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La résistance des fans à l'égard d'un changement d'identité d'un club
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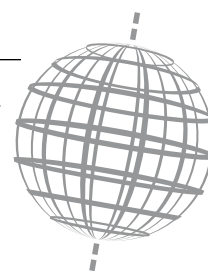Véronique Pauwels Delassus et Raluca Mogos Descotes

Résumé de l'article

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the research is to identify key factors that can reduce resistance towards a change in club identity. The results of our quantitative approach conducted with 229 fans of football clubs show that it is extremely important to inform supporters about the reasons and the benefits of the brand identity change, for the club and for themselves. Furthermore, the fans' tradition consciousness amplifies their resistance to brand identity change. Our results also indicate that after the brand identity change, fans limit the positive word of mouth towards the club (a form of passive resistance) and then exit (a form of active resistance).

Keywords: sport, fan resistance, brand identity change, word of mouth

RÉSUMÉ

L'objectif de la recherche est d'analyser quels sont les facteurs pouvant limiter la résistance des fans à un changement d'identité d'un club. Les résultats de notre approche quantitative menée auprès de 229 fans de club de football soulignent l'importance d'informer les supporters concernant les raisons et les bénéfices du changement pour le club et pour les supporters. De plus, la sensibilité à la tradition du club renforce la résistance au changement de marque. Nos résultats indiquent également qu'après un changement d'identité de marque, les fans limitent le bouche à oreille positif envers le club (forme de résistance passive) et peuvent abandonner le club (forme de résistance active).

Mots-Clés : sport, résistance des consommateurs, changement d'identité de marque, bouche à oreille

RESUMEN

El objeto de la investigación es analizar cuáles son los factores que influyen en la limitación de la resistencia de los aficionados a un cambio de identidad. Los resultados de nuestra investigación cuantitativa llevada a cabo con 229 aficionados de los clubes de fútbol resaltan la importancia de informar a los aficionados sobre los motivos y los beneficios del cambio para el club y los aficionados. Además, la sensibilidad a la tradición del club fortalece la resistencia al cambio de marca. Nuestros resultados también indican que después de un cambio de identidad de marca, los aficionados limitan el boca a boca positivo hacia el club (forma de resistencia pasiva) y pueden abandonar el club (forma de resistencia activa).

Palabras Clave: deporte, resistencia del consumidor, cambio de identidad de marca, de boca a boca

"Because identity is fundamental to behavior, choice of identity may be the most important decision people make" (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000, p. 717). The identity choice has a key importance in the way people perceive themselves, and the way others see and treat them. Identity is maybe the strongest explanatory factor of peoples' drives and behaviours, and for this reason, identity threats are often seen as generators of resistant behaviours (Bravo, Matute and Pina, 2017). In marketing literature, researchers have shown the crucial role that brands play in the construction of consumer self-identity (Escalas and Bettman, 2005) and how they provide consumers with a social identity (Sirgy, 1982). Over the last two decades, considering the increasing importance of the sport industry, researchers have also shown that fans strongly identify with their team (Shank and Beasley, 1998). Moreover, being the fan of a certain team is a central component of one's overall social identity (Wann, Mehiick, Russell and Pease, 2001).

Based on Kapferer's brand identity definition (2007), the identity of a club can be described by means of tangible dimensions (such as the shirt, emblem, name, colours, stadium, star players, investors, results of the game, merchandising products) and by intangible benefits (such as history, values, region, the atmosphere inside the stadium and the style of play). According to Coleman *et al.* (2011, p. 1064), a brand identity is defined as "the strategist's vision of how the service brand should be perceived by its stakeholders". Therefore, club identity can be defined as all the characteristics associated with the club that the club's management wants to be perceived by the different stakeholders. It represents all the associations which help members express their own identity (differentiation of self from others) and at the same time their sense of belongingness (integration of self with others) (Gibson *et al.* 2002; Trail *et al.* 2000).

For these reasons, clubs pay particular attention to the elaboration of a strong marketing strategy in order to reinforce their brand identity. For instance, nowadays, in the football world,

many clubs are forced to attract external investors to ensure their development and reinforce their identity. The problem is that many of those external stakeholders do not always feel concerned about the clubs' identity or the fans' beliefs and often implement major (identity) changes to the club. Often, especially in the case of football clubs, those major external investors are foreigners (e.g. Cardiff City F.C.'s foreign investor is Malaysian, A.S. Monaco's foreign investor is Russian). The acquisition of a football club by foreign investors is very likely to disturb club identity, and thus fans' identity, since fans are often proud of their club first because of physical proximity, the city or region where they live (Rooney, 1974). Indeed, the names of most of the clubs refer to a local place (Cardiff City F.C.; Monaco, Paris Saint Germain, etc.). Fans develop strong ties with the club because they are attached to the city of reference of the club, which becomes a centre of value embodying human aspirations and experience (Altman and Low, 1992). Thus, the acquisition of the club by a foreign investor may alter the perception of the club identity as belonging to a specific city/region or country. Moreover, once they have acquired the club, those foreign investors usually implement some other identity related changes. Let's take the example of Cardiff City F.C., which has been owned by a Malaysian businessman, Vincent Tan since 2011. This major stakeholder decided to first change the colour of the shirt to red. He then proceeded to remove the logo, the highly valued bluebird emblem, and to swap it for a red dragon, red being the colour of success and luck for Asian people. All these decisions prompted strong protests from Cardiff City's supporters, who felt that the new investor had disrespected the club's history, values and identity.

Considering the importance that the club identity can represent for its fans, our research project investigates what the fans' reaction will be towards a change in club identity. A change in club identity consists of a modification of some key elements that reinforce the identity of the club and help the fans distinguish it from all others. Identity changes can be dangerous and they are very likely to generate resistance to change (Bravo, Matute and Pina, 2017). Fans can feel mistreated and taken for granted when club identity changes occur and this can lead to resistance to change as well as negative emotional reactions. The objectives of the research are to understand if the change in club identity may enhance fans' resistance to change. We'll also look at how we can avoid the appearance of negative emotional reactions. Finally, we'll study the consequences. A sports fan can be defined as "an enthusiastic devotee of some particular sports consumptive object" which can be the sport itself or a specific league, team or player. (Hunt et al., 1999, p. 440).

Numerous researchers highlighted the fact that resistance could take the form of different types of consumer behaviour; the most extreme mode being that an individual or a group engages in a boycott against the brand (Gabriel and Lang, 1995; Friedman, 1985). Transposed at a fan level, resistance to identity change could result not only in negative word of mouth, but also cause fan exit (fans who stop supporting the club), with drastic consequences for the club, because without fans, a stadium becomes a soulless place. Those negative consequences of brand identity change have not been studied so far. Therefore, more specifically, our study aims to at least partially address this gap in the literature in order to understand if resistance to club identity change can lead to negative word of mouth and fan exit. The originality of this research consists also in the fact that our research represents a first attempt to combine resistance to change theory (Coch and French, 1948; Lawrence, 1954; Mayo, 1993; Giangreco and Peccei, 2005) and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982; Belk, 1988) in order to better understand the fans' resistance mechanism. If the resistance to change theory is very well suited in order to widely understand resistance to change behaviours (Giangreco and Peccei, 2005), the social identity theory is more specifically suited when trying to understand the role played by the disturbance of the fans' identification process caused by the club identity change. Moreover, the study also investigates the key factors which may limit fan resistance in the case of the change of some elements in the club identity. In order to analyse the process of fan resistance, this research uses the change of different football clubs' identities. In the remainder of this article, we first focus on the resistance to change. Subsequently, we define a research model to explain which factors may limit fan resistance, and what the consequences of fan resistance are in terms of fan behaviour. Then, we present the research methodology and results along with a discussion on their implications. Finally, conclusions, contributions, limitations and prolongations of our research are discussed.

Resistance to change

In marketing, the resistance to change has mainly been studied in the context of advertising (Sagarin et al., 2002). Several authors have focused their research on the understanding of the behaviour of consumer resistance (Peñaloza and Price, 1993; Herrmann, 1993; Fournier, 1998; Roux, 2007; Agboola and Salawu, 2011). Consumer resistance can be defined as a motivational state which is triggered by certain factors perceived as dissonant, leading to variable manifestations of opposition (Roux, 2007). It can appear at both an individual or collective level (Peñaloza and Price, 1993). Consumer resistance is led by emotional reactions, which can provoke more than simple opposition and, therefore creates distortions between consumer and firm moving from avoidance and minimization behaviour to active rebellion (Fournier, 1998; Roux, 2007), as well as anti-consumerism or market exit (Ritson and Dobscha, 1999; Roux, 2007). Several individual factors are capable of influencing consumer resistance due to a dissonance between the experience lived (e.g. emotions) and interpretations made (e.g. cognitive situations). Therefore an individual's propensity to oppose is influenced by consumer experiences (Close and Zinkhan, 2007) and personality traits such as scepticism, cynicism or self-expression (Fournier, 1998; Roux, 2007). Fiestad and Wright (1994) indicate that the more a consumer is educated and aware, the more he is capable of resisting external influence.

Fans' resistance to change

Fans are considered by many brand managers of team sports as the most important marketing target (Bauer et al., 2005) as they are both a source of revenue and ambassadors, as well as defenders of the club. Fans share the values, the history and the experience of the club. According to Belk (1988), fans consider their favourite club as an extension of themselves and may develop a form of possession about it. Therefore, belongingness

and the need for esteem lead fans to create fan communities in order to provide them with a social identity in accordance with their values and their culture.

Identification with a team and self-esteem are major drivers of sports fans' consumption behaviour (Trail *et al.*, 2000). That is why structural modification in the club might alter the identity of the fans' club and can result in strong negative emotional reactions, especially if the group members have no control over changes and decisions such as the change of a sponsor (Woisetschläger *et al.*, 2014) which can lock dialogues between fans and the club's board of directors. According to Redden and Steiner (2000), fans tend to refuse all dialogue and resist to change as long as their claims are not considered. Therefore, in line with Roux (2007), we could define fan resistance as an emotional and motivational state, triggered by certain factors linked to corporate behaviour and market practises which could lead to variable manifestations of opposition by fans wishing to protect both their own identity and the values of the club.

Hypotheses development

As noted in the literature review, two groups of related factors seem to have an impact on fan resistance to club change. First, stemming from the social identification theory (Tajfel, 1982; Belk, 1988), factors such as identification with the club and tradition consciousness could induce negative reactions towards change. Secondly, the resistance to change theory (Coch and French, 1948; Lawrence, 1954; Mayo, 1993; Giangreco and Peccei (2005) and consumer resistance research (Herrmann, 1993; Peñaloza and Price, 1993; Fournier, 1998; Roux, 2007; Agboola and Salawu, 2011) suggest that involvement in the change process, perceived utility and perceived benefits could reduce resistance to change. In our study, the use of the resistance to change theory allows us to widely understand resistance to change behaviours, and more specifically to find managerial levers of action aimed at reducing resistance to change (Giangreco and Peccei, 2005). The social identity theory is more specifically suited to how we understand the role played by identification process disturbance (Zeugner-Roth, Zabkar and Diamantopoulos, 2015) caused by the club identity change.

Antecedents of fan resistance issued from the social identification theory

Based on social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), the self can be conceptualized as being composed of a self-identity and a social identity. The self-identity represents the degree to which the participant, in our case the fan, has incorporated the football team identity into his or her self-concept. The social identity represents the degree to which the fan perceives that others identify him or her with the team identity. Kleine, Kleine and Allen (1995) demonstrated that attachment to an object depends on the degree to which the object is consistent with one's self-identity. Therefore, identification with a team and self-esteem are crucial elements for fans (Trail *et al.*, 2000; Derbaix and Decrop, 2011) and any change which occurs may alter the attachment to the group and the identity connection. According to the social-identification theory (Tajfel, 1982; Belk, 1988), social groups naturally try to enhance distinctive and positive social identity for members of the group and tend to

discriminate against other groups. Indeed the perception of belonging to a group will result in self-identification with that group (Bhattacharya *et al.*, 1995), creating a strong connection with others inside the community and a collective sense of being different from others outside the community (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). A threat to the community can be perceived as a threat to the group and also to oneself, causing negative reactions from both the individual and the group. Therefore, change in club identity might be perceived as an alteration to the identity of the fan club which could lead to a distortion between the fan clubs and the board of the sport club. However, the level of involvement may vary from fan to fan (Hunt *et al.*, 1999). In their research, Funk and James (2001) spotlight that the psychology of each fan is different according to their degree of belonging. Highly engaged and identified fans may refuse the change of identity, considering that it may alter the identity of the community and their self-identity. Indeed Funk and James (2006), indicate that an individual moves from attraction (merely liking a team) to allegiance (becoming loyal to a team). They demonstrate that allegiance is the outcome of a process by which individuals develop stronger emotional reactions to benefits and attributes associated with a sport team. Fans with a strong connection with their team may have more difficulties accepting modifications, which fosters a strong resistance among them. Stadium, players and team logos constitute symbols and help fans identify themselves with the club. In the context of an identity change, fans could lose any connection they had with their favourite team, disturbing their identification with the club. Therefore, we suggest that the more fans identify with the club, the higher the fan resistance:

H1: The fans' high level of self-identification with the club increases their resistance to brand identity change.

According to Gladden and Milne (1999), the stadium, the players and tradition are the most important components of the brand equity of a sports team and are completely linked with fans' behaviour. Guschwan (2012) identifies tradition as a relevant dimension in the perception of sports teams. Rituals and traditions maintain the fan community's shared history (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001), which may distinguish the club from other rival fan groups. The change of some elements of the identity of the club such as the arrival of a new investor or a change to the colour and the logo can be seen as an alteration of the values and heritage of the club especially for fans who are more sensitive to the traditions of the club and thus, potentially cause resistance. Therefore we suggest that:

H2: The level of tradition consciousness will increase fans' resistance to brand identity change.

Antecedents of fan resistance issued from the resistance to change theory

Resistance to change can appear at an individual level but also more collectively (Penaloza and Price, 1993). It is led by emotional reactions which can cause more than a simple opposition but really a distortion between the consumers and the company leading to the boycott of the product (Ritson and Dobscha, 1999; Roux, 2007). Several factors can influence resistance to change. Among the different factors identified in the literature on resistance to change, managers can manoeuvre mainly two

factors in order to reduce resistance: the involvement within the change process and the perceived benefit of the change (Giangreco and Peccei, 2005). In the case of brand name change, consumer involvement within the brand change process can be reinforced by communicating on the reasons why the company decided to conduct the change (Pauwels-Delassus and Mogos Descotes, 2012). If the reasons why the change has been implemented are unclear, consumers will be confronted with a cognitive dissonance regarding the brand change, which induces consumer resistance (Roux, 2007). Therefore the fans' involvement within the club identity change process can minimize fan resistance:

H3: The level of involvement within the change process will minimize the resistance to the club identity change.

Furthermore, in line with the resistance to change theory, Giangreco and Peccei (2005) suggest that perceived benefit of the change will minimize the resistance to change. In the context of change which occurs at a sports club level, the perceived benefit should be distinguished between the benefit for the club and the benefit for the fans. In the case of the arrival of a new investor for instance, financial value will be provided to the club. This can be perceived as a satisfying deal for both the club and the fans as it may enhance the positive image of the club and its fans. For instance, in the case of the football club Paris Saint Germain (PSG), the arrival of the new Qatari investor in 2011, resulted in the recruitment of new, star players such as David Beckham or Zlatan Ibrahimovic. Their stadium, named Parc des Princes, was also completely refurbished. Those kinds of benefits, based on the financial capacity of a foreign investor might improve a club's image and diminish the fans' resistance to the identity change since it distinguishes them positively compared to other 'external' fan groups (e.g.: better players, brand new stadium, etc.). Indeed, based on the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982), social groups try to enhance distinctive and positive social identity for members of the group (the fan group) and tend to discriminate against other groups (rival teams or the club's board of directors). Nevertheless, if this new investor initiates other changes such as the change of a logo, this can be perceived as altering the fans' identity with no clear personal benefits for them, and could tempt them to discriminate against the board of directors. Therefore, we suggest it is important to distinguish between the perceived benefits at club level from the perceived utility of the brand identity change at a fan/ personal level and we propose:

H4: The perceived utility of the club identity change from a fan's perspective will reduce their resistance to change.

H5: The perceived benefits for the club will reduce the fans' resistance to change.

Consequences of fans' resistance to change

Nowadays, word-of-mouth communication represents a crucial element in relationship marketing, potentially influencing consumer behaviour, in both positive and negative ways. Indeed, consumers have access to information and can influence each other through social media which leads to consumer empowerment towards marketing decisions (Labrecque *et al.*, 2013). Consumers can interact in order to share information, ideas, preferences and experiences. According to Sudaram, Mitra

and Webster (1998), consumers will spread positive word of mouth by pure altruism without expecting something in return. Alternatively, consumers will spread negative word of mouth due to a bad experience, in order to stop other consumers from experiencing similar negative feelings. Therefore, negative word of mouth is an expression of dissatisfaction and frustration caused by a bad experience. Bravo, Matute and Pina (2017), observe that in the case of corporate identity modifications, employees use negative word-of-mouth within and outside the organization in order to express their resistance to change. In the case of change in club identity, one could expect fans to spread negative word of mouth towards the practices of the club. Therefore, instead of encouraging the arrival of new fan members, existing fans may stop recommending the club to others in order to help them avoid dissatisfaction due to negative club practices. Therefore, we suggest that:

H6: Fans' resistance to brand identity change will have a negative impact on word of mouth.

Sudaram, Mitra and Webster (1998) also explain that consumers' negative feelings can even generate negative word of mouth. When Cardiff City F.C. changed the colour of their shirts, as well as the logo, fans encouraged others to keep wearing the blue shirt in protest against the change of identity. Indeed the more fans identify themselves with a sports team, the more the team is integrated into their identity, thus enhancing the emotional connection between the fans and the team (Underwood *et al.*, 2001). The emotional connection between the consumer and the brand is an integral part of the relationship-building process (Berry, 2000). Fan identification has a positive influence on brand equity (Watkins, 2014), and thus an identity change at club level may alter the relationship with the club. In the case of brand name change, Pauwels-Delassus and Mogos-Descotes (2012) show that consumer resistance to change disturbs the stability of the relationship they have built up with the brand over the years. Furthermore, consumer resistance can provoke more than simple opposition, sometimes creating distortions between the consumers and the firm leading to anti-consumerism and/or market exit (Ritson and Dobscha, 1999; Roux, 2007). According to Hisrschman, (1970) and Stewart (1998), dissatisfaction concerning actions carried out by a company may motivate the customer exit process. According to these authors, a change of quality and image can create distortions in the relationship between customers and companies which could generate resistance and thus provoke customer-exit. Therefore, we suggest that:

H7: Fans' resistance to club identity change will enhance fan exit.

Methodology

The explanatory nature of the research objectives lent towards the adoption of a quantitative methodology. The choice of the three different football clubs (A.S. Monaco F.C., Paris Saint Germain and Cardiff City F.C) was motivated by the fact the three clubs selected have been faced with a change of identity over the same period (2010/2014) with different degrees of identity change (Annexe 1). To better understand how fans perceive the changes of identity of the cases selected, we conducted a preliminary qualitative study with a sample of 18 fans of

different age and occupation. This preliminary qualitative study has confirmed that the arrival of an international investor was perceived as a change of identity because of fans' attachment to the local history. It also permitted the evaluation of the fans' perception of the different degree of the identity change. The use of three different cases of brand identity change enlarge our sample's degree of heterogeneity, and thus, increase the external heterogeneity of the obtained results. Table 1 hereafter resumes the main identity modifications undertaken by the three football clubs retained for our analysis. As one can see in table 1, the main investor of Cardiff City F.C., Vincent Tan, was forced by the fans to go back to the initial dominant blue colour, as well as the original club badge (the bluebird) in 2015. The drastic changes undertaken in 2012 created a lot of tension among Cardiff City F.C. fans.

The use of a pre-tested questionnaire, posted on the Facebook fan page of the football clubs A.S. Monaco F.C., Paris Saint Germain and Cardiff City F.C., allowed us to gather 229 completed questionnaires. Since our paper aims to understand the overall mechanism of resistance to an identity change, the specific focus on different supporters' profiles was not investigated. The accent was put on the broader perception of fans' reactions toward their club's identity change.

Measures

The questionnaire was administered between October and December, 2014. Table 2 summarises the measurement scales selected for the main constructs of interest in our research.

We developed the items for measuring the constructs of interest for our study by drawing on prior research. All independent constructs are measured with multi-item scales. The items were measured on 5-point-Likert scales, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Fans' tradition consciousness, fan identification and word of mouth intention were measured by multi-item scales developed by Woisetschläger *et al.* (2014). They used those constructs in the context of sponsorship and in the case of a stadium name change (the stadium was named after the name of the sponsor). Thus, it seemed to us important to be able to compare the results of our study to their results. However, after the pre-test, we withdrew the item "Traditions in sports should be upheld' from the scale tradition consciousness". All 12 supporters interviewed for the pre-test noticed the repetitive character of this item, compared to the item "It is important to uphold traditions in sports".

Drawing on prior research on brand name change, we used the scale developed by Pauwels-Delassus and Mogos Descotes (2012) in order to measure football supporters' beliefs regarding their involvement throughout the brand name change process.

Furthermore, we adapted Wendlandt and Schrader's (2007) scale of perceived benefits of change. During the pretest, all the interviewees noted the redundant character of items PB1: "The partnership with the investor X is very beneficial for [club], and two other items from the initial scale of Wendlandt and Schrader's (2007), namely "The partnership with X helps [club]" and "The effects of [club]'s partnership with X are mostly positive."

Based on those observations, we withdrew those two last items from our analysis; Wendlandt and Schrader's (2007) reported lower loadings of those last two items on the latent construct perceived benefits of change (compared to the item PB1).

TABLE 1			
The main identity modifications undertaken by A.S. Monaco, Paris Saint Germain and Cardiff City F.C.			
Football Clubs	**Ranking of the international awareness**	**Identity changes undertaken**	**Ranking of the degree of the identity change**
A.S. Monaco F.C.	2	– **new investor:** Dimitri Rybolovlev (Russian) becomes major investor (67%) in December 2011 – **new star players:** e.g. Radamel Falcao, James Rodrigues	3
Paris Saint Germain	1	– **new investor:** arrival of Qatar Sports Investments in 2011 – **star players:** e.g. Zlatan Ibrahimovic – **logo evolution** in 2013:	2
Cardiff City F.C.	3	– **new investor:** Vincent Tan (Malaysian) becomes majority investor in 2011 (51%) – **star players:** e.g. Craig Bellamyogo drastic changes between 2011 and 2015 – **logo drastic changes** between 2011 and 2015 2011 2012 2015	1

Finally, we used Mogos-Descotes and Pauwels-Delassus's (2015) measure of resistance to the brand identity change. This is the only resistance to change measure which exists in the field of brand change (it was used in the case of brand name substitution by the authors).

Research Results

The data was gathered by means of an online questionnaire, posted on the Facebook fan page of the football clubs A.S. Monaco F.C., Paris Saint Germain (PSG) and Cardiff City F.C.. It allowed us to gather 90 questionnaires from A.S. Monaco's supporters, 89 from PSG and finally 51 from Cardiff City F.C. (229 questionnaires in total). The questionnaire started by mentioning the fact that only the football club's fans were invited to complete the questionnaire.

Most of the interviewed fans are aged between 19 and 30 years (60.7%). 24.5% are aged between 31 and 50 years. 6.1% are older than 51 and the rest younger than 18.

Table 3 presents the structure and scores of the different attitudinal measures used in our questionnaire; all items were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale. As one can observe, the interviewed club supporters express relatively little resistance

to change. However, their positive word of mouth intention is rather low and their fan exit intention average. A possible explanation for those results may be that even though the club supporters got used to the club identity change, the manifestations of their resistance towards the identity changes are still strong. We can also observe, based on the descriptive results, that fan identification can be qualified as rather low for the interviewed supporters, as well as their tradition consciousness level. The supporters do not express very positive opinions regarding the benefits for the club after the identity changes. However, their appreciation of their own personal benefits is rather high as well as the perception towards their involvement within the identity change process.

Reliability analysis for dimensions and items

The research hypotheses and the assessment of the psychometric properties of the measurement instruments were assessed by using PLS path modelling (PLSPM) (Chin, 1998; Fornell and Larcker, 1981). PLSPM was preferred to LISREL because it does not require normally distributed data (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The results of the Shapiro-Wilk normality test, displayed in Table 3, reveal that the data is not normally distributed ($0.643 < W < 0.878$, $p < 0.001$ for all the items).

TABLE 2 Measurement scales	
Measurement scales and references	**Measures and items**
Fan identification Woisetschläger *et al.* (2014)	FI1. I am very attached to [club]. FI2. I see myself as a part of the [club] community. FI3. To be part of the [club] community means a lot to me. FI4. [Club] plays an important role in my life.
Tradition consciousness Woisetschläger *et al.* (2014)	TC1. It is important to uphold traditions in sports. TC2. Particularly in sports, it is nice to remember old times. TC3. A sense of tradition is very important in sports. TC4. Not all changes in sports are positive.
Perceived benefits for the club (of change) Wendlandt and Schrader (2007)	PB1. The partnership with X is very beneficial for [club]. PB2. [Club] can commit better players due to their partnership with X. PB3. X can comply more easily with their financial obligations because of the partnership with X. PB4. The [club] can improve its international competitiveness due to their partnership with X. PB5. [Club]'s needs are met by the partnership with X.
Perceived utility (of change) for the fans Wendlandt and Schrader (2007)	PUF1. I feel valued as a supporter. PUF2. The present club offers attractive advantages. PUF3. The change represents clear benefits to me.
Involvement within the brand change process Pauwels-Delassus and Mogos Descotes (2012)	I1. I was involved in the change process. I2. I was well informed during the change process. I3. The club communication allowed me to understand why this change was necessary. I4. I could give my opinion on the change to the club.
Resistance to brand change Mogos-Descotes and Pauwels-Delassus (2015)	RC1. I did not feel enthusiastic regarding the change (r). RC2. I tried to convince others that this change was appropriate. RC3. I supported this change in discussions with other fans. RC4. I had a critical opinion regarding this change(r).
Fan exit Stewart (1998)	FE1. When I attend a match, I do not wear new colours of the [club]. FE2. I have stopped buying the merchandise featuring the new emblem/colours. FE3. I have rejected the change (r).
Word of mouth intention Woisetschläger *et al.* (2014)	WOM1. I never miss an opportunity to recommend [club] to others. WOM2. I actively encourage friends and colleagues to inform themselves about [club]. WOM3. I speak positively about [club]. WOM4. I actively recommend products of [club] to friends and colleagues.

PLSPM supports the assessment of psychometric properties of measurement instruments including reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity (Chin, 1998; Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

By examining Joreskog's Rhôs and Cronbach's Alphas, we assessed composite reliability; they all exceeded the cut-off value of 0.7.

In order to depict auto-correlation problems among the items composing the latent constructs, the inter-item correlation matrixes for each measurement scale should be observed. According to the rule of thumb, no auto-correlation problems can be depicted if none of the observed correlation coefficients is higher than the critical value of 0.8 (El Akremi *et al.*, 2002). One auto-correlation problem was depicted between the items BP2 and BP3 (Kendall correlation coefficient = 0.832, *p < 0.001*). For this reason, the item BP3 was withdrawn from the analysis since it is the item with the highest correlations with all the other items composing the scale (Kendall correlation coefficient between BP 3 and BP1 = 0.742, Kendall correlation coefficient between BP 3 and BP2 = 0.683, *p < 0.001*).

Convergent validity was checked for by examining the loadings of items on their respective latent variables and the AVE's values. All the manifest variables' loadings exceeded the cut-off value of 0.7 suggested by Nunally and Bernstein (1994) with three exceptions: ID1 ($\lambda = 0.498$), BP5 ($\lambda = 0.456$) and PB6 ($\lambda = 0.473$), TC4 (0.577). As a result, those items were withdrawn from further analysis. Furthermore, all the AVEs exceeded the cut-off value of 0.5 with one exception: AVE fan identification = 0.430. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), if AVE is less than 0.5 (in between 0.4 and 0.5), one should examine the latent variable composite reliability in order to decide whether the convergent validity of the construct is still adequate (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Since the convergent validity indicators for the latent variable fan identification are satisfactory (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.844; Joreskog's Rhô = 0.896), we considered that the AVE value for the fan identification construct is acceptable.

Finally, discriminant validity was assessed by examining whether each construct shared more variance with its measures than with other constructs in the model (Barclay, Higgins and Thompson, 1995; Chin, 1998). The average variance extracted (AVE) should be higher than the squared correlation of any two latent variables (LV) in the model. The results suggest that this condition is fulfilled.

Table 3 and 4 summarize the psychometric properties of the measures.

Collinearity and autocorrelation analysis

Before testing our research hypotheses, we tested for eventual collinearity and autocorrelation problems. VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) and the Durbin-Watson test were performed in order to test the existence of collinearity and autocorrelation problems. In order to perform the Durbin-Watson test, we estimated with SPSS 22.00 the linear regression of fan exit (dependent variable) as a function of all the other latent variables comprised in the research model, namely perceived congruence between the public sponsor and the event, positive attitude, perceived waste of money and involvement with the event. The observed VIF for our latent variables range between 1.0154 for "fan identification" and 2.745 for "resistance to change". The rule of thumb is that VIF exceeds the cut-off value of 5 when multicollinearity is a problem (Grewal, Cote and Baumgartner, 2004). Therefore, the VIF values suggest that no multicollinearity problems can be depicted.

Furthermore, the Durbin-Watson Statistic was used to test for the independence of studentized residuals. The value of the Durbin-Watson statistic ranges from 0 to 4. As a general rule of thumb, the residuals are uncorrelated if the Durbin-Watson statistic is comprised between 1.5 and 2.5 (Garson, 2012). For the before mentioned linear regression analysis, the value of Durbin-Watson is 2.103, indicating no serial correlation. Moreover, the VIF indexes are all lower that the critical value of 5. To sum up, no collinearity and autocorrelation problems can be depicted for the dependent variables.

Hypotheses' test

Figure 1 summarises the test of the research hypotheses and the respective results. Seven out of our eight research hypotheses received empirical support.

60.2% of the variance of the fans' resistance to brand identity change is explained by the fans' tradition consciousness (ß = 0.151, *p < 0.001*), their perceived involvement within the brand change process (ß = - 0.259, *p < 0.001*), the perceived benefits of change (ß = - 0.349, *p < 0.001*) and the perceived personal benefits (ß = - 0.258, *p < 0.001*). The influence of fan identification on their resistance to brand change is non-significant.

Furthermore, the fans' resistance to change explains 39% of their word of mouth (ß = - 0.624, *p < 0.001*). Finally, 63.7% of the fans' exit intention is explained by their resistance to change (ß = 0.634, *p < 0.001*) and word of mouth (ß = - 0.232, *p < 0.001*).

Additionally, by using permutation tests, we explored for differences of the hypothesised relationships of influence between the latent constructs in our research model, among the three club identity changes (groups) selected for our research. Two significant differences have been highlighted by using the permutation tests, concerning the path coefficient between the word of mouth and fan exit intention between the groups of Cardiff City F.C's fans and A.S. Monaco's Fans (perceived difference = 0.536; *p < 0.05*) as well as for the comparison between Cardiff City's fans and PSG fans (perceived difference = 0.536; *p < 0.05*). Remember that Cardiff's brand identity change was more aggressive compared to the changes undertaken by PSG or A.S. Milan. We can therefore suggest that in the case of more extreme brand identity changes, fans' resistance leads more easily to fan exit.

Discussion of the results

As one can observe, the perceived benefits of change have the strongest impact upon fans' resistance to identity change. This result conforms to Giangreco and Peccei's (2005) and Pauwels-Delassus *et al.*'s (2014) results and is in line with the resistance to change theory. It thus seems of upmost importance in the case of a sport club's identity change to inform fans regarding the benefits of the change in order to minimize resistance. Fans' awareness regarding the coming of better (international) players or the possibility for their club to improve

TABLE 3
Measures, descriptive statistics and Normality test (n = 229)

Construct	Items	Mean	Std. deviation	Shapiro Wilk Statistic and p-value	Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Joreskog's Rhô	AVE
Resistance to change	RC1(r)	2.755	1.472	W = 0.843; p < 0.001	0.783	0.844	0.896	0.681
	RC2	4.834	1.308	W = 0.886; p < 0.001	0.883			
	RC3	4.886	1.378	W = 0.878; p < 0.001	0.872			
	RC4(r)	2.502	1.300	W = 0.876; p < 0.001	0.759			
Word of mouth	WOM1	2.306	1.248	W = 0.852; p < 0.001	0.952	0.961	0.972	0.896
	WOM2	2.083	1.181	W = 0.819; p < 0.001	0.935			
	WOM3	2.332	1.245	W = 0.855; p < 0.001	0.950			
	WOM4	2.354	1.258	W = 0.865; p < 0.001	0.949			
Fan exit	FE1	2.913	1.481	W = 0.848; p < 0.001	0.840	0.879	0.926	0.806
	FE2	3.004	1.467	W = 0.859; p < 0.001	0.926			
	FE3	2.974	1.498	W = 0.861; p < 0.001	0.925			
Fan identification	FI2	2.218	1.035	W = 0.869; p < 0.001	0.795	0.844	0.896	0.430
	FI3	2.201	1.021	W = 0.861; p < 0.001	0.890			
	FI4	2.245	1.082	W = 0.860; p < 0.001	0.861			
Tradition consciousness	TC1	1.607	0.720	W = 0.705; p < 0.001	0.893	0.877	0.924	0.803
	TC2	1.524	0.751	W = 0.683; p < 0.001	0.862			
	TC3	1.633	0.823	W = 0.711; p < 0.001	0.932			
Involvement within the change process	I1	4.057	1.134	W = 0.784; p < 0.001	0.748	0.780	0.859	0.598
	I2	3.214	1.342	W = 0.878; p < 0.001	0.794			
	I3	3.100	1.326	W = 0.870; p < 0.001	0.787			
	I4	4.135	1.047	W = 0.779; p < 0.001	0.776			
Perceived benefits for the club	BP1	2.328	1.393	W = 0.820; p < 0.001	0.899	0.938	0.956	0.843
	BP2	1.707	1.185	W = 0.643; p < 0.001	0.931			
	BP3	1.795	1.330	W = 0.663; p < 0.001	0.954			
	BP4	1.891	1.322	W = 0.691; p < 0.001	0.891			
Personal perceived benefits	PPB1	3.502	1.330	W = 0.869; p < 0.001	0.846	0.840	0.904	0.757
	PPB2	3.607	1.237	W = 0.873; p < 0.001	0.888			
	PPB3	3.598	1.227	W = 0.876; p < 0.001	0.878			

TABLE 4
Discriminant validity assessment (n = 229)

Squared correlation between the latent variables	FI	TC	ICP	CBC	PB	RC	WM	FE
Fan identification (FI)	1	0.005	0.036	0.002	0.056	0.016	0.035	0.003
Tradition conciousness (TC)	0.005	1	0.002	0.065	0.053	0.097	0.023	0.108
Involvement in the change process	0.036	0.002	1	0.243	0.382	0.361	0.266	0.222
Change benefits for the club (CBC)	0.002	0.065	0.243	1	0.307	0.431	0.273	0.492
Personal change benefits (PCB)	0.056	0.053	0.382	0.307	1	0.424	0.296	0.351
Resistance to change (RC)	0.016	0.097	0.361	0.431	0.424	1	0.390	0.604
Word of mouth (WM)	0.035	0.023	0.266	0.273	0.296	0.390	1	0.393
Fan exit (FE)	0.003	0.108	0.222	0.492	0.351	0.604	0.393	1
Mean Communalities (AVE)	0.430	0.803	0.598	0.843	0.757	0.681	0.896	0.806

its position within the various sporting competitions, diminishes their resistant behaviour. In line with the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982), those elements are also likely to enhance distinctive and positive social identity for members of the fan group and tend to discriminate against other rival fans groups.

Furthermore, the perception of more personal fan benefits also diminishes fans' resistance to the brand identity change. Such benefits could consist of improved stadium facilities or even a new stadium, or even an increase in fan pride due to positive on-field results. A similar impact in terms of magnitude (to the fans' personal benefits) is exerted by the perceived involvement within the brand change process. This result conforms to the application of the resistance to change theory in order to understand more broadly consumers' resistance to change behaviour (Giangreco and Peccei, 2005; Mogos Descotes and Pauwels-Delassus, 2015). Fans should therefore be aware of the change and involved throughout the change process. In the case of brand name substitution, consumer involvement during the brand change process can be enhanced by communicating on the reasons why the company decided to conduct the change (Pauwels-Delassus and Mogos Descotes, 2012). Confusion regarding the reasons for the brand change lead to cognitive dissonance regarding the brand change, and consumer resistance (Roux, 2007).

As expected, the fans' tradition consciousness will amplify fans resistance to the change of identity. Rituals and traditions are very important elements for fans, maintaining the fan community's shared history (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Therefore for those fans characterized by higher levels of tradition consciousness, the change of some elements of the identity of the club (such as the arrival of a new investor or the modification of the dominant colours and/or the logo) can be seen as a huge threat to club identity and enhance resistance to the brand change. This result conforms to the use of the social identity theory with regard to the explanation of the phenomenon of resistance to a brand change.

The only hypothesis which did not receive empirical support relates to the non-significant impact of the fans' identification to the club regarding resistance to brand identity change. We proposed that the fans' identification to the club should amplify their resistance to change. In line with the social identity theory (Trail *et al.*, 2000), we expected that change in club identity might be perceived as an alteration to the identity of the fan club and could lead to a distortion between the fan clubs and the sport club's board of directors (seen as an external and threatening group). However, a possible explanation for this result could be the relative low level of self-identification of our sample, which can be due to the fact that after the change, fans identify themselves less with the club. According to Funk and James, (2001), fans who identify less with the club may react less and be more easily attracted to new experiences.

Furthermore, as expected, the fans' resistance to change strongly diminishes fans' positive word of mouth regarding the club. As Stahl (2004) suggests, consumers' resistance to products or loyalty programs impact the consumers' word-of-mouth. Change within the club can limit positive word of mouth and eventually cause negative reactions towards the practices of the club. Instead of encouraging the arrival of new fan members, they may (passively) stop recommending the club to others.

FIGURE 1
Hypotheses, test
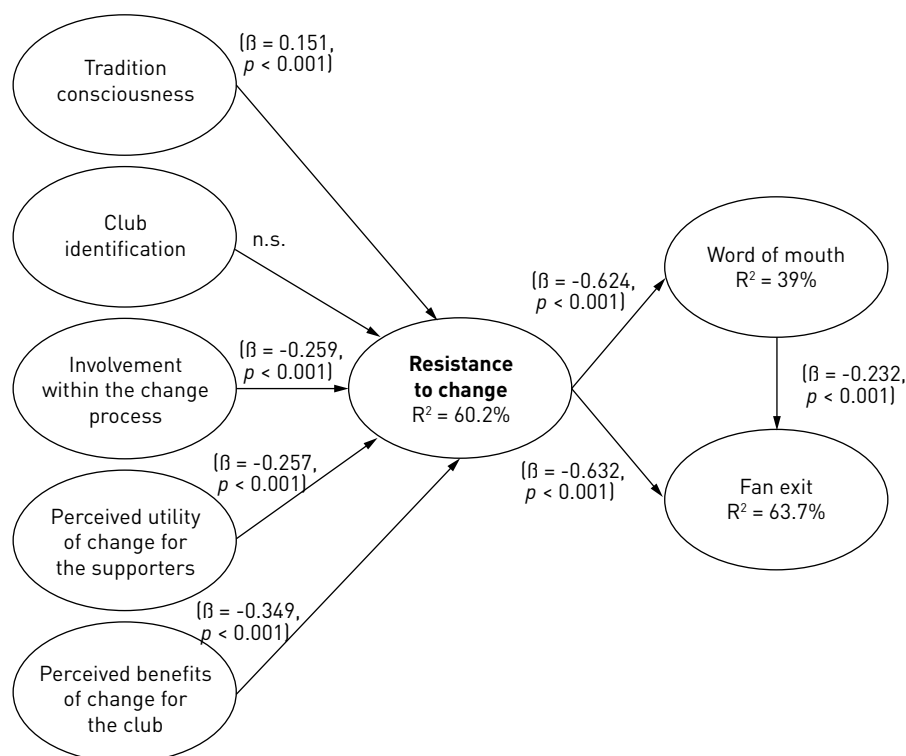
Finally, the fans' exit intention is explained firstly by their resistance to change and then by their positive word of mouth. Indeed, consumer resistance can lead to more than simple opposition and cause market exit (Ritson and Dobscha, 1999; Roux, 2007). It seems though that word of mouth precedes fan exit. Our results appear to indicate that in the first phase, after the club identity change, fans limit the positive word of mouth towards the club (a form of passive resistance) and then exit (a form of active resistance). In other words, passive resistance precedes active resistance.

Another interesting result is that, in the case of more extreme changes of identity, the fans' resistance to change leads more easily to a show of active resistance/fan exit. A possible explanation, issued from the social identification theory could come from the possible negative consequences of the brand identity change upon the fans' identification with the club. Indeed, the brand identity change induced by the arrival of a new majority foreign investor at Cardiff City F.C. can be judged as radical because of the modification of the logo, dominant colours and symbols of the brand. Those important modifications were very likely to disturb Cardiff City F.C. fans. Indeed, in 2014, about 3000 club fans opposed to Cardiff City's change of shirt and logo colour from blue to red took part in a protest march and demonstration (BBC, 2014). In 2015, this active resistance behaviour forced the management of the club to change the colour of the shirt back from red to blue and to make the bluebird more prominent on the club logo after consulting the fans (BBC, 2015).

Conclusion, contributions, limits and prolongations

To conclude, the results of our study suggest that consumer resistance can be active by nature; it can provoke more than the limitation of fans' positive word of mouth (passive resistance behaviour) and cause fan exit (Ritson and Dobscha, 1999; Roux, 2007). However, passive resistance (limitation of the positive word of mouth) is an important determinant of active resistance (fan exit). Regardless of the passive or active nature of the resistance, the fans' resistance to identity change completely explains active and passive resistant fan behaviour. It thus seems crucial to understand how marketing managers can limit resistant behaviour. Our study offers useful guidance in this respect. In order of importance, marketing managers should:

1. Explain the benefits of the change at a club level to the fans (e.g. the arrival of new star players, the ambition to move the club up the table and into a higher division, etc.)

2. Involve them throughout the change process by extensively informing them regarding the change and if possible by asking their opinion on certain changes

3. Explain how the fans can personally benefit from the change of identity (e.g.: by using the improved stadium facilities, benefiting from the construction of a new stadium, taking advantage of the services offered at a newly refurbished stadium or belonging to potentially a world famous sports club)

4. Pay careful attention to the more tradition-conscious fans since they are more reluctant to agree to a change of identity. Give more attention to the three afore-mentioned levers of action in order to reduce the brand identity change resistance of the highly tradition-conscious fans.

5. Keep in mind that fans characterized by high levels of club identification will not exhibit more resistance to the change compared to fans involved at a lower level, which is reassuring for marketing managers.

Another interesting result at a managerial level is that, in the case of more extreme changes, the fans' resistance to change leads more easily to an exhibition of active resistance/fan exit. We can therefore recommend, in the case of the arrival of a new investor at a football club, that this person should not modify the main dominant colours and symbol of the club. Those changes can cause a high level of active resistance behaviour.

We propose that those managerial implications can be generalized to other types of brands, besides the sport setting since more and more brands develop strong online fan communities. Therefore, in the case of a change of brand identity (brand name, logo, emblem…), these results encourage managers to explain the benefits of the changes to the fans and involve them in the change process in order to avoid negative word of mouth, active resistance and fan exit. For some brands, the club history is very important. For example, Club Camif in France was changed to Ekoya in 2016. Based on our results, we would recommend managers pay particular attention to tradition-conscious club members and inform them specifically in order to diminish their resistance to change.

On the theoretical front, this study is the first to combine social identity theory and resistance to change theory in order to understand the fans' resistance to brand identity change. If the resistance to change theory was previously used in order to understand consumers' resistance to brand substitution (Pauwels *et al.*, 2014; Mogos-Descotes and Pauwels, 2015), to the best of our knowledge, it has never been used in a study concerning a sport club's identity change. Our results suggest that the resistance to change theory is highly appropriate when trying to understand the fans' resistance behaviour. On the theoretical front, we have distinguished between the fans' active (fan exit) and passive resistance (limitation of the positive word of mouth) intentions. Moreover, based on the social identity theory and the resistance to change theory we were able to propose a checklist of managerial levers of action which potentially limit resistant passive and active intentions and behaviour.

As usual, when researching new grounds, our study is not exempt from certain limitations. They relate mainly to the composition of our sample and to the brand identity change cases selected. For instance, in this study, we did not consider the differences between the different fans' typologies within our convenience sample. The only condition for interviewing our respondents was their own perception of themselves as being fans of the three football clubs. In the future, it would be interesting to eventually distinguish between the different fan categories, based for instance on the typology of Hunt *et al.* (1999). Another limit is related to the fact that all three football club identity cases relate to changes, mainly induced by the acquisition of the club by foreign investors. We did not control for instance for the ethnocentrism level of fans or for their perceived image of the country of origin of the investor. Those elements should certainly be taken into account by future research in this field. However, the advantage of using three different cases of brand identity change, taking place in three different countries reinforces the external validity of our results.

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ANNEXE 1

A.S. MONACO CASE

The A.S. Monaco (A.S.M) was founded in 1924 and became the pride of the Monegasques as the club was one of the most successful in French football history. Nevertheless in 2011, the club had to go down to the second division and a Russian billionaire, Dmitry Rybolovley, became the major shareholder with 66.67% and took the lead role in the club. For the first time, A.S. Monaco was no longer under the control of the Monegasque principality. The main goal of the new president was to return to the first division within two years. Dmitry Rybolovlev decided to invest more money in order to attract better players and become the best football club in Europe. The arrival of football stars such as Radamel Falcao recruited for approximately 60 million euros and James Rodriguez and Joao Moutinho for a total amount of 90 million euros led football specialists to consider A.S Monaco as 'the new rich club'. In 2012/2013, AS Monaco went back to the first division and at the end of the 2013/2014 season the Monegasque club finished second behind Paris S.G. and, therefore, qualified for the Champions League. Unfortunately, in 2014/2015, the two star players left the club. The fans felt betrayed by these changes which were able to provide short term results but not long term performance and definitely led to the loss of the tradition and spirit of the club.

PARIS SAINT GERMAIN CASE

Paris Saint Germain football club (PSG or Paris SG) was founded in 1970, following the merger of Stade Saint-Germain and the Paris FC. PSG has both history and fame and is a charismatic club which attracts an impressive number of supporters at every game. In 2011, Qatar Sports Investments acquired the club and decided to develop a business plan with the objective of attracting new sponsors and the best international players. Thanks to their financial might, the club succeeded in attracting players like Ibrahimovic, Cavani, Lavezzi, Silva and others who were bought in order to win the Champions League. In this context, Paris Saint Germain entered a new dimension called 'the football business.' In 2013, the logo was changed to emphasize the fact that Paris is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. After 3 years of rebuilding, the club is now considered as the richest football club in the world in front of the Real Madrid, Barcelona and Manchester United. Nevertheless this result was achieved using Qatari funds, by building a new team of players, by altering the logo and atmosphere in the stadium which has affected fans. According to L'Equipe 21, they are also currently discussing renaming the stadium and using a sponsor's name (e.g. Allianz Arena, Bayern Munich F.C) which could also upset fans.

CARDIFF CITY F.C CASE

The club was founded under the name of Riverside A.F.C in 1899, before becoming 6 years later the Cardiff City Football Club (Cardiff City F.C.) with the nickname 'Bluebirds'. The club currently plays in the second division of the English championship. It had its most successful period in the 1920's, winning the FA cup. In 2010, Vincent Tan – a Malaysian billionaire – invested in Cardiff City F.C. and became the owner with 51% of the club shares. The club signed famous players such as Greg Bellamy, owned by Manchester City on a season-long loan. The new owner decided to set up a large investment plan for the club at the beginning of the 2012/2013 season concerning the new training facility, extension of the stadium and a transfer budget in order to attract better players and to be recognizable all over the world. But Vincent Tan also decided to first change the colour of the shirt to red. He then proceeded to remove the logo, the highly valued bluebird emblem, and to swap it for a red dragon, red being the colour of success and luck for Asian people. All these decisions prompted strong protests from Cardiff City's supporters, who felt that the new investor had disrespected the club's history, values and identity. After the decision to change the distinctive colours and symbols of Cardiff City F.C, most supporters decided to protest and kept wearing the traditional blue shirt because they couldn't identify with the new colours.