had attended), affiliation with Toronto FC (i.e., whether they were part of a supporter group/fan club), and involvement with the game of soccer (i.e., whether they were, or had previously been, a soccer player, and also whether they were a soccer parent, coach, or referee).

Part C of the survey asked five demographic questions specific to gender, age, level of education, level of income, and ethnic background. These questions provided a spectator profile and could also be utilized to examine differences between demographic groups (Ross, 2006).

A pilot study was conducted ($n = 15$) at a women’s competitive soccer match in London, Ontario for the purpose of testing the distribution procedure that would be used at the Toronto FC match, the clarity of the survey, and determining an estimated survey completion time. Minor modifications were made to the survey’s format based on feedback from respondents. Specifically, additional spacing was inserted in parts B and

C of the survey between the responses for supporter group names, age, highest level of education, and annual household income.

Participants

The participants targeted for this study included a random sample of adult spectators in attendance at BMO Field on August 18, 2007 for the MLS soccer game between Toronto FC and Chivas USA. It was deemed appropriate to study a cross-section of fans at BMO Field that was representative of the various consumer segments. Individuals who were under the age of 18 were not included in the study.

The projected sample size for collecting data was 377 adults based on a margin of error of five percent, a confidence interval of 95 percent, a population size estimated at 20,000, and a response distribution of 50 percent (Sample Size Calculator, n.d.).

Procedure

Permission to conduct the survey was received from the Marketing Manager of Toronto FC. Formal meetings were arranged in March, May, and July of 2007 with the Marketing Manager, and ongoing e-mail correspondence was carried out by the researcher to inform and update the Marketing Manager on the nature and purpose of the study. Approval was also received from The University of Western Ontario Office of Research Ethics (see Appendix C).

Throughout the course of the MLS season, each team plays 15 home games and 30 games overall. The survey was administered at Toronto FC's 10th home game and 21st game overall—almost four and a half months after the team's first game. The team had posted a record of five wins, 10 losses, and five draws up to the date of data collection. With two-thirds of the season completed, Toronto FC spectators were afforded an

opportunity to develop their perceptions and level of brand associations toward the expansion franchise.

In total, the researcher was granted 12 accreditation wristbands, which provided access into the stadium excluding the seated area, and two all-access passes, which allowed the researcher and one other assistant into the seated area to collect surveys. The researcher and a group of 12 volunteers arrived at the stadium at 12:00pm; three hours prior to the start of the scheduled match to allow sufficient time to collect completed surveys. The shopping mall intercept approach (Sudman, 1980), which elicits information from people at shopping malls, was employed for the present study. A slight modification was made for Toronto FC spectators as the survey involved written, rather than verbal responses. This technique was used at various locations outside and inside of BMO Field prior to the start of the match. A decision was made to administer the surveys prior to the start of the game to ensure as much consistency as possible in responses, and to eliminate the chance of emotions from the match affecting potential perceptions of the team. In teams of two and three, the researcher and volunteers approached Toronto FC spectators to voluntarily complete the paper and pencil survey. An identical intercept script was used (see Appendix D).

Data Analysis

The data for the study was analyzed using the statistical program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to determine the frequencies of the independent variables of gender, age, level of education, level of income, ethnic background, ticket purchase behaviour (i.e., whether they were a season ticket holder, and also the number of home games they had attended), affiliation with

Toronto FC (i.e., whether they were part of a supporter group/fan club), involvement with the game of soccer (i.e., whether they were, or had previously been, a soccer player, and also whether they were a soccer parent, coach, or referee), as well as the dependent variables of the TBAS subscales. The psychometric properties of the nine TBAS subscales were analyzed via Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients to test the homogeneity of the items in the instrument subscales. Following this, a one-way ANOVA with repeated measures on the nine TBAS subscales was conducted to determine whether there was any response variation between ratings of brand associations. Eight separate multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) were employed to determine the differences in the TBAS items according to the variables of gender, age, level of education, level of income, season ticket holder, number of home games attended, affiliation with Toronto FC, and involvement with the game of soccer. The multivariate test procedure Wilk's Lambda was used to determine any significant findings. Subsequent univariate analyses of variance (ANOVA) were employed for those variables with a significant effect at the multivariate level. A minimum alpha level of .05 was set for all statistical tests (Portney & Watkins, 1993), Bonferroni correction ($p = .006$) was used to control for Type 1 error rate at the univariate level.

Limitations

The researcher acknowledged the strong likelihood of a high number of non-English speaking or English-as-a-second-language spectators at Toronto FC games due to the multicultural landscape of Toronto and the ethnic following of soccer. However, limited financial resources prevented the creation of a survey instrument in languages other than English. As a result, data collected must be generalized to only those

spectators who deemed their English-speaking skills to be sufficient enough to complete the survey.

Another limitation of this study pertains to the fact that results can only be generalized to Toronto FC spectators at a home game, and not necessarily all Toronto FC fans, such as media consumers, as attitudes may differ between those able and unable to attend matches.

Delimitations

Although this is a study analyzing the brand associations among Toronto FC spectators, only spectators who were in attendance at the Toronto FC home match on August 18, 2007 were used as participants. This study was also delimited to adult spectators 18 years of age and older.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The August 18th, 2007 Toronto FC home game had an announced attendance of 20,178. A total of 480 surveys was collected by the researcher and assistants on the game day. However, after screening the surveys, 468 were deemed usable for the study.

Demographic Profile

The distribution of the 468 participants by gender, age, level of education, and household income is shown in Table 1. The sample was composed of 76.9% males and 23.1% females. Over 60% of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 34. Specifically, 21.6% were 18 to 24, 41% were 25 to 34, 20.1% were 35 to 44, and the remaining 17.3% were 45 years of age and older. An overwhelming majority (68.2%) listed their highest level of education as a college or university diploma/degree. Seventeen percent had a high school diploma, and 14.1% achieved a graduate or professional degree. In terms of annual household income, 18.8% of respondents claimed to have an estimated household income of \$120,000 or more, 18.4% indicated an income of \$90,000-\$119,999, almost a quarter (23.2%) reported an income between \$60,000 and \$89,999, 16.2% stated an income between \$30,000 and \$59,999, and lastly 9% reported an income of less than \$30,000. Twelve percent of respondents indicated that they prefer not to answer the question pertaining to their annual household income. The ethnic background question was open-ended, resulting in over 50 different ethnic backgrounds being stated by the respondents. Those respondents who listed two ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Irish-Italian) were counted as a half score to each group. A decision

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents by Frequencies and Percentages

Variable	n	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	360	76.9
Female	108	23.1
<i>Age</i>		
18-24	101	21.6
25-34	192	41.0
35-44	94	20.1
45-54	45	9.6
55-64	33	7.1
65 or older	3	0.6
<i>Level of Education</i>		
Elementary School	1	0.2
High School	82	17.5
College or University diploma/degree	319	68.2
Graduate or Professional degree	66	14.1
<i>Household Income</i>		
Less than \$30,000	42	9.0
\$30,000-\$59,999	76	16.2
\$60,000-\$89,999	109	23.3
\$90,000-\$119,999	86	18.4
\$120,000 or more	88	18.8
Prefer not to answer	56	12.0
<i>Ethnic Background</i>		
Western European	240.5	61.1
North American	86	21.9
Eastern European	26.5	6.7
Asian	22	5.6
South/Central American	13.5	3.5
African	5	1.3

was made to categorize the ethnic backgrounds based on geographic location. Almost two-thirds (61.1%) of respondents were of Western European decent, followed by North American (21.9%), Eastern European (6.7%), Asian (5.6%), South/Central American (3.5%), and African (1.3%). More specifically, the most prominent ethnic groups were British—consisting of respondents with English, Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish backgrounds—(27.2%), Canadians (20.6%), Italians (14.4%), Portuguese (7.0%), and Irish (4.8%). To view the full list of ethnicities provided by the participants, please see Appendix E.

Consumer Profile

Table 2 illustrates the respondents' purchase behaviour (i.e., whether they are a season ticket holder, and the number of home games they have attended), affiliation with Toronto FC (i.e., whether they belong to a supporter group), and also their involvement with the game of soccer (i.e., whether they are, or have been, a soccer player, soccer parent, coach, or referee). Season ticket holders accounted for 56.2% of all respondents, while 43.8% of respondents were non-season ticket holders. Just over half (50.4%) of respondents attended seven or more Toronto FC games, while 28.2% attended two or less games, and 21.4% attended three to six home games. Almost one-third (30.8%) of respondents belonged to a Toronto FC supporter group, while 69.2% did not belong to a supporter group. The group with the largest number of respondents was the Red Patch Boys with 51.4%, followed by the U-Sector at 20.1%. Soccer players, past or present, amounted for approximately two-thirds of respondents (66.2%), while 33.8% of respondents had never played soccer. In regards to additional participation with the game of soccer, 26.1% indicated that they were a soccer parent, coach, or referee, compared to

Table 2

Consumer Profile of Survey Respondents by Frequencies and Percentages

Variable	n	%
<i>Season Ticket Holder</i>		
Yes	263	56.2
No	205	43.8
<i># of Home Games Attended</i>		
2 or less	132	28.2
3 to 6	100	21.4
7 or more	236	50.4
<i>Do you belong to a Supporter Group?</i>		
Yes	144	30.8
No	324	69.2
<i>Supporter Group Name</i>		
Red Patch Boys	74	51.4
U-Sector	29	20.1
The North End Elite	9	6.3
Tribal Rhythm Nation	7	4.9
Other	25	17.4
<i>Are you currently, or have you been, a soccer player?</i>		
Yes	310	66.2
No	158	33.8
<i>Are you a soccer parent, coach, or referee?</i>		
Yes	122	26.1
No	346	73.9
<i>Respondents with involvement in soccer.</i>		
Yes	339	72.4
No	129	27.6

73.9% who were not involved in any of these capacities. An investigation into the combined total number of respondents who were involved in the game of soccer as a player, parent, coach, or referee showed that 72.4% of spectators were involved in the game of soccer at some capacity, while 27.6% were not involved.

Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability Coefficients of the TBAS

The means and standard deviations for the TBAS constructs are reported in Table 3. The *commitment* construct had the highest mean out of the nine brand associations with a mean of 6.18, followed by *organizational attributes* ($M = 5.39$), *brand mark* ($M = 5.27$), *social interaction* ($M = 5.26$), *stadium* ($M = 5.11$), *personnel* ($M = 5.10$), *on-field success* ($M = 4.94$), *team play* ($M = 4.91$), and *concessions* ($M = 4.50$). Standard deviations ranged from 1.09 to 1.56. With the exception of *on-field success* ($\alpha = 0.66$), the internal consistency measures for each construct scored above the generally accepted .70 level (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Despite the *on-field success* variable scoring under the .70 level, it was decided to retain this variable in the analysis as the study was exploratory in nature; however, caution should be exercised when making inferences regarding *on-field success* ratings.

A one-way ANOVA with repeated measures on the nine TBAS scales was conducted as a follow-up to the Cronbach alpha test in order to determine whether there were any significant differences in the ranking of the brand associations. Results indicated significant main effects, $F(8, 460) = 142.27, p < .001$, and that there appeared to be four groupings, which can be found marked in Table 3. Post-hoc Bonferroni pairwise comparisons indicated that spectators rated *commitment* ($M = 6.18$) significantly higher than the other brand associations ($p < .05$). The second grouping of brand

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach Alphas of the Team Brand Association Scale

Variable	n	M	SD	α
Commitment	467	6.18	1.09	0.79
Organizational Attributes	464	5.39	1.26	0.77
Brand Mark	467	5.27	1.42	0.73
Social Interaction	466	5.26	1.42	0.78
Stadium	467	5.11	1.41	0.75
Personnel	465	5.10	1.24	0.75
On-Field Success	467	4.94	1.48	0.66
Team Play	467	4.91	1.24	0.72
Concessions	467	4.50	1.56	0.77

Note. — denotes critical breaks in *M* ratings

associations included *organizational attributes* ($M = 5.39$), *brand mark* ($M = 5.27$), *social interaction* ($M = 5.26$), *stadium community* ($M = 5.11$), and *non-player personnel* ($M = 5.10$). The third grouping of brand associations consisted of *on-field success* ($M = 4.94$) and *team play* ($M = 4.91$). The final grouping, and lowest rated brand association was *concessions* ($M = 4.50$).

Effects of Demographic Variables on Brand Associations

The means and standard deviations for the nine brand association factors (dependent variables) according to the demographic variables (independent variables) of gender, age, level of education, and household income are presented in Table 4. Due to varying participant numbers for the ethnic background variable, means and standard deviations are not reported. A decision was made to run separate MANOVAs for the demographic variables as the research being conducted was exploratory in nature. Four MANOVAs were conducted to determine whether the four demographic variables had any effect on the brand association factors. Age was the only factor with a significant effect. Specifically, the multivariate effect of age on the nine brand associations was significant, Wilks' Lambda = .90, $F(4, 463) = 1.43$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$. However, using a Bonferroni adjustment ($p < .006$) to control for Type 1 error, the subsequent univariate analyses showed no significant effects. For the multivariate and univariate analyses, the age categories 55 to 64, and 65 or older were collapsed into one group (55 and older) for a more balanced analysis based on numbers.

Effects of Consumer Segment Variables on Brand Associations

The means and standard deviations for the nine brand association factors according to the four consumer segment variables of season ticket holder, home games

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations of the Team Brand Association Scale by Demographic Variables

Variable	Commitment			Concessions			Brand Mark		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
<i>Gender</i>									
Male	359	6.16	1.09	359	4.48	1.55	359	5.23	1.44
Female	108	6.27	1.09	108	4.56	1.62	107	5.40	1.35
<i>Age</i>									
18-24	100	6.04	1.15	101	4.51	1.49	101	5.18	1.41
25-34	192	6.17	1.10	192	4.50	1.57	191	5.13	1.46
35-44	94	6.31	1.00	94	4.56	1.47	94	5.44	1.41
45-54	45	6.30	1.02	45	4.41	1.77	45	5.50	1.39
55 or older	36	6.14	1.21	36	4.32	1.67	36	5.56	1.23
<i>Level of Education</i>									
High School or lower	82	6.09	1.07	83	4.67	1.53	82	5.41	1.32
College/University	319	6.20	1.09	319	4.49	1.54	319	5.32	1.38
Graduate/Professional	66	6.19	1.15	66	4.31	1.68	66	4.87	1.66
<i>Household Income</i>									
Less than \$30,000	42	6.18	1.08	42	4.24	1.61	42	5.43	1.45
\$30,000-\$59,999	76	6.15	1.17	76	4.72	1.52	76	5.13	1.36
\$60,000-\$89,999	108	6.10	1.07	109	4.51	1.44	109	5.22	1.47
\$90,000-\$119,999	86	6.22	1.09	86	4.49	1.59	86	5.36	1.45
\$120,000 or more	88	6.23	1.11	88	4.51	1.60	87	5.30	1.37

Table 4 (cont.)

Variable	Organizational			Success			Personnel		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
<i>Gender</i>									
Male	357	5.37	1.27	359	4.89	1.49	357	5.08	1.27
Female	107	5.44	1.23	108	5.08	1.43	107	5.18	1.15
<i>Age</i>									
18-24	101	5.27	1.25	101	4.89	1.48	100	4.92	1.24
25-34	190	5.30	1.24	191	4.93	1.42	191	5.10	1.23
35-44	94	5.52	1.27	94	4.99	1.47	93	5.11	1.23
45-54	45	5.48	1.30	45	5.07	1.58	45	5.32	1.30
55 or older	36	5.71	1.20	36	4.78	1.63	36	5.33	1.24
<i>Level of Education</i>									
High School or lower	82	5.50	1.23	83	4.93	1.48	82	5.21	1.22
College/University	317	5.38	1.24	318	4.96	1.45	316	5.10	1.21
Graduate/Professional	66	5.28	1.36	66	4.82	1.59	66	4.97	1.38
<i>Household Income</i>									
Less than \$30,000	42	5.42	1.24	42	4.80	1.60	42	5.08	1.33
\$30,000-\$59,999	75	5.53	1.16	76	5.05	1.42	76	5.17	1.23
\$60,000-\$89,999	108	5.29	1.19	109	4.87	1.37	107	5.11	1.13
\$90,000-\$119,999	86	5.48	1.26	86	5.17	1.49	86	5.17	1.30
\$120,000 or more	87	5.29	1.30	88	4.84	1.50	87	5.10	1.18

Table 4 (cont.)

Variable	Stadium			Social			Team Play		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
<i>Gender</i>									
Male	359	5.07	1.41	359	5.26	1.42	359	4.86	1.23
Female	108	5.25	1.4	108	5.26	1.4	108	5.08	1.28
<i>Age</i>									
18-24	101	5.16	1.37	101	5.24	1.31	101	4.92	1.21
25-34	192	5.06	1.43	192	5.30	1.41	192	4.83	1.29
35-44	94	5.02	1.41	94	5.31	1.46	94	4.98	1.16
45-54	45	5.25	1.33	45	5.22	1.53	45	5.13	1.24
55 or older	36	5.32	1.56	36	5.09	1.44	36	4.88	1.30
<i>Level of Education</i>									
High School or lower	83	5.27	1.41	83	5.36	1.39	83	5.01	1.10
College/University	318	5.09	1.36	318	5.23	1.41	318	4.94	1.22
Graduate/Professional	66	5.05	1.63	66	5.29	1.49	66	4.67	1.48
<i>Household Income</i>									
Less than \$30,000	42	5.25	1.46	42	5.30	1.40	42	5.07	1.27
\$30,000-\$59,999	76	5.02	1.39	76	5.23	1.35	76	4.98	1.21
\$60,000-\$89,999	109	5.13	1.28	109	5.24	1.39	109	4.91	1.14
\$90,000-\$119,999	86	5.04	1.51	86	5.45	1.43	86	5.07	1.30
\$120,000 or more	88	5.12	1.43	88	5.13	1.45	88	4.83	1.25

attended, supporter group member, and soccer participant are presented in Table 5. Due to varying participant numbers for the supporter group name variable, means and standard deviations are not reported. The results of the multivariate and univariate ANOVAs with the brand associations are presented in Table 6.

Season ticket holders and brand associations. The multivariate effect of season ticket holders on the nine brand associations was significant, Wilks' Lamda = .93, $F(1, 466) = 3.84, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$. Using a Bonferroni adjustment, ($p < .006$), significant univariate effects were found on six out of the nine brand associations. More specifically, season ticket holders ($M = 6.34$) rated the brand association *commitment*, $F(1, 466) = 17.48, p < .006, \eta^2 = .04$, significantly higher than non-season ticket holders ($M = 5.98$). Also, season ticket holders ($M = 5.41$) rated the brand association *brand mark*, $F(1, 466) = 7.94, p < .006, \eta^2 = .02$, significantly higher than non-season ticket holders ($M = 5.09$). In addition, season ticket holders ($M = 5.55$) were found to rate the brand association *organizational attributes*, $F(1, 466) = 18.54, p < .006, \eta^2 = .04$, significantly higher than non-season ticket holders ($M = 5.18$). As well, season ticket holders ($M = 5.05$) rated the brand association *on-field success*, $F(1, 466) = 7.85, p < .006, \eta^2 = .02$, significantly higher than non-season ticket holders ($M = 4.80$). Season ticket holders ($M = 5.28$) also rated *non-player personnel*, $F(1, 466) = 18.70, p < .006, \eta^2 = .04$, significantly higher than non-season ticket holders ($M = 4.87$). Lastly, season ticket holders ($M = 5.42$) rated the brand association *social interaction*, $F(1, 466) = 12.21, p < .006, \eta^2 = .03$, significantly higher than non-season ticket holders ($M = 5.06$).

Home games attended and brand associations. The multivariate effect of home games attended on the nine brand associations was significant, Wilks' Lamda = .85, $F(2,$

Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations of the Team Brand Association Scale by Consumer Segments

Variable	Commitment			Concessions			Brand Mark		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
<i>Season Ticket Holder</i>									
Yes	262	6.34	0.97	263	4.49	1.65	263	5.41	1.41
No	205	5.98	1.21	205	4.50	1.44	204	5.09	1.42
<i># of Home Games Attended</i>									
2 or less	132	5.77	1.30	131	4.45	1.41	131	4.93	1.37
3 to 6	100	6.20	1.10	100	4.47	1.52	100	5.28	1.39
7 or more	235	6.40	0.89	236	4.53	1.66	236	5.46	1.42
<i>Belong to a Supporter Group?</i>									
Yes	143	6.31	1.06	144	4.53	1.54	144	5.37	1.42
No	324	6.13	1.10	323	4.48	1.58	323	5.23	1.42
<i>Are you currently, or have you been, a soccer player?</i>									
Yes	309	6.17	1.09	310	4.46	1.55	309	5.25	1.43
No	158	6.20	1.10	157	4.56	1.58	158	5.32	1.42
<i>Are you a soccer parent, coach, or referee?</i>									
Yes	122	6.09	1.18	122	4.52	1.55	121	5.36	1.40
No	345	6.21	1.06	345	4.49	1.57	345	5.24	1.43

Table 5 (cont.)

Variable	Organizational			Success			Personnel		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
<i>Season Ticket Holder</i>									
Yes	261	5.55	1.27	263	5.05	1.50	261	5.28	1.24
No	203	5.18	1.20	204	4.80	1.45	203	4.87	1.23
<i># of Home Games Attended</i>									
2 or less	130	5.07	1.20	132	4.74	1.46	131	4.70	1.15
3 to 6	99	5.32	1.20	100	4.90	1.41	99	5.12	1.17
7 or more	235	5.59	1.27	236	5.05	1.51	235	5.31	1.26
<i>Belong to a Supporter Group?</i>									
Yes	143	5.55	1.23	144	5.16	1.46	143	5.26	1.28
No	321	5.31	1.26	323	4.84	1.48	321	5.03	1.21
<i>Are you currently, or have you been, a soccer player?</i>									
Yes	308	5.37	1.27	309	4.92	1.49	308	5.12	1.23
No	156	5.42	1.24	158	4.96	1.46	156	5.05	1.25
<i>Are you a soccer parent, coach, or referee?</i>									
Yes	121	5.40	1.28	122	4.90	1.51	121	5.15	1.30
No	343	5.38	1.25	345	4.95	1.47	344	5.08	1.22

Table 5 (cont.)

Variable	Stadium			Social			Team Play		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
<i>Season Ticket Holder</i>									
Yes	263	5.17	1.43	262	5.42	1.43	263	5.02	1.23
No	204	5.04	1.38	204	5.06	1.37	205	4.78	1.26
<i># of Home Games Attended</i>									
2 or less	131	4.97	1.40	132	4.93	1.39	132	4.67	1.24
3 to 6	100	5.20	1.32	99	5.16	1.37	100	5.03	1.27
7 or more	236	5.16	1.45	235	5.49	1.41	236	5.00	1.22
<i>Belong to a Supporter Group?</i>									
Yes	144	5.13	1.38	144	5.59	1.35	144	5.11	1.23
No	323	5.11	1.43	323	5.11	1.41	323	4.83	1.24
<i>Are you currently, or have you been, a soccer player?</i>									
Yes	309	5.07	1.42	309	5.32	1.37	310	4.88	1.25
No	158	5.20	1.40	158	5.15	1.51	157	4.98	1.24
<i>Are you a soccer parent, coach, or referee?</i>									
Yes	121	5.28	1.41	121	5.14	1.43	122	5.00	1.25
No	346	5.06	1.41	346	5.30	1.41	345	4.88	1.24

Table 6

Results of Multivariate and Univariate Significant Tests of the Effect of Brand Associations on Consumer Segments

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables		
	Season Ticket	Games Attended	Supporter
Brand Associations			
Multivariate F	3.84*	4.33*	3.05*
Univariate F			
Commitment	17.48*	21.55*	3.92
Concessions	0.00	0.28	0.24
Brand Mark	7.94**	8.40*	1.80
Organizational	18.54*	14.03*	6.17
Success	7.85**	4.75	11.84*
Personnel	18.70*	16.46*	5.24
Stadium	1.60	1.51	0.01
Social	12.21*	12.22*	18.97*
Team Play	7.30	5.78**	8.18**

Note. * $p < .001$, ** $p < .006$

465) = 4.33, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$. Significant univariate effects were found, using a Bonferroni adjustment ($p < .006$). The three levels of games attended (two or less, three to six, and seven or more) were analyzed using a post-hoc Scheffe test and showed that respondents who attended two games or less ($M = 5.77$) were found to rate the brand association *commitment*, $F(2, 465) = 21.55$, $p < .006$, significantly lower than respondents who attended three to six games ($M = 6.20$), and seven or more games ($M = 6.40$). Respondents who attended seven games or more ($M = 5.46$) were found to rate the brand association *brand mark*, $F(2, 465) = 8.40$, $p < .006$, $\eta^2 = .04$, significantly higher than respondents who attended two games or less ($M = 4.93$). Also, respondents who attended seven games or more ($M = 5.59$) rated the brand association *organizational attributes*, $F(2, 465) = 14.03$, $p < .006$, $\eta^2 = .06$, significantly higher than respondents who attended three to six games ($M = 5.32$), and two games or less ($M = 5.07$).

Additionally, respondents who attended two games or less ($M = 4.70$) were found to rate the brand association *non-player personnel*, $F(2, 465) = 16.46$, $p < .006$, $\eta^2 = .07$, significantly lower than respondents who attended three to six games ($M = 5.12$), and seven games or more ($M = 5.31$). As well, respondents who attended seven or more games ($M = 5.49$) rated the brand association *social interaction*, $F(2, 465) = 12.22$, $p < .006$, $\eta^2 = .05$, significantly higher than respondents who attended two games or less ($M = 4.93$). Finally, respondents who attended two games or less ($M = 4.67$) were found to rate the brand association *team play*, $F(2, 465) = 5.78$, $p < .006$, $\eta^2 = .02$, significantly lower than respondents who attended three to six games ($M = 5.03$), and respondents who attended seven or more games ($M = 5.00$).

Supporter group members and brand associations. The multivariate effect of supporter group members on the nine brand associations was significant, Wilks' Lambda = .94, $F(1, 466) = 3.05$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$. Using a Bonferroni adjustment ($p < .006$), significant univariate effects were found. Specifically, season ticket holders ($M = 5.05$) were found to rate the brand association *on-field success*, $F(1, 466) = 11.84$, $p < .006$, $\eta^2 = .03$, significantly higher than non-supporter group members ($M = 4.80$). Also, supporter group members ($M = 5.59$) rated the brand association *social interaction*, $F(1, 466) = 18.97$, $p < .006$, $\eta^2 = .04$, significantly higher than non-supporter group members ($M = 5.11$). Finally, supporter group members ($M = 5.11$) were found to rate the brand association *team play*, $F(1, 466) = 4.83$, $p < .006$, $\eta^2 = .02$, significantly higher than non-supporter group members ($M = 4.83$).

Soccer involvement and brand associations. Respondents who reported that they were a soccer player, coach, referee, or parent, were collapsed into one group to determine if variations in brand associations existed between those involved in soccer and those who were not. The multivariate analysis did not determine a significant effect. Therefore, no subsequent univariate analysis was necessary.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the level of brand associations spectators hold toward a new professional soccer franchise, Toronto FC. Past research has suggested the importance of segmentation to better understand the perceptions of specific groups, which can later become the focus of organizations in relationship building, targeted in marketing campaigns, and bridging the gap between an organization's perceived identity, and the organizational image consumers hold (Nandon, 2005; Ross, 2007). A comprehensive understanding of initial perceptions among Toronto FC spectators may also assist the club in recognizing its level of brand equity. Moreover, understanding the level of brand associations of soccer spectators, a sport that receives relatively little attention in a North American context, may aid in working toward developing a loyal fan-base in the crowded entertainment market of Toronto. A secondary purpose of this study was to determine the demographic profile of the Toronto FC spectators according to gender, age, household income, level of education, and ethnicity, as well as the consumer profile of the spectators according to season ticket holder status, number of home games attended, supporter group status, and involvement with the game of soccer. Additionally, it was of interest to determine whether any variation existed in the level of brand associations within these demographic and consumer groups.

Following an evaluation of previous literature pertaining to the measurement of brand associations, a survey adapted from Ross et al. (2006) that focused on measuring brand associations of sport spectators was selected as the measurement instrument. The

survey was administered to Toronto FC spectators with two-thirds of the season completed at the franchise's tenth home game on August 18, 2007.

Level of Brand Associations

A total of nine out of the original 11 brand associations from the survey constructed by Ross et al. (2006) were considered appropriate for this study—commitment, concessions, brand mark, organizational attributes, on-field success, non-player personnel, stadium community, social interaction, and team play. Participants were asked to rate their level of association on a seven-point Likert scale for each of the 32 items by answering between three and five questions for each brand association.

The results indicated that the respondents' highest level of brand association with Toronto FC was *commitment* ($M = 6.18$). This is not surprising, as the team had a very impressive beginning in terms of fan following for their first year. To begin, the team sold out the stadium's 14,000 season tickets by March of 2007, and later sold out the 30 club suites available (Mickle, 2007c). Moreover, Toronto FC averaged more than a sell-out of 20,130 spectators per game at BMO Field, which has a capacity of 20,000 seats ("Turnstile tracker", 2007). Temporary seating was added in certain locations of the stadium to account for the extremely high demand for tickets, leading many individuals to believe the team will expand the stadium in the future, however team officials have denied this (Campbell, 2007a). Toronto FC's attendance was the third highest per-game average in the 13-team league, trailing only the Los Angeles Galaxy and D.C. United. Los Angeles averaged 24,252 spectators per game; however, their home stadium—the Home Depot Center—seats 27,000. Additionally, Los Angeles' per-game attendance was significantly boosted by the signing of international superstar David Beckham

(“Turnstile tracker”). D.C. United, which plays in the 56,692 seat RFK Stadium, averaged 20,967 spectators for the 2007 season, and has been a part of the MLS since its inception, winning four league titles along the way (“Turnstile tracker”).

Additionally, more than a handful of supporter groups were created in the club’s first season, generally by their location in the stadium, and were quickly recognized around the MLS as the most passionate fans in the league (Molinaro, 2007a). The two largest supporter groups—the Red Patch Boys and U-Sector—led the stadium in songs and chants throughout the season. Astonishingly, these groups travelled to support the team at each away game, flying as far as Los Angeles to root on their team. Members of the media were quick to note early in the season that the support the team had received was going to be short-lived, and that the team was experiencing what is termed the “honeymoon effect”. However, despite these assumptions regarding the strength of the Toronto FC fan-base, season tickets for the 2008 season sold out less than a month after the conclusion of the 2007 season, with a 95% renewal rate among 2007 season ticket holders (Mickle, 2007d). Furthermore, there was a 13% increase in season ticket price and an increase in the total season ticket base from 14,000 to 16,000 (Mickle).

Organizational attributes ($M = 5.39$) was rated the next highest brand association by respondents. Survey items measuring *organizational attributes* included statements regarding the organization’s loyalty and commitment to fans, and initiatives by the team for the community. Prior to their first match, Toronto FC recognized the supporter groups that had been created for its team on their website. Information regarding the supporter groups as well as links to their websites provided the foundation for an early partnership between the organization and fans. Toronto FC also attempted to be very

active in the community during its first season and build strong, positive relations with their fans. Prior to the beginning of the season, the organization invited fans to join newly appointed head coach Mo Johnson and Toronto FC captain Jim Brennan on a number of “pub-crawl” events to get to meet the coach and player (Gazdic, 2006). The organization also gave the moniker “One for All” to their community initiatives—a fitting play on the official slogan for the team “All for One”. This statement reflects the organization’s commitment to making a positive difference in the lives of youth and children in their own community and around the world (One for All, n.d.). Toronto FC’s partner charities include “Right to Play” and “KidSport Ontario”, both of which aim to assist in the development of disadvantaged children through sport (Partner Charities, n.d.). Additionally, the team attended community events, such as fundraisers, libraries, and hospitals every month, and included a request form on their website for player appearances and donations.

One of the inherent advantages many supporters of Canadian soccer felt a professional soccer team would create was the development of Canadian soccer players. Exposure to the professional game would provide a place to strive towards for the numerous youth players in the country. Toronto FC has partnered with many youth soccer clubs in an effort to build relations. Moreover, in October of 2007, it was announced that Toronto FC and the USL clubs Montreal Impact and Vancouver Whitecaps formed a strategic alliance to help the development of the sport and elite players in Canada (“Canadian pro soccer”, 2007). It is expected that Toronto FC will also soon announce the creation of a player academy, which will be a development center for Canadian soccer players. This will not only assist Toronto FC in the future on the

field of play, but also in the minds of those in the Canadian soccer community who have longed for a domestic developmental center, which may lead to a stronger Canadian men's national team. This initiative may be beneficial in strengthening the organizational attributes perception among Toronto FC fans.

The *brand mark* ($M = 5.27$) association also received a high level of brand association by respondents. *Brand mark* measured perceptions related to the symbol and colours of the team. The high rating was anticipated as Toronto FC strategically chose the patriotic colours of red and white to be the team's official colours to "reflect a strong Canadian identity" (About Toronto FC, n.d.). Furthermore, the logo of the team is very European influenced, and quite different than traditional North American sport logos, as it incorporates a shield with the wording "Toronto FC" across it. Merchandise sales remained consistently high throughout the entire season, as the club's outfitter, adidas, struggled to meet demand. As Gladden and Milne (1999) stated, expansion teams experience high merchandise sales initially, but this tends to be only a short-term phenomenon. It will be interesting to follow how well sales of the team merchandise are in 2008 and beyond.

The next highest rated brand association was that of *social interaction* ($M = 5.26$), which accounts for the idea of socializing with friends and other fans of a sports team, and being able to see these individuals at the sporting event. Based on the results, it appears Toronto FC fans enjoy not only the on-field competition, but also the social aspect of being able to socialize with others at the matches. As most of the spectators are season ticket holders, it can be assumed that acquaintances have been formed with other spectators who sit close by, and enjoy not only the on-field competition, but also the

social aspect of going to watch the match. Fans sing together in unison to support the team, and it became tradition for fans to pass a gigantic flag with the team's logo around the stadium prior to the match. The supporter group members have developed a community of sorts through their support of the team. Events such as soccer tournaments, tailgating, pub nights, and bus trips to support the team at away games have made the supporter group members more than just fans, but somewhat of a family. Prior to a match ever being played, or a player named to the team, gatherings were scheduled to practice singing songs for the new franchise, and Internet sites were created so that fans could discuss the latest developments regarding their new professional soccer franchise. Wilson (2007) noted the reliance of MLS fans on the Internet and Internet discussion boards to build virtual communities around teams lacking strong identities and traditions. This has appeared to be the case with the supporter group members of Toronto FC, where the two largest supporter groups—Red Patch Boys and U-Sector—have close to 3,000 registered members combined on their websites.

The *stadium community* ($M = 5.11$) brand association was moderately rated in comparison to the other brand associations. *Stadium community* measured respondents' thoughts regarding the design and uniqueness of the stadium, and how it may enhance the enjoyment of going to watch a game. BMO Field is the first soccer-specific stadium to be built in Canada and was a project the CSA had hoped would be realized in the Toronto area for quite some time. The nation's most populous city had been lacking a quality venue to host international matches for its national teams, and the granting of the 2007 FIFA U-20 World Cup propelled the CSA to have a stadium built in time for the event. After joint agreements with the University of Toronto and York University did not

materialize due to escalating costs, the CSA partnered with MLSE, who added an MLS franchise to its sports conglomerate (“Soccer stadium starts”, 2006). With the ground breaking for construction in early 2006, and the newly awarded Toronto franchise beginning play in the spring of 2007, a tight budget and deadline forced the design of the stadium to be rather basic (“Soccer stadium starts”). The stadium contains a total of 20,000 seats, 30 luxury suites, a patio area overlooking the field of play, and a state-of-the-art artificial surface to ensure the durability of the field and to allow usage of the field in the winter months (“Soccer stadium starts”). Perhaps the most interesting feature of the stadium is its location. On land provided by the City of Toronto estimated to be worth \$10 million, the stadium sits at the Exhibition grounds, a large area of land, with a variety of different buildings that hosts numerous activities throughout the year, and provides spectators on the west side of the stadium an incredible view of the CN Tower and Toronto skyline.

While some respondents may have rated the *stadium community* factor highly, others may have had their reasons to rate it poorly. Concerns with the stadium’s safety, design, and layout were almost immediately expressed by spectators. In May of 2007, after hosting only four games in the newly constructed stadium, a half-dozen fallen bolts and fasteners were found by workers. Emergency repairs were made, and thousands of bolts were checked and tightened in response to the situation, believed to have been caused by sell-out crowds stomping their feet (“Emergency repairs”, 2007).

Additionally, spectators were faced with extensive waiting periods for concessions and access to the washrooms. Soccer is a game where there is only one intermission, specifically at halftime; therefore, this scenario created a rush of spectators to visit

concessions and access washroom facilities. This was coupled with the fact that a very high proportion of spectators are males, which caused lineups to extend into the concourse area. Stadium officials looked into adding more washrooms; however, changes will not be made until the following season (“Emergency repairs”). Another potential drawback from the tight budget on which the stadium was constructed was the lack of a covered seating area. It is common for many outdoor soccer stadiums to have a roof to cover spectators, but due to financial constraints, one was not added to the final design of the stadium. In addition, a no umbrella policy was implemented at the stadium as the umbrellas may obstruct the view of other spectators, which left many unknowing spectators angry and wet at a rainy May home game (“Emergency repairs”).

Lastly, some fans have expressed discontent with the field having an artificial surface. Fans have argued that the game is meant to be played on a natural grass surface. However, the issue is non-debatable as approximately 70% of the construction cost came from public funding at the federal, provincial, and city levels, and it was emphasized that the field be available to community soccer groups. As a result of this agreement, the field will have a dome placed over it so that it can be used during the winter (Millson, 2007). It would have been informative to conduct interviews with spectators to gain a deeper sense of their opinions of the stadium, and perhaps provide a more solid foundation for making either positive or negative assumptions regarding the newly built stadium.

Respondents rated the *non-player personnel* ($M = 5.10$) brand association moderately compared to the other brand associations. *Non-player personnel* measured individuals’ perceptions regarding the coaches and management of the team. In the case of Toronto FC, their head coach, Mo Johnson, is also their general manager. Given this

dual role, Johnson not only is given authority to play who he wants, but he also controls who is on the team. In selecting Johnson as their head coach and general manager, Toronto FC gained instant credibility. Johnson was a former star in the Scottish soccer league, and a regular national team player for Scotland, playing in the 1990 World Cup. Johnson ended his career by joining the MLS where he played from 1996 to 2001, and later coached the New York MLS franchise from 2005 to 2006. Given his accolades, there are presumably many respondents who rated the *non-player personnel* brand association high. There may also be many respondents who rated this variable somewhat lower based on his decision making. Johnson earned the nickname “Trader Mo” around the league, as he traded nine of Toronto FC’s permitted roster of 18 players in the first few weeks of the season (Doyle, 2007), including dealing away fan favourite Alecko Eskandarian (Molinaro, 2007b). Although many of the team’s most passionate supporters may have known who Mo Johnson was at the time of data collection, and the transactions he had made throughout the season, there were also more than likely a large number of respondents who did not know Mo Johnson or the work he had done in the front office. It would take one a lot of time to become educated to fully understand and evaluate the transactions and decisions Johnson made, but it may also be safe to assume that the more casual consumers were perhaps judging this brand association based on the team’s unsuccessful play on the field.

The brand association measuring *on-field success* ($M = 4.94$) was rated relatively low in comparison to other levels of brand associations. This is expected as expansion franchises tend to perform poorly in their first season of play. However, it is intriguing that the brand association was not rated even lower. Toronto FC struggled early in the

season to not only win a game, but to score their first goal, both of which finally came in their fifth game. After their first win, and heading into the All-Star break, the team went on to post a very respectable record of four wins, three losses, and four ties. However, the team's fortunes turned for the worse following the break, and leading up to the August 18th data collection date, the team was in the midst of a six-game winless streak, and five game goalless streak. The team would only win one more game out of their remaining nine, and finish the season with the worst record in the MLS at six wins, seventeen losses, and seven ties. Over the course of the season, the team would set two unfavourable distinctions – the longest goal drought in an MLS season (824 minutes) and the longest goal drought to start an MLS season (384 minutes) (Polishuk, 2007).

The *on-field success* construct also involved the thoughts of respondents regarding the quality of players. Currently, Toronto FC is required to carry a minimum number of Canadian players. Toronto FC would be well served, at the expense of Canadian player development, if the MLS loosened its Canadian player quotas. MLS commissioner, Don Gerber, admitted the league would have a look at the rule at the end of season as it is felt that the Canadian talent pool is not deep enough at the moment (Sandor, 2007). Additionally, while a few teams took advantage of the newly introduced “Designated Player Rule”, which allows MLS teams to sign players outside of the team salary budget (“MLS implements”, 2006), Toronto FC decided not to sign a designated player in its first season. It will be interesting to observe whether Toronto FC looks to improve the on-field quality of their team by utilizing the ability to sign a designated player in the 2008 season.

Team play ($M = 4.91$) was the next lowest rated brand association with Toronto FC. *Team play* measured respondents' thoughts regarding the characteristics the team displayed on the field of play, such as the personality of the team and team play (e.g., good defense). Similar to the analysis of the *on-field success* brand association, the survey respondents may have been unimpressed with the qualities the team displayed in their inaugural season. However, it is also possible that some fans may not have been exposed to the team's play as a collective unit long enough to have formed a perception regarding their characteristics. As previously stated in the non-player personnel analysis, the team experienced numerous changes throughout the duration of the year. It would be interesting to analyze this same brand association in future years as fans become more familiarized with players, and the team's roster becomes more consistent than the high turnover experienced this past season.

Lastly, and somewhat unexpectedly, the lowest rated brand association was *concessions* ($M = 4.50$). MLSE are an ownership group that has significant experience with sporting events. Among MLSE's entities are the Toronto Maple Leafs, Toronto Raptors, and Air Canada Center—a venue that is host to numerous events each year. Furthermore, in an effort to seek the opinion of their season-ticket holders directly, Toronto FC invited a few random season-ticket holders prior to the start of the season to sample prospective dishes that would be available at BMO Field ("Lucky fans get", 2007). The menus at concession stands were full of diverse foods from many different cultural backgrounds in anticipation of the ethnically diverse spectators Toronto FC expected to draw. Menu items included Portuguese cornbread sandwiches, chip butty, Jamaican patties, and barbecued bratwurst, among other things ("Lucky fans get").

Perhaps the low rating for the concessions were in part a result of the design of the stadium and large waiting lines at half-time. Another possible explanation for the low level of brand association with concessions may have to do with the price of concessions, which is traditionally quite high at sporting events. It would be interesting to gather qualitative interview data on this matter to discover what is truly in the minds of Toronto FC spectators.

Participant Profile

Upon analysis of the participants in the study, the majority were young males, who were well educated and had a relatively high household income. Almost 77% of the survey respondents were male compared to 23% female. These figures resemble statistics collected in 2006 by the National Sporting Goods Association (NSGA), where males comprised 63.7% of MLS spectators and females 36.3% (MLS Viewing Profile, n.d.). The ever so alluring and highly sought after consumer segment of individuals between the ages of 18 to 34 were best represented with almost 63% of respondents falling into this category. These figures once again coincide with data collected by the NSGA, where it was found that individuals between 18 and 34 accounted for 61.1% of spectators (MLS Viewing Profile). This should illustrate that the team has a very young and fresh consumer base with the opportunity for a long-standing relationship to develop and grow closer together in the years to come. Additionally, given that the majority of participants had at least a college or university diploma/degree (68%), it can be assumed that the participants in the study were well educated and were able to competently complete the survey accurately. Moreover, a high rate of participants had a total household income of greater than \$60,000 (62%). This closely falls in line with the

research conducted by the NSGA, which showed that 82.4% of spectators had an income of more than \$50,000—a slightly wider income grouping (MLS Viewing Profile). Given their socioeconomic status, these individuals are likely to have a large amount of disposable income to allocate toward sporting events. Knowledge of this highly educated, wealthy, young, male dominated demographic is not only appealing to the organization, but will also be an attractive audience to potential sponsors.

As stated in Chapter 4, the ethnic background question on the survey was left open-ended. This subsequently resulted in over 50 different ethnic backgrounds being reported. Many respondents listed dual backgrounds (e.g., Irish-Italian) and some reported three or more. A decision was made to eliminate respondents who listed three or more ethnic backgrounds from the frequency list, as it would be less likely that these individuals would retain their ethnic roots to the same degree as those who listed one or two backgrounds. Additionally, some respondents gave their racial background rather than their ethnic background by providing responses such as Asian and Black.

The city of Toronto reported on their website the growing trend for individuals to have multiple ethnic origins. Individuals more likely to report multiple backgrounds included those from European backgrounds whose ancestors have lived in Canada for several generations. Individuals with a more recent history were more likely to report only a single response (Toronto's Racial Diversity, n.d.). While only those individuals who listed a single ethnic origin were included in the city of Toronto's research, the author of the present study felt that it would be valuable to extract as much information as possible from survey respondents, and therefore included both single and dual ethnic background responses. Respondents who listed two ethnic backgrounds were counted as

a half-score to each ethnic group. British (27.2%), followed by Canadian (20.6%), Italian (14.4%), Portuguese (7%), and Irish (4.8%) backgrounds were the most prominent ethnic groups. Collectively, these five ethnic backgrounds represented 74% of the total number of respondents. Overall, the results of the ethnic background construct from the present study were with similar to the results from the 2001 census reported on the city of Toronto's website, which stated the six most prevalent ethnic backgrounds in Toronto were British, Chinese, Italian, East Indian, Filipino, and Portuguese (Toronto's Racial Diversity). Given their large ethnic communities in the city of Toronto, and also the strong passion for the game of soccer in their native countries, it is not surprising that the British, Italian, Portuguese, and Irish were the most prevalent ethnic backgrounds among spectators who participated in the present study.

Based on the vast number of ethnic backgrounds reported, respondents were further categorized based on their geographic location. The online encyclopaedia Wikipedia was utilized to determine which regions countries would be placed into (Eastern Europe, n.d.; Western Europe, n.d.). As expected, an extremely high proportion (61.1%) of individuals fell into the geographic region of Western Europe. This again supports the fact that the majority of Toronto FC spectators have ethnic roots tied to areas of the world where the game of soccer is followed passionately. Western Europe was followed by North America (21.9%), which was also expected to account for a large proportion of respondents, as it can be assumed the majority of spectators at the Toronto FC match live in Canada. The remaining geographic regions accounted for a small percentage of the survey respondents. Although there are an extremely large number of individuals of Asian decent in the Toronto area, soccer is traditionally not followed as

closely by Asians as in other parts of the world such as Europe. This notion was supported, as only 5.6% of individuals fell into the Asian geographic territory. The remaining three geographic areas—Eastern Europe (6.7%), South/Central America (3.5%), and Africa (1.3%)—all have deep ties to the game of soccer; however it is assumed that their smaller ethnic communities in Toronto resulted in a less prominent showing in the results.

Demographic Variables and Brand Associations

To investigate whether the demographic variables of gender, age, education level, and household income had an effect on the brand association factors, four MANOVAs were conducted. The ethnic background variable was excluded from the analysis due to a plethora of backgrounds being reported and inadequate participant numbers in the groups constructed. Previous research has indicated that females differ from males in their processing of information (as cited in Ross, 2007), and clusters of individuals with similar perceptions could be distinguished based on their educational level and household income (Ross). Overall, results indicated that age was the only demographic variable with a significant effect. This is an interesting finding among the spectators, as it was previously noted that there may be a shift in opinions regarding the professional game in Toronto. Specifically, younger soccer enthusiasts may be more accepting towards the MLS and Toronto FC than older individuals who may have deeper ties to leagues overseas (Ormsby, 2007). However, upon further review, univariate analysis showed no significant effects between the different age groups.

The absence of demographic differences among the brand associations parallels the findings of James et al. (2002), who studied season ticket holders' psychological

connection to a new sport team. Their results indicated that differences did not exist between the demographic variables of gender, age, education, and income, and high, moderate, and low psychological connections to the new team. Based on the results of the present study, it may be assumed that the brand associations held by males do not differ from females; the differences among various age categories and brand associations are minimal; and spectators' level of education and household income did not influence differences in level of brand associations in this study of Toronto FC.

Consumer Profile

An analysis of the data pertaining to the variables of spectator ticket purchase behaviour, fan type, and involvement with the game of soccer showed a representative sample of all consumer segments. As was anticipated, season ticket holders had a higher number of participants compared to non-season ticket holders (56% compared to 44%). This can be directly attributed to the fact that Toronto FC's season ticket holder base stood at 14,000, in a stadium that contains just over 20,000 seats. In light of this statistic, non-season ticket holders were very well represented in the sample. As expected, the majority of consumers attended seven or more games (50.4%). Given the large number of season ticket holders, the majority of these spectators had been attending close to every home match, evidenced by the club reaching a sell-out, or near sell-out, for every home match in their inaugural season.

A healthy number of respondents identified themselves as supporter group members (31%). These individuals are the most passionate fans of the club, and are committed to creating a very colourful and loud atmosphere at the games to encourage the team. The two largest supporter groups, the Red Patch Boys and U-Sector, who

occupy the stadium's south end, were, as anticipated, the best represented groups in the study with 51% and 20% of the supporter group population, respectively.

Lastly, the results indicated that 66% of consumers were current or former soccer players, and 26.1% were a soccer parent, coach, or referee. The majority of individuals who were soccer parents, coaches, or referees were also soccer players. A decision was made to combine all spectators who were players, parents, coaches, or referees to better distinguish how well individuals who were involved with the game of soccer translated into paying consumers, and also their perceptions to the new team. Collectively, respondents who had some involvement in the game of soccer accounted for 72.4% of the survey respondents. Markovits and Hellerman (2001) suggested that a sporting culture is formed based on what individuals follow and consume as spectators and not necessarily the sport in which they participate. In addition, Brown (2007) noted that although playing soccer is a regular activity for millions of Americans, the majority of them will never turn into fans of the game at the professional level. Despite these reports, results illustrate the fact that the large number of soccer participants, and others involved with the game of soccer in Canada, and specifically the Toronto area, has translated well into these same individuals becoming paying customers and holding a strong interest for the professional game. With almost three-quarters of the fan-base comprised of individuals involved in the game of soccer, it can be established that the soccer community has embraced the city's newest professional soccer franchise.

Based on these findings it may also be assumed that Canadians and Americans differ in their interest of professional soccer. Although soccer has traditionally lacked a place in mainstream media outlets in both countries, differences may exist between sport

consumers from each country. For example, professional baseball has long been considered America's national pastime, and the country has deep roots in American football, car racing, and basketball, whereas in Canada, hockey is considered the "national" sport. In a similar vein, attitudes may differ, or perhaps are changing in Canada with regards to soccer.

Consumer Segments and Brand Associations

Similar to the investigation of demographic variables and brand associations, four MANOVAs and subsequent ANOVAs were run on the consumer segment variables of season ticket holders, number of home games attended, supporter group members, and involvement with the game of soccer to determine whether they had an effect on the brand association factors. The supporter group name variable was excluded from the analysis due to varying participant numbers. It was discovered that significant differences existed in the consumer group variables of season ticket holders, number of home games attended, and supporter group members with the brand associations.

Season ticket holders and brand associations. In regard to the season ticket holder consumer segment, significant univariate differences were found with six out of the nine brand associations. Season ticket holders' level of brand association to *commitment* was higher than non-season ticket holders. This was expected as season ticket holders themselves committed to purchasing season tickets to an unknown franchise. They are also likely to experience the product more often than non-season ticket holders, and notice the loyalty and large amount of team supporters.

Season ticket holders also rated the brand association *brand mark* higher than non-season ticket holders. It may be possible that given their high level of commitment

to the team, season ticket holders are also proud of their team and the team's Canadian identity reflected in its choice of red and white colours. Mullin et al. (2000) noted that 80 percent of an organization's sales typically come from 20 percent of the customers. It would be interesting to examine the purchase behaviour of season ticket holders in other areas such as merchandise, and whether they are more likely to purchase Toronto FC merchandise bearing the team's logo and colours.

Also, season ticket holders held higher levels of brand association to *organizational attributes* than non-season ticket holders. E-mails, telephone calls, and letters, among other things, are common services an organization provide season ticket holders to develop deeper relations (James et al., 2002). Given that their interaction with the organization is more involved, season ticket holders are more likely aware of the initiatives the organization undertakes. Through this increased communication, the perception of the organization is also likely to become more favourable than those of individuals who do not interact as frequently with the organization.

The brand association *on-field success* was also rated higher among season ticket holders than non-season ticket holders. Season ticket holders are a consumer group, who through the purchase of season tickets, are likely to have seen the team play often. It is therefore intriguing that based on the record and performance of Toronto FC, they did rate it significantly higher than non-season ticket holders. Moreover, given that they have invested in the team, it would be assumed that they would be more critical of the team's performance. At the same time, however, it is also likely that given their commitment to the team, they hold a more favourable perception of the team and are perhaps less pessimistic than non-season ticket holders.

In addition, season ticket holders' level of brand association to *non-player personnel* was significantly higher than non-season ticket holders. It is possible that season ticket holders find head coach and general manager Mo Johnson's aggressive management behaviour encouraging, and that he will employ all means necessary to find the right combination of players to win. It is also possible that non-season ticket holders simply do not have the same level of involvement as season ticket holders and attribute the overall poor play of the team to the coaching and management of the team.

Finally, season ticket holders rated the *social interaction* brand association higher than non-season ticket holders. This was anticipated as season ticket holders are likely to go with other season ticket holders to the matches, and also see familiar faces when at the stadium. A non-season ticket holder may not feel the same level of interaction when attending the matches as they likely do not know as many spectators and are focused more on the actual competition.

Number of home games attended and brand associations. Significant univariate differences were found with six out of the nine brand associations and number of home games spectators had attended. Respondents who attended two games or less were found to rate the brand association *commitment* significantly lower than individuals who attended three to six games, and those who attended seven or more games. This does not come as a surprise as the respondents who attended two games or less are the least frequent consumer group out of the three. In this regard, they may not feel the same passion nor had the opportunity to experience the fanatical atmosphere that arose at BMO Field over the course of the first season.

Respondents who attended seven games or more rated the brand association *brand mark* significantly higher than those who attended two games or less. One potential explanation for this finding is that spectators who attended more games were also subject to a greater number of impressions involving the team's logo and colours. As Mullin et al. (2000) noted, 80 percent of an organization's sales come from 20 percent of consumers. This high rating is a positive sign for the organization, as the team's most valuable consumer group associates favourably with the logo and colours of the team, which may continue the high merchandise sales the team experienced in its first season.

The brand association *organizational attributes* was rated significantly higher by respondents who attended seven or more games than those who attended three to six games, and two games or less. This finding may correlate with that of the high rating of organizational attributes by season ticket holders, in the sense that it is likely that the majority of individuals who attended seven games or more are season ticket holders as well. As a result, it is probable that these individuals have had more interaction with the organization and have a favourable image of the organization's commitment to its fans and their initiatives.

Respondents who attended two games or less were found to rate the brand association *non-player personnel* significantly lower than those respondents who attended three to six games, and those who attended seven or more games. The results found are again likely to be a result of a greater familiarity and support of the coaching and management by those who attended a higher frequency of games.

Also, respondents who attended seven or more games had higher levels of brand association to *social interaction* than those who attended two games or less. Given the

frequency of attending matches, it is likely that respondents who attended seven or more games have developed friendships and feel a certain level of camaraderie with others in the stadium. As a result, the social aspect of going to the game with others, and the festival-like atmosphere during the games have weighed heavily on these individuals in their association to *social interaction*.

Lastly, although all three groups rated the *team play* brand association relatively low, those respondents who attended two games or less rated this factor significantly lower than those who attended three to six games, and those who attended seven or more. Given the differences in number of times watching the team play, those spectators who had not been to as many games may not have had enough time to have formed positive perceptions. Additionally, those who attended more games may be more knowledgeable regarding the team's style of play.

Supporter group members and brand associations. Significant univariate differences were observed when analyzing supporter group members and brand associations. Specifically, the brand association *on-field success* was rated higher by supporter group members than non-supporter group members. This is not very surprising as the supporter group members are the team's most passionate fans and as a result likely to associate more positively with the team, even if they have a poor record. Non-supporter group members' perceptions are likely to fall in line more accurately with the team's actual on-field success

Supporter group members were also found to rate the brand association *social interaction* higher than non-supporter group members. This does not come as a surprise as it is generally known that the supporter group members feel it is their responsibility to

create an exciting environment through singing, chanting, and encouraging the team. Prior to the beginning of the season, the supporter group members would meet and interact with one another to develop songs and practice singing together at the matches. This continued throughout the season where they planned events together, played in soccer matches, and went on bus trips to away games. These same supporter group members have also continued to keep close ties to one another. At the conclusion of the season a large group of supporter group members from the Red Patch Boys made headlines for their vocal support while attending the Toronto Raptors season opener.

Lastly, supporter group members were found to have higher levels of *team play* brand associations than non-supporter group members. Similar to the assumptions made for the supporter group members' high rating of success, it is probable that given their heightened involvement in the team and their undying love for the team in its first season, they will likely report positive associations regardless of the team's play.

Conclusions

In closing, the adapted framework from Ross et al. (2006) provided an effective way to measure spectators' initial levels of brand association with Toronto FC. Although the team suffered on the field of play, the team has appeared to make a positive impression on the crowded Toronto market. The brand association of *commitment*—referring to the commitment and loyalty of fans—was rated the highest brand association among spectators. This illustrates that despite being labelled an expansion franchise, consumers followed Toronto FC with great enthusiasm during the season, and the fans' commitment to the team is considered the strongest brand association among spectators. Following *commitment*, the next highest rated brand associations were *organizational*

attributes, brand mark, social interaction, stadium community, and non-player personnel.

The team's recent announcement of selling 16,000 season tickets for the 2008 season may be directly attributed to these strong levels of brand associations. The remaining three brand associations in order of their rating were *on-field success*, *team play*, and *concessions*.

One of the lower rated brand associations was *on-field success*. Although this was Toronto FC's inaugural season, winning has been attributed to high brand equity. Furthermore, as stated previously, Chivas USA, an expansion franchise in 2005 experienced high attendance levels in their first two seasons; however, after failing to place a winning team on the field, home attendance dropped by over 5,000 spectators in 2007 despite finally having a winning record ("Turnstile tracker", 2007). Measures should be taken by the new franchise to continually improve their team in order to elevate the *on-field success* brand association. One potential measure to improve on-field success is through the acquisition of a designated player.

The demographic profile of Toronto FC spectators is primarily comprised of well-educated males between the ages of 18 and 34, who have a relatively high household income. Toronto's diversity was noticeable in the profile of respondents as over 50 ethnicities were reported. Overall, the most prominent ethnic groups were British, Canadians, Italians, Portuguese, and Irish, with the majority of spectators being of Western European descent. These findings suggest that Toronto FC have effectively taken advantage of the global popularity of the sport of soccer and provided these individuals with a team they can support closer to home. From a marketing standpoint, it might be beneficial if the franchise acquired a star player from one of these ethnic

backgrounds. Alternatively, they may want to consider targeting a player from an area that was not very well represented among Toronto FC spectators, such as South America, to tap into a new fan-base.

The consumer profile of Toronto FC respondents consisted of slightly more season ticket holders than non-season ticket holders. Approximately one-third of respondents were supporter group members, with the two largest Toronto FC supporter groups—the Red Patch Boys and U-Sector—the most represented groups in the study. Lastly, almost three-quarters of respondents were involved in the game of soccer at some capacity. These findings suggest that Toronto FC have a very strong consumer base, and those involved with the game of soccer have embraced the city's newest professional team.

The consumer segment variables appear to be stronger predictors of variation in brand associations than the demographic variables as evidenced by the significant differences for three of them—season ticket status, number of home games attended, and supporter group status. Overall, the findings suggest there is a tendency for spectators who were the most involved (i.e., season ticket holders, high number of home games attended, and supporter group members) to rate each of the brand associations at higher levels than less involved spectators (i.e., non-season ticket holders, low number of home games attended, and non-supporter group members).

Initial examination of the level of brand associations of spectators toward Toronto FC appears to be strong, and the development towards high brand equity seem encouraging. The consequences of brand equity as outlined by Ross (2006) include team loyalty, media exposure, merchandise sales, ticket sales, and revenue solicitation.

Merchandise sales, and ticket sales appeared to be very healthy in Toronto FC's first season, evidenced by sell-out crowds, high season ticket renewal rates, and extraordinary merchandise sales. It would be premature to determine team loyalty at this stage given that loyal consumers remain with an organization over an extended period of time (James et al., 2002). However, the team has a very committed fan-base that has been praised as one of the best by the MLS commissioner, and as previously stated, season tickets have sold out for a second consecutive year. Additionally, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), The Score, and Rogers Sportsnet, which all had television contracts with Toronto FC, broadcasted every one of their 30 league games for the 2007 season; however, viewership ratings were inconsistent and at times very poor (Campbell, 2007b). It will be interesting to see if all three of these networks decide to renew their broadcasting deals with Toronto FC for the 2008 season. Lastly, revenue solicitation, which includes attracting corporate sponsors and naming rights, appeared to be strong. Toronto FC entered into a ten-year stadium naming rights agreement with the Bank of Montreal, and also was one of seven teams to sell shirt sponsorships that displayed a corporate mark on the front of the team's playing jersey (Mickle, 2007c). Additionally, the organization sold out the 30 club suites available for the 2007 season (Mickle). Revenue solicitation should continue to grow based on the positive response toward the franchise by consumers.

Practical Implications

A number of practical implications for Toronto FC were drawn from the present study. To begin, the information gathered provides a look at the level of brand associations held by Toronto FC spectators. In turn, these brand associations demonstrate

a clearer understanding of the organization's brand equity. Sport managers/marketers would significantly benefit from conducting this type of brand association research in understanding their consumers' perceptions and their overall level of brand equity.

Additionally, the current study suggests that segmenting groups of spectators through demographic variables may not be as useful as segmenting through spectators' consumption patterns and affiliation with a brand. This information can be useful to sport marketers when targeting spectators through marketing campaigns.

The commitment shown to fans and the community by Toronto FC was reflected in the high ratings of *commitment* and *organizational attributes*. Sport organizations should work closely with their fan-base to demonstrate that they care as much for them as the fans do for the team. The inclusion of fan groups on the team website, making public appearances, and supporting charitable initiatives will make positive impressions in the minds of consumers.

The poor ratings of the *on-field success* and *team play* subscales, especially by those who were non-season ticket holders and those who attended fewer games, suggests that less involved consumers may be more critical of a team's success. Additionally, although other sport franchises have been found to have high levels of brand equity despite poor on-field performance, these franchises have long histories behind them. New franchises should attempt to quickly form a winning team and capitalize on their early popularity in order to build loyalty with existing fans and develop new ones.

Although early efforts were made by the organization to gain feedback from their fans, *concessions* were the lowest rated brand association. This suggests that continual monitoring of spectators' perceptions is needed to ensure that the gap between perceived

perceptions and actual perceptions is closed. Moreover, spectators' moderate rating of the *stadium community* brand association in the present study suggests that a stadium's layout and policies should be the subject of continual evaluation and re-evaluation. Waiting lines, lack of sufficient facilities, and safety are all elements that may drive perceptions.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following recommendations were formulated on the basis of the study conducted:

1. The present study examined the level of brand associations of spectators toward Toronto FC. Many similarities arise between the United States and Canada when discussing the lack of popularity of soccer in North America. A comparative study between an MLS team from the United States and Toronto FC would provide greater insight into the perceptions of soccer spectators from both countries.
2. The city of Toronto is home to many professional sports teams that have already established brand equity, most notably, the Toronto Maple Leafs, Toronto Raptors, Toronto Blue Jays, and Toronto Argonauts. A study of the fan-base of one of these more established professional teams in Toronto would provide a useful comparison.
3. A vital part of any sport organization is having loyal consumers. The present study provided a cross section of spectators' perceptions of Toronto FC at a very early stage of the product life cycle. Longitudinal research replicating the present study in the future would be interesting to examine how the spectators' brand associations have changed or remained the same over time.

4. The current study was conducted using a written survey. A study incorporating a qualitative approach, such as interviews and focus groups, would provide a greater understanding of spectators' level of brand associations, as their ability to elaborate on the perceptions they hold would reduce generalizations.
5. Toronto FC is Canada's first MLS franchise; however, professional soccer franchises also exist in Montreal and Vancouver. A study comparing the brand associations between soccer fans from Montreal or Vancouver and Toronto would provide a greater understanding of soccer fans in Canada.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Letter of Information and Questionnaire

Letter of Information

Hello,

I am a Master's student in the School of Kinesiology at The University of Western Ontario conducting a survey about branding and Toronto FC. Specifically, I would like to study the perceptions of Toronto FC spectators toward Toronto FC. Researchers have suggested that knowledge of consumer perceptions may assist sport organizations in areas such as providing a clear organizational identity, and strengthening relations with fans. I am requesting your participation in a written survey that contains three parts. Part A asks your perceptions of Toronto FC. Part B includes questions that ask about your involvement with soccer and Toronto FC. Part C asks you questions about yourself. The survey will take approximately five minutes to complete.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect. If you are under the age of 18, you must not participate in this survey. All information collected from this study will be kept confidential, and only group data will be reported. You will not be asked to provide your name. Completion and return of this survey indicates your consent to participate in this study.

If you have any questions about the study, you can contact John Gallo by phone at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED]. If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario, (519) 661-3036 or by email at ethics@uwo.ca.

This letter is yours to keep.

John Gallo
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TORONTO FC SPECTATOR SURVEY

PART A:

The following are characteristics that could describe a sport team. Please rate the extent to which you **STRONGLY DISAGREE (1)** or **STRONGLY AGREE (7)** that the following items are characteristics of the **Toronto FC** organization. Please circle the appropriate number in the scale beside each statement.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
1. Toronto FC has many loyal fans supporting them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. The concessions at the stadium are excellent.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Toronto FC has distinctive colors.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Toronto FC is committed to its fans.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Toronto FC is not very successful.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Toronto FC's personnel do a fantastic job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Toronto FC has excellent coaches.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. The stadium has unique characteristics.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Toronto FC offers me a place to spend time with friends.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Toronto FC is a great team.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. The design of the stadium is excellent.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. Toronto FC has a clear personality (e.g., respectable, perseverant).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Many fans regularly follow the team.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. There are specific foods at the stadium that I like to eat.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. The symbol of Toronto FC is unique.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. Being a fan of Toronto FC is a good way to meet other people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. Toronto FC is not very high quality.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. Toronto FC is very loyal to its fans.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. The management of Toronto FC is outstanding.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. The stadium enhances the enjoyment of going to see the team.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. I am able to see friends because of Toronto FC.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. The devotion to fans by Toronto FC is obvious.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. Toronto FC has high quality players.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. Toronto FC has distinct qualities (e.g., quick offense, good defense).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. The loyalty of the fans is very noticeable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. I enjoy eating at the stadium.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. Toronto FC's logo is different from others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28. Toronto FC gives back to the community.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29. Toronto FC provides a good place to see friends.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30. The performance of Toronto FC is first-class.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
31. Toronto FC has unique characteristics (e.g., exciting, motivated).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
32. The concessions at the stadium are not acceptable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please Turn Over

PART B:**Please check the best response for each question.**

1. Are you a Toronto FC season ticket holder? ☐ YES ☐ NO
2. Please indicate the number of Toronto FC home games you have attended this year.
☐ 2 or less ☐ 3 to 6 ☐ 7 or more
3. Do you belong to a Toronto FC supporter group? ☐ YES ☐ NO
 If "YES", to what group?
☐ Red Patch Boys ☐ The North End Elite
☐ U-Sector ☐ Tribal Rhythm Nation Other _____
4. Are you currently, or have you been, a soccer player? ☐ YES ☐ NO
5. Are you a soccer parent, coach, or referee? ☐ YES ☐ NO

PART C:**Please respond to the following demographic questions by indicating the most appropriate answer.**

1. Your gender? ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Your age? ☐ 18 to 24 ☐ 35 to 44 ☐ 55 to 64
☐ 25 to 34 ☐ 45 to 54 ☐ 65 or older
3. Your highest level of education?
☐ Elementary school ☐ College or University Diploma/Degree
☐ High School ☐ Graduate or Professional Degree (e.g., Master's, Doctorate, MD)
4. Your annual household income?
☐ less than \$30,000 ☐ \$60,000 to \$89,999 ☐ \$120,000 or more
☐ \$30,000 to \$59,999 ☐ \$90,000 to \$119,999 ☐ Prefer not to answer
5. Please indicate your ethnic background (for example, Italian) _____

APPENDIX B

Team Brand Association Scale Subscales and Items

TBAS Subscales and Items

Personnel

Toronto FC's personnel do a fantastic job
Toronto FC has excellent coaches
The management of Toronto FC is outstanding

Stadium Community

The stadium has unique characteristics
The design of the stadium is excellent
The stadium enhances the enjoyment of going to see the team

Social Interaction

Toronto FC offers me a place to spend time with friends
Being a fan of Toronto FC is a good way to meet other people
I am able to see friends because of Toronto FC
Toronto FC provides a good place to see friends

Success

Toronto FC is not very successful (reverse)
Toronto FC is a great team
Toronto FC is not very high quality (reverse)
Toronto FC has high quality players
The performance of Toronto FC is first-class

Team Play

Toronto FC has a clear personality (e.g., respectable, perseverant)
Toronto FC has distinct qualities (e.g., quick offense, good defense)
The team has unique characteristics (e.g., exciting, motivated)

Commitment

Toronto FC has many loyal fans supporting them
Many fans regularly follow the team
The loyalty of the fans is very noticeable

Concessions

The concessions at the stadium are excellent
There are specific foods at the stadium that I like to eat
I enjoy eating at the stadium
The concessions at the stadium are not acceptable (reverse)

Brand Mark

Toronto FC has distinctive colours
The symbol of Toronto FC is unique
Toronto FC's logo is different from others

Organizational Attributes

Toronto FC is committed to its fans
Toronto FC is very loyal to its fans
The devotion to fans by Toronto FC is obvious
Toronto FC gives back to the community

APPENDIX C

The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Approval Notice



Office of Research Ethics

The University of Western Ontario
 Room 00045 Dental Sciences Building, London, ON, Canada N6A 5C1
 Telephone: (519) 661-3036 Fax: (519) 850-2466 Email: ethics@uwo.ca
 Website: www.uwo.ca/research/ethics

Use of Human Subjects - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. K. Danylchuk

Review Number: 13405S

Review Level: Full Board

Review Date: July 6, 2007

Protocol Title: Brand associations with a new sport franchise: Spectator perceptions of Toronto FC

Department and Institution: Kinesiology, University of Western Ontario

Sponsor:

Ethics Approval Date: July 13, 2007

Expiry Date: November 30, 2007

Documents Reviewed and Approved: UWO Protocol, Letter of Information and Consent, Advertisement (intercept script)

Documents Received for Information:

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information. If you require an updated approval notice prior to that time you must request it using the UWO Updated Approval Request Form.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the study or consent form may be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazards to the subject or when the change(s) involve only logistical or administrative aspects of the study (e.g. change of monitor, telephone number). Expedited review of minor change(s) in ongoing studies will be considered. Subjects must receive a copy of the signed information/consent documentation.

Investigators must promptly also report to the NMREB:

- a) changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) all adverse and unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected;
- c) new information that may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study.

If these changes/adverse events require a change to the information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment advertisement, the newly revised information/consent documentation, and/or advertisement, must be submitted to this office for approval.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussion related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

Chair of NMREB: Dr. Julie McMullin

Deputy Chair: Susan Hoddinott

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

☒ Denise Grafton (dgrafton@uwo.ca) ☐ Jennifer McEwen (jmcewen4@uwo.ca) ☐ Ethics Officer (ethics@uwo.ca)

This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.

cc: ORE File

APPENDIX D

Intercept Scripts

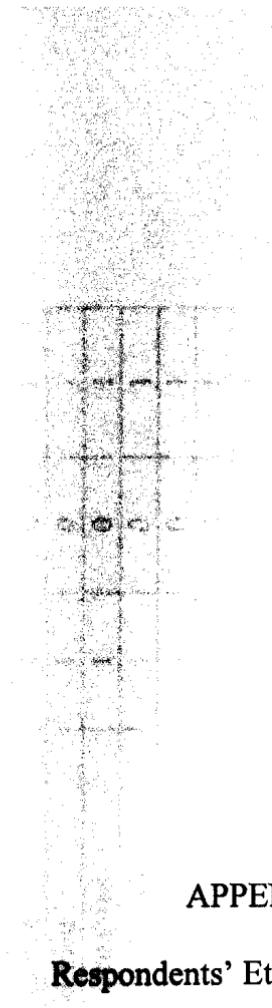
Intercept Scripts

“Hello, I’m a Sport Management graduate student at The University of Western Ontario.

If you’re 18 years of age or older, would you mind taking five minutes to complete a brief survey on Toronto FC? Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time”.

OR

“Hello, I’m a volunteer assisting a Sport Management graduate student at The University of Western Ontario. If you’re 18 years of age or older, would you mind taking five minutes to complete a brief survey on Toronto FC? Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time”.



APPENDIX E

Respondents' Ethnic Backgrounds

Ethnic Backgrounds Reported by Survey Respondents

Ethnicity	Full	Partial	Total
Canadian	64	34	81
Italian	50	13	56.5
English	44	21	54.5
Scottish	26	8	30
Portuguese	25	5	27.5
Irish	15	8	19
British	15	5	17.5
Polish	11	6	14
French	5	7	8.5
Chinese	6	2	7
Greek	5	2	6
Spanish	5	1	5.5
German	4	3	5.5
Welsh	4	2	5
Indian	4	1	4.5
American	4	0	4
West Indi	3	1	3.5
Dutch	3	0	3
Asian	3	0	3
Croatian	3	0	3
Russian	2	0	2
Hungarian	1	2	2
Sri Lankan	2	0	2
Trinidadian	1	1	1.5
Ukrainian	1	1	1.5
Guyanese	1	1	1.5

Ethnicity	Full	Partial	Total
Egyptian	1	1	1.5
South American	1	1	1.5
African	1	1	1.5
Danish	1	0	1
Maltese	1	0	1
Serbian	1	0	1
Columbian	1	0	1
Ecuadorian	1	0	1
Nicaraguan	1	0	1
Argentine	1	0	1
Jamaican	1	0	1
Kenyan	1	0	1
South African	1	0	1
Native Canadian	1	0	1
Slavic	1	0	1
Korean	1	0	1
Afghani	1	0	1
Pakistani	1	0	1
Mongolian	1	0	1
Filipino	0	2	1
Czech	0	2	1
Romanian	0	1	0.5
Latvian	0	1	0.5
Lebanese	0	1	0.5
Barbados	0	1	0.5

Note. Full = 1, Partial = 0.5