



LUND UNIVERSITY

Department of Service Management

SMMM20 Master's Thesis

Travelling Football Fans & Hotel Selection

Salient Hotel Attributes & Fandom Subculture in the British Premier League

Submitted by

Anestis Zoumpoulakis

Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the hotel attributes that affect selection by football fans when travelling away from home to participate in a sport event. Attributes that identified in previous researches were segmented into five major sets and the most common and relevant to the purposes of this study were chosen to form the questionnaire. Questionnaires were distributed through online channels, fan Forums and social media pages.

Results show that the most important aspects, for travelling fans when selecting hotel during football related trips, are price and value for money, followed by cleanliness and location related attributes. Interpersonal services such as personnel behaviour, appearance and efficiency are considered important. Elements of core service like breakfast, food quality, Internet availability, room quietness and appliances (TV) are also somehow important. Fans also admit that the hotel selection process is different when travelling for football purposes than other (business or holidays). However, they are loath to sacrifice basic hotel services for fan related and oriented ones. Finally, they are willing to return to a hotel they have previously stayed, rather than search for a new one each time they visit the destination.

The study is positioned under the context of sport tourism and city break travel. Furthermore the fandom subculture is analysed in order to understand the situational background of the respondents' profile.

Keywords: Sport tourism, football, fandom subculture, city-break travel, hotel selection, hotel attributes

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1. Introduction

Sport tourism is identified as one of the most dynamic and fast growing sectors in the global travel and tourism industry (Kaplanidou et al., 2012). English football and more specific the Premier League, after a turbulent period of violence and hooliganism, has undergone severe transformation and for the past years is growing in popularity and revenues (Guilianotti, 2002). Football Venues in turn, have become places of mass consumption (Turner, 2014) which attract huge numbers of fans. According to ONSIPS¹, around nine hundred thousand (900.000) foreign football fans visited Britain and spent approximately £706 million. For almost 40% of them, watching the event was the sole purpose of the trip. Advances in transportation technology and the increase of disposable income enabled people to travel with more safety and comfort as well as cheaper and more often. Plus, there is an increased tendency of Europeans to take shorter but more frequent vacations of few days, often triggered by the desire to participate in an event as a football match (Dune et al, 2009).

The figures above clearly demonstrate the huge mobility and the growth potential of the football related travel and tourism. This has already great impact on local economies and hospitality related business and the number of inbound tourists is on the rise. Hotels can take advantage of this tendency to increase room occupancy, as well as complement the weekday revenues that traditionally comes from business travellers (Dunne et al., 2011). It is consequently important for managers, to know and understand the needs of this specific sub-segment in order to satisfy them in the best way possible.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Hotel Selection

Previous research on the subject of the hotel selection criteria, has mainly focused on the purpose of the trip, business or leisure and the type of the hotel services, basic, mid-range or luxury. Hotel guests have complex motivations, plus numerous diverse characteristics and perceive value under different light, depending on the purpose of the travel (Dube & Renaghan, 2000; Knutson, 1988), individual sociocultural characteristics (Lockyer, 2005¹; Tsai et al., 2011), price (Erickson & Johansson, 1985; Victorino et al., 2005) and various tangible or intangible attributes of the hotel. Football travellers have two very strong pull factors that influence their behaviour. One is the purpose of the trip, with extensions to city break travel. The other is the fandom subculture which illustrates and promotes a sense of social belonging and suppress or magnifies other individual or cultural characteristics.

Up to date, the stunning number of 173 attributes have been identified and evaluated, regarding the factors that affect hotel selection choice by customers (Barsky & Nash, 2002; Chan & Wong, 2006; Jones & Chen, 2010; Kim & Perdue, 2013; Lewis, 1985; Lockyer, 2005¹; McCleary et al., 1993; Pan et al., 2013; Richard & Sundaram, 1994; Yavas & Bebakus, 2005).

Choice behaviour studies have been evolved from classical approach (rational) to an information

¹ Office for National Statistics (ONS), the Department for Transport, International Passenger Survey (IPS), (2011) [Office for National Statistics](#)

processing model (Kim & Perdue, 2013). Customers undergo the selection process in order to make a decision which best satisfies their needs and motives in the particular time and situation they are into. Satisfaction or dissatisfaction is thought to be a relative judgement that takes into consideration both the qualities and the benefits obtained through a purchase (Ostrom & Iacobucci, 1995). Today tourists have lots of sources of information in order to compare and evaluate various offers. Therefore, it is essential to situate older studies in a context where pre-purchase information was limited and usually provided through leaflets, advertisements and word of mouth.

Previous researches have shown that the most significant parameters that the guest examines are location, overall service quality, image/ brand, price, physical properties and amenities (Chan & Wong, 2006; Dube & Renaghan, 2000; LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1996; McCleary et al., 1993; Ostrom & Iacobucci, 1995; Richard & Sundaram, 1994; Victorino et al., 2005). However, the order of importance is not conclusive. Different authors in various locations, examining different market segments and type of hotels, came across an infinite combination of attributes and their significance in the decision making process. However, Jones & Chen (2010) in their research claim that in fact, customers consider only a small proportion of previously identified attributes in order to make a choice. Initially they form a consideration set which is followed by a smaller choice set, from which the final decision is taken.

In addition to the hotel related attributes that affect choice, there are also demographic, sociocultural and internal factors that influence the decision making (Tsai et al., 2011; Yavas & Bebakus, 2005). Hotel selection is a complex process and there is no consensus among researchers about the number of attributes that a guests examines before the decision or, the order of importance of those attributes during the selection. It is evident in the literature that there no universal marketing strategy which applies to all customer segments. Therefore, specific market sub-segment research is required in order to have a better and deeper insight about what guests consider important.

There is great potential for hotels to reap benefits and raise their revenues by targeting sport fans. More specific, football fans are loyal and emotionally tied to their favourite clubs and in a way, they feel obliged to follow by travelling wherever their team performs (Davies & Williment, 2008; Jones, 2008; Koenigstorfer et al., 2010; Weed, 2010). Football lovers belong to the fandom subculture and their behaviour is dictated by its norms and traditions. Their consuming choices can also be influenced by the subculture or, in a less stringent concept, as members of the fans consumer “tribe”.

1.1.2 Sport Tourism, Football Fandom & City Break

Travelling football fans are a distinct sub-segment of leisure-based tourism with sport orientation. People travel to participate (actively) or attend (passively) sport events since ancient times. Perhaps the most widely known events are the Olympic Games in ancient Greece and the Coliseum races in Rome (Zauhar, 2004). Football fandom specifically, consists of a very strong subculture, where fans chose to participate and attend in order to shape their individual and social identity (Green, 2001; Jones, 2008; Koenigstorfer et al., 2010; Weed, 2010). The emotional and subcultural factor explains

the motive of fans to travel frequently and many times long distances in order to follow their favourite team. It is essential to situate the football tourist in a separate context and as a distinct sport tourism segment, with unique characteristics.

That kind of travelling, to participate in an event which takes place in an urban area without other intermediate destinations, falls into the city break form of tourism (Dune et al, 2009). The trip is usually structured around the event, by either undertaking additional activities at the destination, or not. The pull factor of a football sport event could be extremely strong and motivates people to travel to places that otherwise they would not (Standeven, 1998).

1.2 Research Issue

Although there is substantial research about the factors that influence the hotel selection process, there is a gap in the knowledge of the travelling football fan market sub-segment and the aspects that affect their choice, when travel in order to attend a match, with an overnight accommodation intention. There is no previous research which addressed the issue and most of the studies have focused on the two major segments, business and leisure tourists in various expressions.

Football fans travel under a very specific context which is expected to differentiate and influence the hotel choice and the elements that they deem as critical, in comparison to other tourist segments. The purpose of the trip is very specific and most of the times the event is the sole reason for visiting the destination. Fans build the trip around the event which in turn shapes their needs and demands from other parts included in the vacation as accommodation, transport and various activities.

In addition their belonging in the social group and subculture of football fandom, disguises their other individual and social characteristics up to a degree. Fans travel as members of a subculture group, rather than as individuals. That implies that there is a potential to address them massively and the marketing efforts could focus on group characteristics than individual ones. Consequently it is essential to investigate the degree these two aspects affect the hotel selection.

Travelling football fans can fall in the category of passive/ spectator sport tourists (Gibson, 1998), as they travel away from home in order to attend a sport event and the city break tourism since they visit a city as a single destination (Dune et al, 2009). Nevertheless, they have unique characteristics since they belong in the specific football fan subculture (Green, 2001; Jones, 2008). Furthermore, the purpose of the trip is driven by the football event, either is the sole purpose or at least the focal.

1.3 Aim of the study

This study aims to shed light on the hotel aspects that affect choice by the travelling football fans, when they follow their favourite team away from their place of residence. Twenty seven hotel attributes were qualified for evaluation. The selected attributes will be ranked in order of importance by the responding fans. Then, the significance of individual characteristics, as age and income, in relation to desired hotel features will be measured. Finally, the magnitude of the impact of the travel context (football event) and the strength of the fandom subculture over the decision process and the the various hotel attributes will be explored.

The research is placed under the context of sport tourism and city break travel. Furthermore, in order to understand in full depth and detail the construction and the driving factors behind the choices, the social profile of the football fan and the respected subculture need to be build.

Great numbers of football fans travel during the weekends mainly and for a period of nine months (August-May) throughout the year, to watch football games. The study is focused on the English Football Premier League and the supporters of the clubs that constitute it. The English Premier is the most popular football League in the world. The participating Clubs are enjoying high attendances and the stadia have occupancy rates close to completeness. The stadium occupancy rate reached an impressive 95.6% in the 2013/14 season, with a cumulative attendance of 13,944,100 spectators. In addition the Barclays Premier League is broadcasting in 645m homes across 175 countries and is estimated to appeal to 1.163 billion fans worldwide².

This is an important target group for travel agents, hotels and other hospitality related business with an increasing trend, as attendances raise and penetration boosts through live broadcasting global wide; it is a market with great potential. By knowing the parameters that the fans consider significant, the hotel managers can shape their product offering accordingly in order to gain an advantage over competition. Furthermore, they can lure visitors to stay overnight at the hotel, stay at a hotel more times per trip or increase the total nights spend. If successful, the inbound tourism of the destination will raise, with benefits for hospitality related and other businesses as well. Last, they could better meet the needs of the guests and increase their satisfaction.

1.4 Research Question

“What factors affect the hotel choice of football fans when travelling to attend English Premier League games?”

The main research question can be broken into three main parts.

1. In what order of importance are the various hotel attributes ranked by the travelling football fans when selecting a place to stay during the trip?
2. Is there any statistical significant difference between different group sub-segments, concerning age and income in relation to the perceived importance of the attributes?
3. What is the size of the impact of the trip purpose and fandom subculture on the selection process?

2. [Premier League season review 2013/4](#)

2. Theoretical Framework

This study examines the key factors that affect the hotel selection decision by the football fans supporting English Premier League clubs, when travelling to attend matches. Since there is no relevant literature regarding the specific tourist sub category, general hotel selection decision making theories will be applied. The objective is to investigate commonalities and differences with the major group they belong to, the leisure tourist. In order to understand the unique characteristics of this leisure / sport tourist group, the phenomenon and the societal connections of fandom will be analysed. Last the trip of the supporter who follows a football club will be placed in the city break travel context.

The discussion in this chapter starts with the sport tourism, as football fans are examined as tourists within the context of city break travel. Then the the main topic of hotel selection is discussed. Finally, fandom the unique characteristic that defines travelling football supporters are explored.

2.1 Sport Tourism & City Break Travel

2.1.1 *The roots of sport motivated travelling*

Sport loving people, athletes or attendants, travel shorter or longer distances to participate or watch a sport event since ancient times. Despite the physical dangers and the discomforts, spectators (and contestants) travelled by foot, wheeled carriages, litters and boats to attend (and participate) the ancient Olympic Games in Olympia, Greece (Crowther, 2001; Zauhar, 2004). There are sources (Crowther, 2001) that estimated the total attendance in Olympia III Stadium at 4th century BC up to forty thousand spectators. We can imagine the difficulties for the organizers and the attendants had to confront for issues like food and water supply, accommodation, sanitary conditions and control for such a crowd. Nevertheless, Olympic Games in ancient Greece were the predecessor for the modern Olympic Games and the foundation of sport events as we know them today.

2.1.2 *Sport tourism definition*

Scholars have produced numerous definitions of sport tourism throughout the years, in their effort to categorize and explain the phenomenon. The additional difficulty when trying to define sport tourism, is that it encompasses both concepts of sport and tourism and attempts to synthesize them into one. Under the context of this study the definition given by Varaldo (in Radicchi, 2013) states:

“the set of journeys that lead people for more or less long time periods away from their places of residence in order to practice competitive or simply amateur sport activities or to participate in sports events as spectators, fans, and supporters. The sports practice or the sports event may be the main reason for the journey, or at least be an important motivation that drives people to travel”.

This definition suits the classification of the sport / football fan in this study and satisfies the

parameters of travelling away from home, for short periods of time, participate passively to the event as a spectator, with the sport event to be the main or at least an important motive for the trip. For the purpose of this study, overnight accommodation at a hotel or any commercial property is also an essential requirement.

2.1.3 Sport Tourism Forms & Concepts

Sport tourism can be encompassed in three major and wide categories: 1) Actively participating in the organized event as a contestant; 2) passively attending the event as a spectator; and 3) visiting historically significant sport sites as nostalgic sport tourist. Sports tourists, are considered to be those individuals, whose travel, is primarily “motivated by Sport” – to visit sport sites, to attend/participate in sports events, to observe sporting activities, to learn more about sports or improve skills, to experience the ambiance of a major event and the environment of a sporting activity, to meet sport persons or involve in any other sport related activity. (Kurtzman, 2005)

A complementary point of view, developed by Gammon and Robinson (2003), demonstrate a model divided either by sport perspective and intention or primary purpose. The first distinction is “sport tourism”, where the sport part is the main attractor for travelling. They further distinct the sport in its competitive or recreational nature. The second defined as “tourism sport”, the sport part is the secondary element of the holiday. This break down to the distinction that sport activity is secondary but demanded nonetheless or it can be just incidental.

In the case of travelling football fans, it is obvious that it falls in the category of passively watching the spectacle and that the attended sport is competitive. It can also include tourists that attend a football game without that being the main purpose of their visit to the destination. The limitation and the difficulty with the motivational concept is that the purpose behind a visit is not always clear. Some tourists watch a sport event more as a part of the tourism experience as opposed to driving the tourism experience (Deery et al., 2004). Tourists many times can choose a destination for numerous reasons, without prioritizing their motives. The fan category which is examined later, plays a role in the decision to travel and follow the club. Different fan types show different commitment rates and bond strength with their teams which varies from a coercive obligation to follow, to a lighter inclusion of the game in a broader city break trip with numerous activities.

As it will be further discussed later in that paper, city break travellers may have more than one reason for their short visits to an urban destination. It might be attending an event (sport, music), visit a museum, shopping, visit cultural sites or dine in restaurants collectively, separately or in combinations.

2.1.4 City Break Travel

The football fan who travels away from home to participate in a sport event or attend a game, fits perfectly in the city break travel category. The city break travel is defined as “a short leisure trip to one city or town, with no overnight stay at any other destination during the trip” (Trew and Cockerell in Dune et al., 2010). The city break is short in duration, usually between one to four days. The purpose of the trip is recreational, meaning business related activities are excluded. The

final destination is an urban area. The distance is not explicitly mentioned but it can be said that almost always, the destination is within few hours travel time. In addition, those trips are characterized by their discretionary nature, often opportunistic one, and the composition of the travel party, mostly couples or groups with common interests (Dune et al., 2010).

Football fans travel either individually, in groups with friends other fellow fans or in excursions often organized by some travel agency. The trip is built around the event and if it is not the sole purpose for it, is a very strong pull factor. The game and consequently the trip, can be seen as an excuse to escape from daily routine, an opportunity to visit places that otherwise (without a match) are unattractive or just to take few trips around the year complimentary to the main vacations. The trips are also relatively date flexible, as there are many fixtures spread throughout the year, from where a fan can choose the most suitable.

A city break trip is usually less complicated than the traditional vacations. The planning involves only travel and accommodation arrangements, since the destination and the event is predetermined. So the decision is either to take the trip or not. Maybe another consideration for the fan who seeks attendance of popular and attractive matches, is the ticket availability. In English Premier League because of high rates of occupancy, match day attendance can often only be assured through purchase of a season ticket, or for the away matches through travel agencies, because match day tickets are virtually unavailable (Brandes et al., 2013).

The recent growth of the city break travel has been assisted by the low cost airlines, the increased trend towards shorter and more frequent trip taking and the changing perception of cities as destinations (Dune et al., 2010; Ene & Schofield, 2011). Various peripheral destinations have become easily and fast accessible by air travel, in very low costs. Finally it can be implied that a city break is an activity oriented trip and not for relaxation. It includes sightseeing, visiting theatres and cultural places, attending events, enjoying night-life, shopping and generally experiencing the city's attractions (Dunne et al., 2011).

2.1.5 Sport Event & Destination

Recurring sport events over time become intertwined with the destination's tourism product portfolio and the incorporation of event attributes in a destination attribute pool can contribute to the formation of a profile, with further potential of creating marketing benefits (Kaplanidou et al., 2012). English Championships' football matches are taking place every week for more than hundred years, therefore they are completely incorporated in the place and the destination's image. Sport tourism comprises a bundle of services that form the final product. There are core products and services which are necessary to complete the purpose of the trip and peripheral activities that can make it more attractive. Transportation to the destination and the sport venue as well as tickets for the game are in the core. Accommodation depends on the travel time and can be necessary or optional. Food, shopping, visit to other attractions and other activities unrelated to the sport event on the periphery.

Sport and tourism products have complementary features and it is important to view them as the two interdependent aspects of one experience. A destination can reap benefits from sport events,

stadiums, museums and other infrastructure projects which have become tourist attractions in their own right and can bring into urban areas tourists who would not otherwise be there (Standeven, 1998). There are three main motives that affect the choice to attend a sport event 1. being a fan of the sport, 2. leisure preferences and, 3. identifying with the subculture of the sport at the event (Jones, 2008).

The “away” travelling fan has a lot of matches – destinations to choose from. Apart from the importance of the game itself there can be a possible options between alternative destinations. In the case of recurring sport events, success can be measured by satisfied customers who intend to return to both the sporting event and the destination. It is not always clear whether the sporting event or the destination serve as the primary source of repeat visitation. Personal attitudes and characteristics as well as destination specific attributes can influence the intention to visit or return to a destination (Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008). In professional sports the two most important determinants that influence the intention to attend and travel, is the perceived competitive balance and the stadium atmosphere, followed by consumer preferences, economic variables, quality of viewing and supply capacity (Koenigstorfer et al. 2010). The decision to travel in the first place or opt for a destination – football match over another, is a combination of individual pursuits and characteristics, event related parameters and destination attributes.

Hotels separately can play a small role in attracting the sport tourist individually. As we have seen the hotel / accommodation is included in the overall product and service bundle of the destination. Sport tourists are attracted by the event or the destination as a whole, although is not always clear which one is the main attractor. Hotels on their part, can adjust and shape their product in order to increase their market share of the already visiting tourist, increase overnight stays and expenditure. As a secondary, long term goal they can customize their offering in order to meet the demands and lure more fans by convincing them to spend night(s) at the destination.

2.2 Hotel Selection Process

Previous researches have shown that there is a remarkably large amount of data and attributes that hotel guests consider and evaluate during the selection process. And despite the fact that they form smaller consideration sets for making final choices, still either consciously or not, they are influenced by many endogenous and exogenous factors. Personal characteristics, travel purpose of and hotel attributes are the main parameters that have impact on the selection process.

McCleary et al. (1993) suggests that is necessary to narrowly define the situation in which a product is to be used in order to identify what is important in defining specific product selection at a hotel. Furthermore, Dube & Renaghan (2000) claim that the purpose of the travel is an important determinant on the value perception by the guests. Aligned with those notions, this study attempts to investigate the hotel selection of the specific tourist group, the travelling football fan, under the purpose of seeking accommodation when following their favourite club, to a match away from home. Nevertheless, despite there is a specific travel purpose common for all, various demographic, financial and personal choices could affect decision.

2.2.1 Identified Attributes

Researchers in previous studies about attributes that influence the selection of accommodation by hotel guests, identified and rated a considerably large amount of features. In their research, Dolnicar and Otter (in Lockyer 2005²) extracted data from 21 journal articles (between 1984-2000) identified 173 attributes related to image, price / value, hotel physical setting, service and more. Scholars asked participating hotel guests either to openly state which properties affect their choice (Dube & Renaghan, 2000; Kim & Perdue, 2013; Victorino et al., 2005) or to rate between pre-given list of attributes according to the importance of impact on the decision making (Barsky & Nash, 2002; Chan & Wong, 2006; Knutson, 1988; LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1996; Lewis, 1985; Lockyer, 2005²; McCleary et al., 1993; Ostrom & Iacobucci, 1995; Richard & Sundaram, 1994; Tsai et al., 2011; Yavas & Bebakus, 2005). Researchers favoured quantitative method and rely on literature review in order to determine the attributes under question, although at times they applied open questionnaires or mixed method with interviews, to get a deeper insight.

In the existing literature, the determined attributes were examined mainly by two methods. The first one, by putting them in order of importance and evaluate them as standalone variables. The second is to correlate and connect the results to different tourist groups (business-leisure), sub-segments of the same major group (meeting or transient business) or by recognizing similarities and differences between demographically different groups (gender, age).

When choosing a hotel to stay, guests value various attributes. At the top of the list of importance and the most frequent seen determining factors, according to previous studies are, convenient location (Chan & Wong, 2006; Dube & Renaghan, 2000; McCleary et al., 1993; Richard & Sundaram, 1994; Tsai et al., 2011), general amenities (Yavas & Bebakus, 2005), clean/ comfort room (Callan & Bowman, 2000; Knutson, 1988), security (Lewis, 1985; Sohrabi et al., 2012) and room rate (Wong & Chi-yung, 2001).

2.2.2 Target Groups

Literature covers a wide range of participants according to various travellers categories. Richard & Sundaram (1994) questioned pleasure travellers located at an airport (passengers) in order to achieve diversification and secure as many lodging type guests in than manner. Their objective was to identify which service quality items influence repeat purchase intentions. LeBlanc & Nguyen (1996), positioned their sample in one hotel and examined both business and leisure guests, with aim to spot the key attributes used by guests to evaluate corporate image. Ostrom & Iacobucci (1995) asked frequent travellers, afterwards segmented into business and leisure, about the driving factors for making a purchase decision. Lockyer (2005²) focused on residents of a city and the three most important factors they consider when selecting accommodation, by rating a number of attributes in a Likert scale. Yavas & Bebakus (2005) targeted all residents of an area, then separate them into business and leisure tourists and required by them to rate the importance of various hotel attributes. Knutson (1988) used frequent travellers divided into 3 hotel categories and connected the salient factors considered when selecting accommodation to each type/price range hotels. Victorino et al. (2005) studied the selection from a different perspective, by questioning business and leisure

travellers, in all three hotel types (economy, mid, upper), regarding the innovative attributes that influence choice. Tsai et al. (2011) sampled tourists in a specific destination, asked them to rate various hotel selection criteria and compared the responses of domestic to international visitors. McCleary et al. (1993) studied subscribers of a business travellers magazine who rated hotel attributes in the selection process and then drew connections to the importance of variables in relation to travel purpose/situation. Chan & Wong (2006) asked frequent International travellers found in an airport, to prioritize factors in hotel selection process, by segmenting them in two categories: product/experience related and stimulus/ recommendation (advertisement). Kim & Perdue (2013) examined business and leisure travellers who stayed at a hotel once during the previous year, with the purpose to determine the extend in which each attribute is important to hotel experience.

2.2.3 Forming Attribute Sets

Hotel attributes can be assembled and form a basic set of salient features that include various elements (Richard & Sundaram, 1994; Dube & Renaghan, 2000; LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1996). These categories depending on how the attributes are divided can interweave. For example the gym or fitness center is a place inside the building which have physical properties like size. But at the same time it is an amenity (equipment) and a service provided (it can even include personal trainer). The purpose of this study is neither to cite all the attributes identified in previous researches nor to meticulously put them into categories. The identified attributes by previous studies will be grouped in the most appropriate way, so as to serve the objective which is to rank the level of significance and influence over the choice of the travelling football fan.

2.2.4 Influential Attributes for Hotel Selection

Hotel attributes that were found in previous studies, can be grouped into five major sets. They are attributes related to 1) services and amenities, 2) accommodation, 3) building and physical properties, 4) personnel and 5) brand. Furthermore, for managerial purposes and implications these attributes can be divided into fixed, meaning that they cannot change, as location; hard assets, which can change by investing, decorations and furnitures fall into this category; and last soft assets that can easily be modified, like food menu.

1. Services & Amenities

Business guests put weight on amenities as meeting and business facilities, gym, laundry and food quality. Professionals are sent by their companies, usually with the expenses paid, to perform a job. They want to spare time by having everything at hand and also keep up with their routine as they were at home. That is why they want all services accessible no matter if they happen to use them or not (Fawzy et al., 2010; Knutson, 1988).

Amenities and services in general were considered important but came second in priority, in the middle of the importance list in most studies (Lockyer, 2005; McCleary et al., 1993; Shanka & Taylor, 2003; Yavas & Bebakus, 2005). Security services and business facilities are the most important that have a decisive role in the selection process (Callan & Bowman, 2000, Knutson,

1988; Tsai et al., 2011). It can be assumed that most of the services and amenities like booking (taxi, flight, tours), Internet access, room service, concierge and restaurants are well established as traditional services, which are expected to be found. They don't play a big role as they are core services, however it may cause trouble and negative evaluation if unavailable.

2. Accommodation

The same, as with amenities can be said about accommodation services. A good sleep is of utmost importance and at the very core of the hotel product. Cleanliness was mentioned in many studies and was at the top of the importance list in early years (Callan & Bowman, 2000; Knutson, 1988; Lockyer, 2005; Tsai et al., 2011). Comfort of bed, linen and towels, quietness, spacious room and various devices (TV, radio, hairdryer,) are all somewhat important, but apart from cleanliness neither is a main determinant for final choice.

As with the core service and amenities, accommodation attributes which have to do with room and bathroom, are nowadays taken for granted for most travellers. It is more probable a failure in delivering those attributes (e.g. not operating air condition) to generate negative image and stress upon the guest, than to enhance the experience. It may be considered as necessary and essential but at the same time neutral attributes.

3. Building & Physical Environment

A property either has or has not open and unobstructed view to a landmark like Eiffel Tower or is located next to the sea. In addition some hotels occupy iconic buildings, with historical value and unique architecture. There is really nothing can be done to attend those matters. Of course a hotelier can offer (free) commute services to compensate in a way for location disadvantages. They can also undergo extended renovations to attach a special design, image and feeling to the property. This is a policy that was followed the previous years by boutique hotels (Victorino et al., 2005). Where hotels have wide open field to differentiate and attract customers, are the offered services and amenities, as well as the personnel attitude and care-taking.

Convenient location is at the top places of almost every study and concerns all types of tourists (Chan & Wong, 2006; Dube & Renaghan, 2000; McCleary et al., 1993; Richard & Sundaram, 1994; Tsai et al., 2011). This is understandable since location incorporates a lot of attributes as facilitator. In urban destinations for example, leisure travellers prefer hotels near attractions, it is natural to desire to spend time doing activities than commuting. A business traveller wants to be near the business district or the meeting place, as traffic or any such incident can cause delays. Neighbourhood safety, transportation hubs are important for all travellers for the feeling of security and convenience.

4. Personnel

The posture of personnel can support the image and the quality of the hotel, can fix a problematic situation or can spoil an experience. Service employees, through their attitudes and behaviour, have a direct impact on the impression that travellers have of the hotel establishment (LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1996). Interpersonal relationships and interactions can create memorable experiences,

while the human “tough” is significant for every guest. Hotel guests want to be treated with respect, made feel special and pampered, while resting and relaxing away from home.

In addition, guests are not willing to waste time in hotel procedures like check-in, but to utilize every moment in the destination, so efficiency is essential. This is especially important during city breaks football trips, since the duration of the trip is short and therefore maximization of net time directed towards activities is even more precious.

5. Brand and Marketing

Hotel reputation and corporate image have a significant impact on hotel image and consequently choice. The name of the hotel and its affiliation to an international or renowned chain are the features that constitute the identity factor. As such, these are key elements that influence travellers' expectations with regard to service quality (LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1996). Customers are looking for cues of quality and the brand name is a good and trustworthy indicator.

Corporate image is associated with the brand name of the organization. Image is defined as perceptions about a product/service as reflected by the associations held in consumer memory (Zhang & Mao, 2012). From the company's point of view, as the way in which those projections and associations are perceived from external stakeholders or customers and how the managers would like the outsiders to see the company (Kandampully et al., 2011). For the customer, image reflects the value and meanings attached to the product or service and since it is personal it can be subjective. Companies build internal mechanisms in order to create and project desired image and form favourable public opinions about them (Kandampully et al., 2011). Image is a very important strategic asset for hotels and can signify service concept, quality, type of business and it can be a very quick corporate indicator of these characteristics.

The image communicated by a hotel has been acknowledged to be a strategic variable, having the potential to influence customer intentions and loyalty (Kandampully et al., 2011; LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1996). Image incorporates to main components: functional and emotional. Hotel image can be derived from any of the tangible or intangible attributes separately, or the combination of them. However, the combination of physical features and the stimulation of senses to evoke emotions in collaboration to service personnel performance, can result in exceptional experiences and positive post consumption evaluation (Kim & Perdue, 2013). Consequently, corporate brand works best when it both delivers a practicality (tangible and service) plus emotional value.

Positive image would lead to repeat patronage and will turn into competitive advantage. Living up to the expectations of the customer and, at best exceed them, is the optimal way to leave lasting impressions and build market share; the first visit offer opportunities in that direction (LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1996). It has also been observed that when people have a positive holistic impression of a hotel, they tend to rate specific attributes, such as service performance, in a more positive way (Kandampully et al., 2011). This is known as the “halo effect”³. In conclusion, image can be regarded as an expression of the hotel personality and character, can shape positive impressions and

3. The halo effect is a cognitive bias in which an observer's overall impression of a person, company, brand, or product influences the observer's feelings and thoughts about that entity's character or properties. Source: wikipedia.org

favourable attitudes, which eventually can result in loyalty and repeated patronage.

Reputation has appeared in many studies, as an important attribute (Kim & Perdue, 2013; LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1996; Richard & Sundaram, 1994; Victorino et al., 2005). Today besides the brand and the corporate projected image, customers take into consideration travel blogs, reviews by other travellers and tourism communities (forums) at the Internet (Zhang & Mao, 2012). The projected brand and identity has been slipped from the hands of official channels, the company and its associators, and passed on the client side. This is possibly a reason that advertisements were not a convincing factor, except from older travellers.

Loyalty

Kandampully et al. (2011), found strong correlation between service quality, corporate image and loyalty. Consistent and excellent service quality positively influence image, which in turn has a strong impact on customer loyalty and repeat patronage intentions. Customer loyalty is defined as a consumer's deep and consistent commitment to a product, service, brand; or as a feeling of attachment to or affection for a company's people, products, or services (Kandampully et al., 2011). Loyalty has two dimensions, the behavioural which is referred to repeat purchasing patterns and the attitudinal which is about psychological commitment (Zhang & Mao, 2012). It also includes four stages 1) cognitive (cost - benefit evaluation), 2) affective (emotional link), 3) conative (formation of behavioural intentions), 4) action (habitual repurchase and recommendation) (Kandampully et al., 2011). Loyalty can be a valuable tool for hoteliers when addressing football fans, since fans return to the destinations at least a time per year, sometimes more than once and consequently be the first hotel choice can raise revenues.

Beyond the point that the customer has been convinced and proceeded to the purchase, simply delivering on the attributes that motivated purchase is not sufficient to build loyalty (Dube & Renaghan, 2000). Instead, the guest should experience visible value every time during the stay. Hoteliers need to identify those attributes that create visible value and make sure that they are presented and provided to their guests. Those are the features that the guests are willing to pay for (Dube & Renaghan, 2000), if the price is right and they consider the transaction beneficial and honest.

Building loyalty which results in repeat patronage, should be the priority of hospitality business. Loyal customer-company relationships are widely accepted as an investment in future revenue and competitive advantage (Mitchell & Imrie, 2011). Loyalty needs to be approached in a holistic way as it involves multiple attributes and the hotel offering as a total. According to Zhang & Mao (2012) friendly and efficient service, well-planned and well-maintained room and convenient location are the basic driving factors for customer loyalty to hotels. In previous studies loyalty has been measured as repeat patronage intention, willingness to recommend, preference of one to others, and willingness to pay premium (Zhang & Mao, 2012).

Loyalty therefore, has impact on the price sensitivity. Room rate is not regarded as significant parameter, for people who are loyal to a brand and truly committed to the belief that their selected hotels' prices represent the best value for money (Barsky & Nash, 2002; Chan & Wong, 2006).

Loyalty seen as a customer's commitment to repurchase, is particularly valuable as a competitive advantage due to the difficulty competitors have in replicating and in turn breaking this bond (Mitchell & Imrie, 2011). In conclusion, brand loyalty develops from cognitive (rational) evaluation to affective (emotional), where emotional bonds are much more resistant. It ends up to habitual repurchase which means that the selection process is completely eradicated. Brand loyalty at the final stage, as it is strenuous to be built, it is difficult to collapse. For hotels means repetitive patronage and increased market share, deprived from the competitors.

Socially interconnected groups, as football fans, have been found to act loyally, because personal relationships are maintained through shared, regular consumption (Mitchell & Imrie, 2011). There is an opportunity for hoteliers to attract the fan tribe as a group and not individually. Based on the idea that the purchase decision is made upon emotional elements, brand loyalty can be leveraged to new levels thereby erecting powerful barriers to exit (Goulding et al., 2013). Tribes and subculture tend also to build patterns and rituals (Goulding et al., 2013) which assist the notion of “conative” loyalty. Shaping a friendly and facilitating experiencescape for the communal consumption, by projecting the appropriate image, will result in increased and strong loyalty. Fans therefore could extend the consumption of their favourite activity (following the club) to other places. It is probable that the fandom loyalty would be transferred and associated to the the hotel scape as part of the ritual.

Price

Although price was not among the first and most important parameters that determine hotel selection, budgetary constraints are undoubtedly crucial. Customers may categorize the hotels according to price, prior to the attribute related selection, because if a room rate is above the customer's financial affordability, no transaction can be made and therefore no selection. In addition Pan et al. (2013) in his study of online hotel selection, found that if the number of candidate hotels is larger than five, customers cut down the choice set usually by price criteria. Of course absolute price cannot be confused with the value for money attribute which is high in regard to most studies.

Fairness of the transaction is much more important than the absolute price. Of course value for money and fairness of price, is an extremely subjective issue. Generally, customers choose to patronize hotels that offer the best value proposition under existing budgetary constraints (Victorino et al., 2005). For some travellers price can have reverse impact as it is perceived as an indicator of quality (Erickson & Johansson, 1985). That means higher price, point higher quality and that there may be customers who exclude hotels with lower room rates.

Finally a mismatch has been identified, between what hotel managers believe is important and what guests say is important in the selection of accommodation. Where guests value and rate every other attribute as location, cleanliness, amenities, security and related items as the most important, on the other hand, industry indicates almost uniformly that price is the most influential factor in hotel selection by guests (Lockyer, 2005¹). Price is essential and budgetary constraints play an important role on decision, but price is one among many attributes that may be considered salient when selecting accommodation.

Table 1: Hotel attributes divided into five sets

Services & Amenities	Accommodation	Building / Physical Environment	Personnel	Brand & Marketing
Check In-Out Food & Beverage quality Bars & Restaurants 24h Room Service Concierge Meeting Banqueting Conference Gym Security Business Center Internet (Wi-Fi) Pick-up / Drop-off taxi Safe deposit box Booking services	Room Bed Mattress Cleanliness Comfort Appliances (TV-Radio) Cable-Satellite TV Housekeeping Quietness Bathroom Cleanliness Appliances (Hair-dryer) Amenities (Towels)	Interior Room size Common Areas Furniture Design Decoration Exterior Façade Appearance Location View Parking Transportation Hubs Proximity to places of interest Central location Clean & Safe neighbourhood	Behaviour Appearance Training Efficiency	Image Type/Category Value For Money Discount Rates Loyalty Programs Reputation

Table 1 illustrates the five sets of hotel attributes which were considered in this study. Each attribute included is identified by previous studies. This table was the foundation of the questionnaire used in the survey. The attributes are condensed in order to form a solid set of questions. Elements which were considered irrelevant to the purpose of the study were removed (e.g. business related facilities). Most researchers have assembled significant attributes for hotel selections and formed relevant sets (Dube & Renaghan, 2000; Fawzy, 2010; LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1996; Richard & Sundaram, 1994; Shanka & Taylor 2003; Sohrabi et al., 2012; Tsai et al., 2011; Yavas & Babakus, 2005). The attributes were gathered and built groups that serve the purpose of each study and assist the analysis procedure. Each scholar formed the number of the sets and the attributes included according to the needs and the aim of the conducted study. In this survey the following attributes (table 2) were selected and formed five sets which used in the distributed questionnaire for ranking by the fans.

Table 2: Attributes qualified for the questionnaire

Services & Amenities	Accommodation	Building / Physical Environment	Personnel	Brand & Marketing
1. Bar & Restaurant In The Hotel Premises 2. Breakfast, Food & Beverage Quality 3. 24h Room Service 4. Security 5. Internet 6. Broadcasting Games On Wide Screen	7. Cleanliness 8. Room Appliances (TV, Radio) 9. In-Room Cable - Satellite TV 10. Quietness	11. Hotel Decoration 12. Hotel Design 13. Parking 14. Proximity To Stadium Nearby 15. Transportation Hubs 16. Proximity To Places Of Interest 17. Clean & Safe Neighbourhood	18. Personnel Behaviour 19. Personnel Appearance 20. Personnel Training 21. Personnel Efficiency	22. Hotel Brand Name 23. Hotel Type/ Category 24. Price / Room Rate 25. Value For Money 26. Loyalty Programs 27. Offers & Travel Packages

The attributes in table 2 were qualified to form the questionnaire used in the survey. Those attributes were considered as the most appropriate and relevant for the purpose and the aim of this study. They were selected based on the trip characteristics, influenced by the city break notions and the trip purpose affected by the fandom subculture. For example the central place of interest is the sport venue. Since city break is an activity oriented vacation, relaxation services (e.g. spa) were

excluded. Under this concept the twenty seven attributes, forming five sets were concluded.

The first column consists general services that are regarded as core in the hotel business, are sought by most travellers, both leisure and business. The second column refers to room related aspects. The third one has to do with physical attributes and location elements. Location and building properties are found to be of the utmost importance in a significant number of previous studies and played a focal role in this study as well. The forth column concise the interpersonal service attributes. In order to make it clear and help the respondents in their answers, a few word description followed each question. The last column includes the marketing efforts of the hotel and the conducted campaigns to attract customers.

2.2.5 The Selection Process

When customers make a purchase, they seek to satisfy various needs and fulfil personal goals. Satisfaction is thought to be a cognitive evaluation, derived from the qualities and benefits obtained through that purchase as well as the costs and efforts borne by a customer to obtain that object or service (Ostrom & Iacobucci, 1995). The customer's choice is influenced by numerous factors, both internal and external (Tsai et al., 2011), where looking for the best value proportion with the desired features, from a product range using criteria that they believe best satisfy the needs and motives. (Kim & Perdue, 2013).

Previous studies have identified 173 unique hotel attributes that influence accommodation selection. However, it would be impossible for guests, to evaluate and weight such an enormous amount of information, about hotel characteristics in order to make an lodging choice. All consumers go through, a more or less similar process, every time they make a purchase (Lewis, 1985), although that accommodation purchases are more complex and cognitively demanding than those of other consumer goods (Lockyer, 2005²; Pan et al., 2013).

Despite the vast number of attributes identified by hotel guests in previous studies, Jones & Chen (2010) showed in their study that in fact, subjects consider only a small proportion of them, when making a choice for accommodation. Further they divided the typical hotel selection process into two steps. The first one for the decision maker, is to form a consideration set which is followed by an even smaller choice set, from which the final selection is made. This notion is also supported by the uncomplicated nature of the city break travel, where fans in our case, favour simple choices which best serves their trip purpose and are unwilling to undergo an extensive selection process. In addition to that concept cognitive psychology and marketing suggest that presenting too many options is harmful to conversion rates and consumer satisfaction (Pan et al., 2013). Nevertheless research findings are inconclusive and having many options is considered as a double-edged sword.

Table 3: Summary of previous studies

Author	Market Segment	Location	Findings
Richard & Sundaram	Leisure	Airport	Reception, Accommodation, Building and bathroom related attributes are important to repeat choice intentions
LeBlanc & Nguyen	Business / Leisure	Single Hotel	Personnel, building, service quality and brand have significant impact on the perceived image
Lockyer	Business / Leisure	City Residents	Trigger points of the purchase decision are price, location and facilities with overall cleanliness a "must have"
Yavas & Bebakus	Business / Leisure	City Residents	Only general amenities and core service show strong congruence between business/leisure groups.
Knutson	Frequent Travellers	Hotels	Cleanliness, Location, Interpersonal service and safety were the most salient consideration sets for all groups
Victorino	Business / Leisure	Hotels	Hotel type has the largest impact on choice
Tsai	Leisure Domestic & International Travellers	Landmark Hong Kong	Convenience, safety and value/money the most important attributes for domestic. Safety, convenience and maintenance for the International
McCleary	Business divided by trip purpose	Magazine Subscribers	The discriminating factor was location banquet/meeting facilities. Other attributes differences were statistically not significant
Chan & Wong	Frequent Travellers	Airport	Location and interpersonal service the most influential factors
Kim & Perdue	Business / Leisure	Online	Both cognitive (price, service, brand) and and emotional (feeling, entertaining) considerations when selecting hotel
Shanka	Business / Leisure	3* Hotel	Physical facilities, interpersonal and general services are regarded highly
Fawzy	Business	4 & 5* Hotel (Cairo)	Luxury guests rate all attributes higher. Wake up calls found to be choice determinant
Callan	Senior travellers	Mature people societies	Value for money, safety and location important when selecting hotel

2.2.6 The Stages

The selection process can be distinguished into pre lodging consumption, where the guest assesses information based on external sources and, the post lodging consumption where all the previous information and expectations, are evaluated based on the lived experience of the service. There are five stages in the selection process, when a guest looks for satisfying the need of accommodation. At first there is the recognition of the need, followed by the pre-purchase search and information gathering, then the evaluation of offerings or alternatives, followed by the purchase and last the post-purchase evaluation (Tsai et al., 2011). Factors such as budget, reason for stay and level of service desired, are critical issues and are often considered as part of the early decision process (Lockyer, 2005¹). Those factors belong to the initial restrictions set and shape the demands and expectations for the rest of the selection process accordingly.

Post Purchase Evaluation

At this point we need to clarify that choice is in fact the outcome of the decision-making. And a distinction needs to be made between evaluative criteria and choice criteria (Jones & Chen, 2010). As it was mentioned, the selection process is divided into before and after choice to lodge or purchase of service. Prior to purchase there are many attributes that the customer could not know

about. Therefore the decision is relied heavily, if not solely, on information provided by official (hotels, travel agents) or unofficial (press reviews, other guests) channels.

2.2.7 The Purpose of the Trip

The trip itself generates the need of accommodation and constitutes the first stage of the selection process. The purpose of the trip may affect the importance placed on different underlying factors (Yavas & Bebakus, 2005) and the values each traveller seek (Dube & Renaghan, 2000). This is obvious for the two major tourist segments, business and leisure. There is no consensus among researchers, about whether the specific trip objective has a statistically significant impact on the decision of the same segment, for example business tourists. Snepenger and Milner (1990) found in their study that the trip purpose is a strong differentiating variable. On the other hand McCleary et al. (1993), supports that the differences inside the business tourists segment, although present, are in general statistically insignificant. The author of this study supports that the purpose of the trip may not be a defining factor for selection, when the hotel is full service. For example, for business travellers, office services may be a prerequisite, so properties lacking this service are excluded from the list, in the first place, but where it is available it is probably considered as core service without much impact on the choice.

In their study Dube & Renaghan (2000), found that leisure and transient business travellers value as most important attributes that drive the hotel purchase decision and, surprisingly in the same order (out of ten rated values) location, brand and physical properties. Contrary for business meeting and convention travellers, location and brand are much less important (seven and four respectively). This shows that the purpose of the trip has a significant impact on the decision. For business meeting guests, location may be predetermined and consequently out of the choice set. Add the fact that these guests spend their whole time (sleeping and working) in the premises, so location is indifferent. During the stay the top value creating attributes, for all three groups are physical setting and interpersonal service. The list is almost completely inverted and it is clear that guests evaluate the hotel offering differently during the pre and post purchase stage. If hoteliers are aiming at repeat visitation they need to offer a complete offering with a holistic approach.

In the case of travelling football fans, the purpose of the trip is very specific and may generate strong needs. The needs of the trip possibly have impact on the desired elements of the hotel as location, price and the services provided. Football related travel is a purposeful trip where the aim is to watch the game, it consequent that the accommodation is sought according to the degree it can serve this purpose and facilitate the tourist in his pursuits. To make it more clear, the hotel is not an end to itself, as for example is a resort where the guest selects it for the services and the activities provided inside the property.

2.2.8 Internal & External Influences

During the information seeking stage the potential customer seeks for hotel features that are believed to be essential for the satisfaction of the accommodation need. The credit each tourist group or individual customer gives to specific hotel attributes are influenced by both internal (personal) and external (environmental) factors. Models of consumer purchase behaviour, focus on

internal (individual) and external (environmental) influences' impact on decision outcomes.

Internal influences and individual differences can fundamentally affected consumers' decision-making processes and have profound impact on the final selection (Lockyer, 2005¹; Tsai et al., 2011). Such influences include various elements as motivation, knowledge, personality, lifestyle, demographics, perception, attitudes and past experience.

Fawzy (2010) and Knutson (1988) implied that high-end customers in luxury hotels, evaluate the experience in total and expect to have at hand all the services and amenities, although they rarely make use of all of them. By paying high prices and influenced by their personality, lifestyle and perception of luxury, they demand a wide range of services, regardless if they use it or not.

The study conducted by Callan & Bowman (2000), found that brochures, past experience and travel agents, dominated the decision's information source. Which is expected since it is focused on mature (elderly) travellers. Value for money is the most important attribute for initial hotel selection followed by interpersonal service, when leisure facilities were completely unimportant. Although unimportant to the sample in total, mobility facilities (ramps) were important to a number of respondents, obviously to those who make use of them out of absolute necessity. The element of demographics (age) has an obvious impact on the results, judging that older guests are not that familiar with new technologies and that some of them have specific characteristics (mobility difficulties).

Shanka & Taylor (2003) have identified statistically significant differences between age groups and between guests based on their country of residence on the dimensions of the facilities and services provided components.

External factors emphasise the impact of firm's marketing efforts on product, promotion, price, and channels of distribution (Tsai et al., 2011). For example in hotels, star rating system may help travellers to form impressions about a particular brand offering, divide hotels into types and categories and therefore make the selection process less complex. Environmental influences focus on elements of the sociocultural surroundings like family, informal sources, social class, culture, and subculture (Lockyer, 2005¹).

Richard & Sundaram (1994) confirmed that reception, accommodation, building and bathroom related attributes are important to repeat choice intentions. In turn LeBlanc & Nguyen (1996), confirmed that in intangible services, personnel has a strong impact on how guests perceive corporate image and quality. Followed by the environmental cues and the physical setting of the place where the service is produced and consumed. Those findings illustrate that the firm's efforts on image and brand have a significant impact on customer's choice, as external factors.

Apart from specific travel related parameters which form the background of needs, there are also individual and environmental elements that have impact on the consideration set and the selection process. Consequently many different variables need to be taken into consideration by managers when they try to optimize the product offered and address to various market segments, with different characteristics and diverse agendas. Despite the fact that the most important factors when

choosing accommodation are similar, though in different order, hotel selection is a complex process depended on purpose of travel, tourism segment, hotel type, place and demographics among the most significant.

Football fans consist of a very diverse tourist group individually. Football is the most popular sport globally which attracts huge number of attendants and consequently people from very different social, cultural and economic backgrounds. However these rough individual edges and differences are polished, up to a degree by the belonging to the fandom subculture. It can be implied that in the fan traveller the individual characteristics play a much smaller role, as it is expressed in hotel selection than in other occasions of travelling.

2.2.9 Connections of Hotel Attributes to Internal – External Characteristics

Tsai et al. (2011) in a Hong Kong located study, found that for foreign travellers the element of safety and security is the most important, with the proximity to attractions in the second place. For Chinese the order is reversed. The security issue came also in front in Sohrabi et al. (2012) study in Tehran, with facilitation services (air tickets, taxi, 24h service) to be of equal importance. When travellers are unfamiliar with a place and, moreover when the region has a specific reputation, safety and security come first. Accidents or even crimes that may occur, will lead to unpleasant psychological effects. External environment as well as cultural background influence the order of importance of various attributes.

Under this notion, the football fan may be reluctant to opt a hotel located at an unfamiliar neighbourhood both for safety and commuting reasons. If for example extensive commute planning is required for the fan to reach the stadium or if there high(er) probability for event arrival delays, will probably result in uneasiness and nervousness, two elements that can spoil a vacation experience.

In the more recent study by Yavas & Bebakus (2005), we can see that new attributes have come about. For both leisure and business guests, general amenities which include aspects as access to computer / Internet, fitness and entertainment facilities appeared as most important, where physical properties are located at the bottom of the list. Assessing previous studies in their respective time period is crucial for extracting valid conclusions. The core product of the hotel is accommodation, but advancements in technology and sociocultural changes, influence the demands of customers. Continuing the previous notion about time period, in the study carried out by Knutson (1988), the most impactful consideration, for both types of travellers (business and leisure) and all three type of hotels, is cleanliness and comfortable room. In addition, this was the issue for both initial – first time and return hotel selection. The attribute of cleanliness, never appeared again at the top of the list in following studies. Probably after a point it was taken for granted or the researchers did not consider it as an important selection determinant.

Out of this review we can realize that the hotel choice is a very complex procedure. The attributes that identified and rated from time to time, resulted in a great numbers, though the important ones are recycled in most studies. Attributes related to location, interpersonal service, core services and amenities, physical features and brand, are among the most influential. Still, the role of internal,

external and environmental aspects substantially affect the hotel choice.

Previous studies have brought on surface the important role of both internal and external components that influence accommodation selection. There are numerous distinct characteristics that affect choice and even within a relatively homogeneous group of guests there is quite a wide range of different attributes used (Jones & Chen, 2010). In literature, neither results of attributes under consideration, nor the order of importance are the same and there is no consensus whether the differences between groups or subgroups are statistically significant.

2.2.10 Affective Attributes

Apart from the cognitive evaluation of the demanded practical features, the findings of the study conducted by Kim & Perdue (2013), support that affective attributes play a crucial role for experiential products like hotels. Additionally they claim that potential guests during the information gathering stage, are not only looking for cognitive but also sensory cues. Before a hotel experience takes place, they continue, affective attributes significantly influence choice decisions and lodging purchase probability.

Affective attributes can be of additional importance for football fans as a consumer tribe. Tribes are often grouped around something emotional rather than rational (Mitchell & Imrie, 2011). The hotel selection can be influenced not so much by the functionality of attributes, but rather their “linking value” between the individuals. Fans may put more weight on the fact the a hotel is friendly to them or that members of the tribe are accommodated there. They may follow the lead just to maintain the connection and the social status.

Interactions with other guests at the hotel may also be a touch point for emotional quality evaluations. Unruly and inconsiderate guests can create unpleasantness while courteous and orderly guest contribute to pleasant experiences (Shonk and Chelladurai, 2008). Confrontations with other guests with different backgrounds, agendas and pursuits may cause displeasure between patrons. Football fans may be excited and want to celebrate noisy and share their passion in the social surrounding, with fellow fans and therefore enhance their emotional experience and satisfaction. When contradictory, this will upset other guests who want to rest or have a romantic dinner at the restaurant.

2.3 Football and Fans Social Phenomenon

2.3.1 The History and the Transformation of Football as Social Phenomenon

Football fans were neither always considered a source of revenue nor were always welcome by the local communities and businesses. The United Kingdom and particularly England, has perhaps witnessed the most dramatic change in football’s social and economic standing. In the mid-1980s the English game was synonymous in the global public imagination with spectator violence, entrenched infrastructural decline (Guilianotti, 2002) and the football subculture was associated with excessive drinking (Morgan, 2007), social disorder and hooliganism (Rookwood & Pearson, 2012). It is not exaggeration to say that in the 1980s, during the supposed peak of the problem,

hooliganism was one of Britain's more serious social issues. Apart from the social problem, hooliganism had direct and serious impact on peaceful fans who attend matches. At one end of the scale they could find themselves unwittingly caught up in disorder, potentially leading to serious injury, whilst at the other they could have their interests harmed more subtly, for example by a match being postponed, their club fined or banned from competitions, their away ticket allocation reduced (Rookwood & Pearson, 2012). All these could be inhibiting factors for traveling massively, either by personal choice or official restrictions.

The football fan / consumer profile, the nature of the participation in the event and the consumption of the product has undergone serious transformations. There were various social, political and economic reasons which implied this change. After 1992 shift towards the neoliberalization of football (Guilianotti, 2002) and the commercialization of clubs to international corporations (Edensor & Millington, 2008) reflects the turning from places of specific subculture and identity to postmodern mass consumption spectacle arenas (Turner, 2014). The construction of safer all-seated football stadia, reduced the capacity and increased ticket prices which resulted in restrained number of traditional working class supporters to more affluent middle class consumers (Guilianotti, 2002; Turner, 2014). Adding the connections with corporations and the advent of pay-per-view television are four key ingredients identified in this process of commodification⁴ (Guilianotti, 2002).

The changes towards commercialization and safety, resulted in growing numbers of sports observers who take their passion for sports spectating to another level of involvement and travel extensively, domestically or even internationally, in order to champion and support their favorite team (Davies & Williment, 2008). The fandom subculture, following the general social, political and economic environment is shifting from personal and emotional attachments towards commercialization. This is an ongoing process and the football subculture is not disappearing rather than transforming.

2.3.2 Football Fandom Subculture

Sports and especially football are part of very strong subcultures. Subcultures can be defined as segments of society embracing certain distinctive cultural elements of their own which typically include a shared set of identifiable beliefs, values and means of symbolic expression (Green, 2001). The subcultural football consciousness of the old style working class supporters, centered around the local club, masculinity, active participation and demand for victory. The middle class spectators who replaced them have a different agenda of family football entertainment, spectacle, skill and performative efficiency (Guilianotti, 2002). These values and beliefs shape the self and social identity of the participating fan and play pivotal role in the consumption of the event (Green, 2001).

Football fandom is not just a label or a designation but is also tied to individual and group identities and social performances (Turner, 2014). Fandom is best captured by the frequency and regularity of consumption, participation and engagement and not only the physical presence at a

4. Commodification is the transformation of goods and services, as well as ideas or other entities that normally may not be considered goods, into a commodity.

space or place (Turner, 2014). Allegedly sport consumers and especially football fans, have a different and more profound relationship with the teams than with conventional commercial brands because of the nature of sports. In fact, fans rarely conceive of clubs as brands, for the relationship is a social and emotional rather than a financial exchange (Edensor & Millington, 2008). It has also been suggested that sport consumers may be more involved with, and may have higher levels of identification with a sports team (Davies & Williment, 2008). Excitement and identification are the most influential variables in becoming loyal to a particular team which in turn leads to the notion that highly involved sport fans tend to attend more games (Chen, 2006).

Under the football fandom subculture the main reason that triggers the desire of the fan to travel and follow the club away from home, is whether the event provide opportunities to perform activities publicly that are consistent with a social identity that the attendee values and is consistent with who they see themselves to be (Green, 2001; Jones, 2008). The sport consumer seeks experience that meets and satisfy a number of important psychological, social and cultural needs (Smith & Stewart, 2007). By consuming the event along with others, they are looking for belonging and they shape the image they the others to have about them (Morgan, 2007). Attending a sport football event is much more complex than sit down and watch the performance. It is about sharing a communal spectating experience, building a social identity and desire to belong to subculture group (Jones, 2008; Weed, 2010). Through spectating a football match, fans seek satisfaction to higher personal and social human needs.

2.3.3 Types of Football “Customers”

In the previous text, the terms fan, supporter, follower, spectator and consumer, were used in turn to indicate the individual who decides to be physically present in a stadium, with the purpose of attending a football event. At this point we need to clarify the specific words and their meaning when referring to the football customer or spectator according to the fan taxation by Guilianotti (2002), who identified and categorized four types of football “customers”. This is the most detailed football “consumer” classification up to date; it measures the level of fandom and the strength of the bond between the consumer and the brand/ club. This will help us to understand better the intentions behind the action to attend a game and travel to support a team. Usually in literature the words fan, follower and supporter are used as alternatives with similar connotation.

The four types of football customers which have been identified and categorized by by Guilianotti (2002) are 1) supporters, 2) followers, 3) fans and 4) flâneurs. The main criterion for the classification, is the degree of spectator's identification, personal (emotional) and financial investment towards the club. Football consumers under this classification, are segmented according to their attachment. More attached/ loyal fans have stronger emotion and desire to follow their team and consequently travel to more games. The traditional / consumer distinction indicates the cultural or market centered investment and the hot / cool the individual's projection of self formation through the club. The next section briefly explains the fan types according to the Guilianotti (2002) taxation.

1. Supporters

Supporters attend regularly, are familiar with the home grounds, the traditions and the procedures of a match day. Supporting the club is a lived experience, rooted in a grounded identity that is reflected in an affectionate relationship and a key preoccupation of the individual's self. They have a hot and traditional relationship with the team.

2. Followers

Followers are traditional / cool spectators and they follow the clubs, the sport and its people, they are aware of meanings, traditions and identities but unlike the supporters they are not involved deeply or with devotion. They may be attracted to a specific club for historical, ideological, political or religious reasons and they seek to validate their former beliefs by identifying with the club.

3. Fans

Fans are hot in their identification to the club but they have a more market oriented approach than supporters. They authenticate their affection through consumption of related products and game attending. If the club fails to deliver its market promise, fans may leave for other markets, leisure activities, football leagues or sports, though it is not probable to support rival teams.

4. Flâneurs

Flâneurs are more likely to be bourgeois and thus in the pursuit of a multiple of football experiences. They have a distant and detached relationship to the club and they may be attracted by aesthetics rather than the signified meanings or superstar celebrities athletes. Their loyalty to the game and the club is very fragile since they follow trends and fashion.

Under this taxation and in the specific context of this study, supporters are the most probable group of travelling to attend their favourite team, as they perceive supporting as their obligation towards the club (Guilianotti, 2002). It remains to examine whether they are willing to stay overnight at the destination. On the other hand, fans are now the biggest group and since they have a more consumerist approach to the game, it is likely that under the circumstances which satisfy their demands of the event and the tourist product, they could travel with potential overnight accommodation. Followers fall in between those two and their travel behaviour is more likely influenced by personal and individual characteristics than group related. Flâneurs seek experience in football events among other types of entertainment and recreation, however they are not tied to a team. Though in the future the flâneur type is likely to gain market share and it could be attracted through football related activities with high cross selling potential.

2.3.4 Football Consumer Tribe

One of the aims of this study is to examine whether there are connections to the fandom subculture and the hotel selection attitude. In addition these connections will differentiate the football fan from other sport tourist categories. Fans have specific characteristics and belong to the football subculture regarding the sport and club affiliations. In this research it will be explored if these behaviours can be extended to the consumer tribes concept, in other activities performed during the

trip and stay at the destination.

The focal idea which gives shape to those communities is the fandom subculture, around the “brand” of a football club. The subculture of sport and football has already been formed and has built strong bonds between the fans themselves and the club, regarding the main consumption product / service, the spectacle and everything around it. The next strongest community created inside the football subculture can be brand related. A “brand community” is a set of social relationships that are structured around the use of a brand product (Goulding et al., 2013). For example fans of a team drink a specific beer brand, which is connected to the team through sponsorship or advertisement.

Hospitality business rarely can be connected to the subculture or brand communities. However they could become the object of a consumption tribe. For example the “fan friendly hotel”, can customize its product to be appealing to fans. Travel packages, football related events organized by the hotel and held in the property, decorations, contexts are some of the targeted actions that could attract football fans. Consumer tribes are groups of people emotionally connected by similar consumption and usage values, linked socially to form communities and express identities, gathering together for social interaction and usually under the pretext of consumption and brands (Mitchell & Imrie, 2011; Silva & Santos, 2012). Consumption tribes form less tight bonds and are more ephemeral than subculture and brand communities (Goulding et al., 2013).

It is implied by Silva & Santos (2012) that tribe members share an emotional link with a brand but, most importantly, with each other. Moreover, tribal members seek out products and services mainly for their linking value than for their utility, since supporting or making easier their communion may be more critical than functionality. Social associations are the most important influence on an individual’s consumption decisions (Mitchell & Imrie, 2011). Under this context a lodging decision may not only be based on hotel related factual attributes but also to individual social links associated with tribal membership. Individuals can possibly put aside their personal demands or needs, so as to follow the tribe. Therefore socially constructed consumption tribes may prove important for hotel marketers.

Consumer tribes could propose an alternative market segmentation concept. Tribes are identified as consumer-driven groups with shared characteristics (Mitchell & Imrie, 2011). Consumer tribes exist when members identify with one another, have shared experiences and emotions, and engage in collective social action which can be facilitated through a variety of brands, products, activities and services (Goulding et al., 2013). Hospitality marketers could direct their efforts to address travelling fans as a consumer tribe, instead of individual tourists, traditionally segmented. Fans already belong to the fandom subculture which is dominating and at the time may muffle other individual characteristics. There is a probability that fans would like to extend their collective identity beyond the stadium grounds. Engagement to the tribe explains that people do things together and is a central component of any consumption community, as they look for shaping self-image through shared experiences, emotion and their common passion (Goulding et al., 2013). It is also possible that their individual characteristics are subdued during the trip and act as members of a collective in more expressions than only during the game.

2.3.5 *Travelling Football Spectators*

Sport event customers / football fans chose to attend a match in order to satisfy various personal and social needs. Fandom involves an emotional tie with the club and the regular consumption of its popular narrative which is the fixtures (Turner, 2014). Fans who identify themselves with this narrative (subculture) at a high degree, are most likely to attend games and therefore chose to travel as club followers. To display and celebrate identification through attendance is an important factor in attracting attendees (Jones, 2008). Football fans who follow the team in regular basis, both home and away, enjoy high respect and admiration among their fellow fans. The presence in iconic matches carries considerable status and cultural capital among football fans and telling stories about those experiences raises respect and admiration among the members of the subculture (Weed, 2010). Building social identity and acceptance inside a fan group is one reason of attending football games and travel along with the club. That points out that the priority of the fan is to travel and attend the game and, when the budget is limited fans have to reduce and minimize other expenses of the trips in order to increase the frequency of the attendance. Accommodation is one the trip expenses and there is probability for fans with strong ties to the club (many trips), to search for discount accommodation or even try to avoid it when possible so as to have the resources to watch more games.

Sport spectating represents a popular form of leisure in modern society (Davies & Williment, 2008; Koenigstorfer et al. 2010) and is often combined with tourism endeavours (Yu, 2010). Fans participate in sport events and are willing to travel frequently and sometimes long distances in order to watch their favourite team. Fans look for enjoyment, happiness, excitement, satisfaction, socialization and self-esteem enhancement, are psychologically attached and committed to the club, involved in club activities and perceive it as extended family (Chen, 2006). According to Smith & Stewart (2007), the motivation to become a travelling fan includes eight motivations, eustress (positive stress or arousal, stress release), escapism (diversion from daily life), entertainment, aesthetic pleasure (the beauty of sport performances), group affiliation, family needs (spending time with family), potential economic gain (gambling), and self-esteem (personal enhancement). Professional football leagues and fixtures promote and include excitement by the uncertainty of outcomes (eustress), entertainment and satisfaction by the high quality of athletic display (aesthetic pleasure), socialization (group affiliation) and escapism by becoming shortly part of group (subculture), self-esteem boost by identifying to the winning team and happiness from the victory. The reasons behind decision to attend and travel are complicated and a combination of personal - psychological and social - cultural pursuits.

Enhanced travel opportunities, media exposure and television broadcasts enable many new football supporters to pick and choose their preferred team, regardless of location (Edensor & Millington, 2008). The number of old traditional local fan with the strong ties to the place, is gradually cut down, especially for well known international brand clubs and, crowds are becoming increasingly heterogeneous and cannot easily be distinguished by conventional notions of ethnicity, locality or class. Professional sports teams and leagues have been aggressively expanding their markets overseas, by increasing their team recognition and brands through the sale of broadcast

rights, team merchandise, and other products (Yu, 2010). Nevertheless, clubs in order to attract and retain new supporters, are directed nationally or overseas to appeal to those attracted by the values embodied in local identity – as a sign of authenticity (Edensor & Millington, 2008). Although is much more important for the clubs revenues, to sell broadcasting rights and merchandise than physical presence in stadium (ticket sale), it is important for tourism related business, as potential pool of customers with high motive to visit the destination. Fans from overseas is a relatively small market, but with the live TV penetration it has a growing potential.

As a result of the previous review it is evident that the football fan has strong motives to follow the club. They are willing to travel domestically or internationally to secure experiences and lend their support to their favourite team and athletes (Davies & Williment, 2008; Koenigstorfer et al. 2010; Smith & Stewart, 2007). The challenge for destinations is to attract football fans in the first place or compete with other similar places for market share. As for the hospitality business and hotels, to attract them in their premises and incorporate the sport related trip into a broader tourist experience. In an alternative way, sports tourists might be seen as individuals engaged on a subjective emotional journey in search of experiences with strong personal, social and cultural meanings (Morgan, 2007).

3. Method

This chapter describes the research methodology and design, the course of action taken and the appropriation as well as the limitations of the chosen methods. The purpose of the conducted survey is a) to identify the most influential hotel attributes by ranking them according to the impact they have on the decision of accommodation selection, b) to measure the strength of the influence of the trip purpose and the fandom subculture and c) to test the statistical significance of various individual characteristics on the attributes categorization, by the travelling football fans when they follow their favourite club away from the place of residence to attend games.

To optimally address the research questions, quantitative survey was selected and self-administered questionnaires was the data gathering instrument. This research study is descriptive and cross-sectional. The survey was conducted online and the sample was the Premier League clubs' fans who were football forum members.

This chapter aims to (1) describe the research methodology of this study, (2) explain the sample selection, (3) describe the procedure used in designing the instrument and collecting the data, and (4) provide an explanation of the statistical procedures used to analyse the data.

3.1 Quantitative Method Selection

After reviewing the literature on the hotel selection subject, about the perceived importance of accommodation attributes to various travellers categories, it was found that most researchers favoured the quantitative method (Callan & Bowman, 2000; Chan & Wong, 2006; Dube & Renaghan, 2000; Fawzy et al., 2010; Knutson, 1988; McCleary et al., 1993; Richard & Sundaram, 1994; Sohrabi et al., 2012; Tsai et al., 2011; Wong & Chi-yung, 2001; Yavas & Bebakus, 2005). As the most used, tried and tested method, the quantitative was adopted as the most appropriate to cover the purpose of this research. The study aims to (a) measure the level of importance each attribute plays in determining hotel guests' choice intentions, (b) examine whether there are statistically significant differences between the independent variables on the perceived importance of particular attribute/s and (c) measure the level of impact of the fandom on the decision process.

Quantitative method is the most appropriate for this study because of its capacity to generate quantifiable data on large numbers of people who are representative of a wider population in order to test hypothesis (Bryman, 2004). Quantitative data is particularly useful when the aim is to discover how common particular forms of behaviour are connected to various groups. In order to achieve that, large sets of data are required so as the results to be reliable.

The questionnaire adopted as the primary data collection instrument and was considered to offer relevant advantages and has been the most widely used data collection technique in this area of investigation (Callan & Bowman, 2000). The questionnaire aimed to determine the relative importance that travelling fans ascribe to accommodation attributes when selecting hotels. After the categorization of the attributes, connections will be drawn in order to check the importance in relationship to other segmentations (e.g. age).

3.2 Sample

The population of this study is consisted of fans of British Premier League football clubs who travel away from home, with purpose to participate in a football event and attend a game of their favourite team. A necessary condition was to have spent a night or more in a hotel during the trip. For convenience reasons, the survey was conducted online. An initial research was done in order to identify an adequate number of English football fans forums. Finally, an online link along with a short description of the topic and the targeted group of respondents was posted on fifty three forum pages and four fan Facebook pages. At least one forum or online community from each of the twenty clubs was included in the list. Naturally more popular clubs have multiple pages, with more members. The total number of responses according to team supported will be checked for representative proportion in the sample. Official Premier League statistics in combination with occupancy rates in stadiums will be the checking instrument. The sample can be defined as English Premier League football fans who travelled away from home to watch a football game, spent a night or more at a hotel and are members of online fan communities.

Online surveys have lots of advantages. Internet has the ability to provide access to groups and individuals who would be difficult, if not impossible, to reach through other channels. Virtual communities as sites for research is that they offer a mechanism through which a researcher can gain access to people who share *specific* interests, attitudes, beliefs, and values regarding an issue, problem, or activity (Wright, 2005). Football fans are gathered in online communities, forums and social media pages in order to discuss, exchange opinions and experiences. Many times they assist each other with various issues (information, tickets) regarding their passion about football and their team. As with many online communities, they are the extension and the evolution of physical places. In the case of this survey, the author acquired access to a substantial number of fans in short time, easily and with no financial cost.

However, there are some issues with online surveys that need attendance. Despite the easy access to large populations, sampling issues may arise. Apart from the basic demographic variables, which even they may be questionable, little may be known about the characteristics of people in online communities (Wright, 2005). When data self-reported, there is no guarantee that participants will provide accurate demographic or personal characteristics information. Researchers rely upon the respondents honesty. Additionally some individuals are more likely than others to complete an online survey. The tendency of some people to respond to an invitation to participate in an online survey, while others ignore it, may lead to a systematic bias. Finally, usually Internet users are of younger age and higher education than the population. To avoid proportional issues, the sample was checked for representativeness by comparing its demographic profile, with the most recent official statistics population (football fan) distribution, by a survey conducted under the Premier League authority⁵.

5. An online survey conducted officially for Premier League by SportWise at the season 2007/8, recognized a slight tendency for a more upmarket respondent than seen in previous postal surveys. To address with this fact I will follow percentage and weighting of those surveys in order to achieve representativeness. The sample for the survey of 2007/8 numbering 34.827 respondents.

Members of online communities often think of uninvited and unwanted posts rude or offensive (Wright, 2005). The questionnaire was posted online, after communication with the administrators of the pages. It was accessible to all members, under the same probabilities to be seen and answered by all members. To increase response rate and randomness, the post was online for a period of two weeks, since some members login more frequently than others, this time frame was deemed as adequate for all active members to notice the survey and choose to respond.

This one can be considered a probability sample, since each person of the defined population has equal chance to respond and participate in the survey. Age and income groups are well represented in the results, in comparison to the 2011 census data⁶. Of course, the larger the sample the sounder the generalizability, however 170 responses can be considered as adequate, since other relevant published articles worked with less. Consequently, the findings and conclusions of this research can be extended to the population at large.

3.3 Data Collection

Data for this study was collected through self-administered questionnaires, posted online in football club's forums and social media, operated and administrated by fans (unofficial). The web-pages were identified and located by inputting key words, using the Google search engine. Key words were “fans, supporters, forum, club names (e.g. Liverpool F.C.) and nicknames (e.g. Leicester city Foxes)”. The number of forums identified was larger than the number of those finally used. The reason was that forum pages in order to prevent spamming and control in a way the threads posted, don't give access and posting privileges to new members right away. This was an inhibiting factor for further expanding the fan-respondent base but the number of fifty three forums is considered adequate.

The invitation to participate was followed by a short description about the study. This introduction played also the role of the initial screening, since it explicitly explained both the required characteristics of the participants. This is necessary in self-completion questionnaires since the researcher has no understanding of respondents considerations when answering (Sutton in May, 2011).

The name of the supported club in these online communities, was stated clearly on the title or the description of the forum or social media. Therefore, clubs participating in the English Premier League were selected. Since the survey was conducted online, there was no possible way to distinguish the nationality or place of residence of the respondents, prior to the reception of the answers. However, the targeted clubs are English, the online communities/forums are operated from England and the fans support English teams, there is reason to assume that the majority of the participants were resided in the United Kingdom.

The duration of the study was two weeks. Adequate time was given in order to gather the required number of responses, but also to give the opportunity for most fans who frequently visit the online communities, to be aware and answer the questionnaire. The initial post was updated regularly in

6. Office for National Statistics <http://ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Population#tab-data-tables>

order to bring it up in the posts' sequence⁷ and make it visible to members. In addition the thread was updated in all weekdays; before, during and after the games in order to secure the highest visibility and number of members in all occasions. After this period the response rate was stagnated, plus multiple posting was perceived as intrusion and the post with the survey link was banned from the forum.

The time frame for the trip and accommodation, is the current season started on August 2014 and still going in April 2015, when the questionnaires were distributed. The reason for this choice, was that the respondents have comparatively recent memories and experiences of their travel and lodging conditions, so as to provide more reliable data. Plus it is common for football fans to memorize and connect football related activities within the fixtures championship calendar than the yearly one.

3.4 Questionnaire

The questionnaire aimed to determine the relative importance that travellers ascribe to accommodation attributes in selecting hotels. The attributes in question, were listed in a five point Likert scale for rating and were put in order of importance after statistical analysis was applied.

The questionnaire for this study included three sections. The first section consisted of twenty seven relative attributes, based on the five sets (Services, Accommodation, Building, Personnel, Brand & Marketing) of hotel selection attributes . Travellers were asked to indicate the perceived importance of those attributes when they choose a hotel. These hotel attributes were identified based on a review of relevant literature and were predetermined. The questionnaire was structured so that each hotel attribute could be rated using a 5-points Likert scale, ranging from 1, least important to 5, most important for each of the features.

The second part was designed to elicit the demographic information of the respondents. Respondents were categorized according to various individual characteristics as gender, age, income and place of residence and fan related ones as supported team. This will provide an insight after the analysis, by addressing the case whether individual internal characteristics have a strong impact or not on the perceived importance of hotel attributes.

The final part of the consisted of attitudinal questions to specify travel behaviour and hypothetical hotel situations, related to football fandom in particular. Fans were asked the number of trips and the number of hotel stays during that trips. The last section was consisted of authoritative hypothetical questions, about hotel elements in comparison to fandom related aspects. The way the questions posted aimed at explaining and measuring the strength and the impact of fandom over traditional hotel services. This approach was adopted since there are not tourism sub-segment (football fans) specific attributes found in the literature.

The questionnaire list of attributes was designed from those found to be the most influential and common in previous relative studies. In studies examining hotel selection, the number of attributes

7. Forum posts follow the time-date sequence, new ones are taking the top place on the web page, by displacing the older ones. When commenting on a post it puts it back at the top of the list. Usually members check the first two or three pages the most.

used in the questionnaire has varied. Taking into consideration the objective difficulties of this study and in order to collect the necessary responses, the number of attributes asked were reduced to minimum. That consisted of twenty seven hotel selection related features included in the questionnaire. The questions needed to be easily understood and be completed in short time. Those two features raise the attractiveness of a questionnaire and increase the response rate. Long lists of items will produce respondent fatigue, leading to a lower response rate and bias, although clearly a very short list will not provide enough detail to be useful (Callan & Bowman, 2000).

The selected attributes formed five group sets (Services & Amenities, Accommodation, Building & Physical Properties, Personnel, Brand). Such groupings were chosen to allow a much closer and better understanding of the guests' requirements for each specific and major area of a hotel (Tsai et al., 2011). Under each set a number of related specific attributes was developed in five point scales and the respondents were asked to rate them according to importance on the hotel choice. To reduce the potential bias of forced responses from respondents, the option "not applicable N/A" was included for each question.

In that way we can have an image about whether the football fandom subculture and consumer tribe has significant impact on the decision making of the travelling fan. It is essential for the hospitality professionals to know whether a traveller acts and decides in different ways under different contexts. In addition, hotel managers by knowing what tourists consider as important they can modify and customize their offering in order to make it more attractive for this specific segment.

3.5 Statistical analysis

The analysis of the data is divided into two stages. The initial phase includes the description of the survey sample data, by using tables, graphs and descriptive statistics. Next, statistical techniques will be applied, based on probability theory, to estimate population parameters, assess the differences and statistical significance between groups and measure associations. As this study involves human participants, it is useful to gather information on the number of people in the sample, the number and percentage of males and females, the range and mean of ages, income level, place of residence and club supported (Pallant, 2007).

Descriptive statistics were used to rank the degree to which different factors influenced travellers when they were selecting hotels to book when travelling as football fans. In terms of data analysis, they were represented in frequencies and mean ratings order to analyse respondents' profile and identify the importance of selection attributes to all groups of travellers. Although travelling fans consist a homogeneous group as of the purpose of the trip and members of the fandom subculture, demographically they are diverse. Therefore independent t-test and ANOVA tests were performed to determine whether there were any significant differences among the groups.

3.5.1 Sample Profile Description

To rank and analyse the data for categorical variables, frequencies will be used. Age and income are not continuous variables in this survey, rather segmented into groups beforehand. The same

tactic will be used for the place of residence, supported club and gender. After that the complete structure of the sample characteristics will be revealed. The use of frequencies will describe completely the sample profile.

3.5.2 Ranking of Attributes

This study explored the the perceived importance of various attributes by using Likert scales. It is necessary to check the reliability and the internal consistency of the scales. For the twenty seven attributes used to measure perceived importance of hotel amenities, Cronbach's alpha was calculated and the resulting coefficient was at the acceptable level of $\alpha = .924$. Cronbach's alpha coefficient is one of the the most widely used indicators of internal consistency (Pallant, 2007). Ideally, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of a scale should be more than 0.7 to be acceptable, but preferably above 0.8. Five point Likert scale is commonly used in relative studies. The rating of all attributes in the scale will be put in order of importance by ranking the mean values. Standard deviations will also be calculated for each attribute. The mean scores, standard deviations and ranking (based on mean scores) are presented in Tables. All attributes with mean scores below 3.0, were excluded from further analyses as not important.

3.5.3 t-tests & ANOVA

Significant differences in scores were tested according to gender, age, place of residence, club supported and level of income. In this study the independent t-test will be used to measure differences between male and female fans. An independent-samples t-test is used when you want to compare the mean score, on some continuous variable, for two different groups (Pallant, 2007).

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) involves one independent variable (referred to as a factor) which has a number of different levels (Pallant, 2007). These levels correspond to different groups. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied on age and income. ANOVA will tell whether there are significant differences in the mean scores on the dependent variable across the two groups (Pallant, 2007).

3.6 Conditions of Standardization, Replication and Representativeness

The condition of standardization is satisfied, since the questionnaire is designed according to findings of previous studies, administered and analysed by commonly used methods among the researchers. Replication of the study is also simple, the sample and the population are open and accessible to anyone, the questionnaire attributes are similar for many years and the survey can be conducted at any time and place.

Regarding representativeness, there is no reason to believe that we cannot generalize the findings to the whole population of British clubs football fans and those in other leagues, or fans following clubs of various popular sports, in any place of the world. Football and other popular sport fans (basketball, baseball, rugby, hockey, etc.) are members and belong to the fandom subculture. This is a common characteristic among sport fans of any sport, in any location. Depending on the fan type and therefore the strength of the influence can suppress, in lesser or larger degree, other individual,

social, cultural and economic characteristics of the fan. This element further supports the notion of generalizability and representativeness of the findings.

3.7 Limitations

Apart from the intrinsic limitations of the online studies, additional issues that demand care and attendance need to be mentioned. It is common practice among researchers in previous studies, to test the questionnaire, by conducting a pilot study (Callan & Bowman, 2000; Chan & Wong, 2006; Fawzy et al., 2010; Sohrabi et al., 2012; Tsai et al., 2011; Wong & Chi-yung, 2001). Pilot testing enables the researcher to access individual questions and comments, as well as the functionality of the instrument (Sutton in May, 2011). The option of a pilot study was rejected in this survey because it would have caused significant delays. To address with this issue, the questions followed the norm of previously conducted studies and they were standardized at the maximum degree.

Interviews with industry professionals and travelling fans could give deeper insight on attributes and features that this specific tourist group consider important. Since there are no studies so far that addressed and examined the specific leisure tourism sub-segment of travelling football fan, this research was relied mainly on attributes identified in the two major tourism segments. Interviews with information rich individuals as hotel professionals who interact with the fans during those trips, as well as fans themselves could reveal unique elements that are desired or that are offered by hospitality business. Future research could expand the attribute pool and examine individual travellers' hotel selection criteria in a more comprehensive manner.

Online data collection tool is time and money saving, convenient and gives access to a huge pool of respondents. However, more targeted sampling on football fans that are on travel at the time, would get more precise and reliable answers. Current guests would not have to go back in time and recall the selection process, since it would be fresh in memory. Plus, the questioning on the hotel site would exclude the danger of imaginary conditions and answers. Finally the initial screening about football event related travel and hotel lodging would not be necessary, as the researcher could verify the conditions on the process.

Summary

The survey design followed the commonly used and accepted path from previous relative studies. The purpose was to rank hotel attributes in order of importance, examine correlations between various groups according to individual characteristics and measure the power of the fandom subculture over traditional hotel services. The most relative and common attributes were selected through literature review and asked from respondents to rank them by rating according to perceived importance in a Likert scale. The fandom strength was quantified by measuring the rate of agreement in various statements. The used statistical tests in this study are common practice in previous researches.

4. Results & Analysis

A total of 170 questionnaires were collected during the two weeks period. The questionnaire were distributed (posted) into fifty three Premier League clubs fan related web forums. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are listed below, followed by an analysis of hotel attributes importance and the examination of statistical significance of attributes and sample sub groups. Last, hypothetical questions regarding the influence of the fandom subculture/ consumer tribe on the the hotel selection are analysed.

4.1 Profile of Respondents

As it was expected male respondents predominated in the football forums responses with 82,4%, while females were accounted for the rest 16,5%. This is close enough to the last year's (2013/14) official Premier League season review, where females attending matches were 23%. It can be assumed that female fans attend the matches but are less active in online communities than their male counterparts. Despite the transformations that has undergone in the past years, football is still a physical sport which promotes masculinity, demand for victory and naturally appeals more to male than female attendants (Guilianotti, 2002).

The majority of the respondents fell into the age group of 35-44 (25,3%) and 45-54 (24,1%). Most of the respondents belong to the middle class, with incomes vary from £15-30.000 (25,9%) £30-50.000 (34,7%) (Table 3). All age and income groups are represented adequately in the sample. Football used to be the working class game. The results depict the change of this trend, by the proportion number of middle to upper-middle class respondents who dominate the sample. In comparison to the past, football crowds are heterogeneous and no longer can be easily distinguished by conventional notions of class, gender or ethnicity (Edensor & Millington, 2008). This well showed by the respondents profile, as it very diverse and spread out. Those relatively new fans have different agendas, as it is suggested by literature (Guilianotti, 2002). As the social class raises, so does the disposable income of the travelling fans and in combination with the increased tendency for city break trips (Dune et al, 2009), verifies the notion of the significance of this tourist sub segment for hoteliers. Modern fans have more money to spend and they desire to take short breaks throughout the year. Travelling to attend games and combining that with various activities, can increase the consumption at the destination with benefits for the hotels.

Table 4: Respondents' Profile (N=170, Valid 168)

Demographics	Frequency (%)		Frequency (%)
Gender		Age	
Male	140 (82,4)	18-24	18 (10,6)
Female	28 (16,5)	25-34	32 (18,8)
		35-44	43 (25,3)
Annual Income (£)		45-54	41 (24,1)
< 15.000	16 (9,4)	55-65	27 (15,9)
15.001-30.000	44 (25,9)	65+	7 (4,1)
30.001-50.000	59 (34,7)		
50.001-70.000	21 (12,4)		
70.000<	28 (16,5)		

As far as it concerns age, there is a representation of all age groups with the youngest and oldest groups on table accounted for the smallest percentages. Youngest fans usually have strong bonds with the club and are considered the most “fanatic” but as the sample indicates they don't travel as much. The most obvious explanation is the financial shortages, since those ages consist of students and young professionals at the lowest salary scale. The small percentage of the retired age group can be attributed to the fact that the elders are not as much accustomed to the Internet and social media. However, it is positive that all groups are represented.

As natural most of the fans (28,8%) were located in London, since it is the most populated area in the United Kingdom and home of five out of twenty Premier League clubs. The number of fans resident outside the Premier League club locations (England and Wales), where all places in the U.K. plus Ireland are appearing. It is also impressive the relatively big number of fans from Europe and rest of the world which are represented in the sample. This is in accordance with the notion which supports that media exposure and enhanced travel opportunities enable many new football supporters to pick and choose their preferred team, regardless of location (Edensor & Millington, 2008). It is obvious that the fans of Premier League clubs are not confined in the traditional space and tied to the location of the football club ground. This is also confirmed by the number of foreign inbound football tourists presented in the introduction of this study.

West Ham supporters won the race and their fans dominated the survey by 19,4% followed by those of Crystal Palace 12,9% (Table 5). Bigger and more popular clubs' fans were outnumbered, with the sum of all the “big four⁸” put together at the amount of 15,8%. A possible explanation for this inconsistency, can be that because of the popularity of their forums and the big number of members, threads are outdated fast. That means more new threads are posted which results in for the older to disappear from the visible page range quickly. Another one may be that smaller clubs communities are more solid and their fans more engaged and therefore more willing to show their fandom and promote their team.

Table 5: Travel & Accommodation Behaviour (N=170, Valid 160)

Times Travelled	<i>Frequency (%)</i>	Hotel Stays	<i>Frequency (%)</i>
1-3	57 (33,5)	1	65 (38,2)
4-7	41 (24,1)	2	45 (26,5)
8-10	14 (8,2)	3	20 (11,8)
10+	48 (28,2)	4	10 (5,9)
		5+	20 (11,8)

The 33,5% of the respondents travelled between one to three times this season to attend matches of their supported club, where a 28,2% showed great commitment and followed their club more than ten times. From those travels, most of them opted to stay at a hotel one 38,2% or two times 26,5% (Table 4). As it is implied by literature, fandom is best captured by the frequency and regularity of consumption, participation and engagement (Turner, 2014).

A large number of fans (28,2%) travel more than ten times to attend games which consists of half the away games and one fourth of the total championship games. According to the Guilianotti (2002) taxation those football travellers can be categorized as “supporters”, as the relationship to the club

8. Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool and Manchester United.

is passionate and indicates religious devotion, since they chose to attend away from home games more than ten times per season. If the taxation is to be extended to the times of travel, the customers categories include “fans” and “followers” as well.

Supporters are hot at their relationship to club and they decide to travel only to help their team with their presence and share identities. It can be extrapolated that other activities at the destination are secondary or just a necessity (e.g. accommodation). Fans are hot as well but with market orientation. They seem to be those who combine the the football event to other activities at the destination and they fit better at the city break concept. In same category fell the “flâneurs” but with much weaker ties and connections, most likely they are occasional travellers to iconic matches. Followers finally, are cool in their relationship, they value the club and its meaning but they are not as devoted, they are most probable the least possible to travel and stay overnight.

Fans in order to justify their social involvement and ratify their profound bond and relationship with the club and whatever it represents, they travel several times per season. Although the number of trips is not accurately translated into hotel stays, there is space for the managers to attract the already travelling fans in their premises. There may be several reasons for the gap between trips and stays, such as time and schedule restrictions, budget or just the distance and travel time is too short to require overnight accommodation.

Table 6: Residence & Supported Club (N=170, Valid 168)

Place of Residence	<i>Frequency (%)</i>	Supported Team	<i>Frequency (%)</i>
London	49 (28,8)	West Ham United	33 (19,4)
South East	28 (16,5)	Crystal Palace F.C.	22 (12,9)
Central England	23 (13,5)	Everton F.C.	13 (7,6)
North West	18 (10,6)	Queens Park Rangers	11 (6,5)
North East	12 (7,1)	Leicester City	10 (5,9)
South West	10 (5,9)	Southampton F.C.	9 (5,3)
Rest of the World	8 (4,7)	Manchester United	8 (4,7)
Europe	8 (4,7)	Tottenham Hotspur	8 (4,7)
Ireland	4 (2,4)	Arsenal F.C.	7 (4,1)
Wales	3 (1,8)	Burnley F.C.	7 (4,1)
Northern Ireland	3 (1,8)	Liverpool F.C.	7 (4,1)
Scotland	2 (1,2)	Newcastle United	6 (3,5)
		Chelsea F.C.	5 (2,9)
		Stoke City	5 (2,9)
		West Bromwich Albion	4 (2,4)
		Aston Villa	3 (1,8)
		Hull City	3 (1,8)
		Manchester City	3 (1,8)
		Sunderland A.F.C.	3 (1,8)
		Swansea City	1 (0,6)

4.2 Importance of attributes

For travelling football fans the most important element when on the road to attend their favourite club's performance is room price and value for money, followed by cleanliness and location related attributes like proximity to stadium and transportation hubs. The mean and standard deviation was calculated for all the 27 hotel selection attributes and the results are illustrated in table 4. In the five

points scale, mean above three signify attributes that are important. Attributes which scored mean lower than three, are excluded from further analysis.

Reliability analysis (Chronbach's Alpha), was conducted to test the reliability of gathered data with the hotel selection criteria questionnaire. The results illustrated that α is 0.924 which is considered acceptable. Chronbach's Alpha was also calculated for the sixteen attributes qualified as important (scored above 3) and found $\alpha = .891$ which is within accepted range.

When football fans are travelling in order to attend a football game, they seek accommodation at the best value for money ratio and low prices. As it was assumed and implied by sport related tourism studies, fans deal with hotel accommodation as a necessary evil, a by-product of the trip. Price and value related attributes are by far the highest rated and with substantially low standard deviation. Taking into consideration that city break is much less complicated trip than the annual vacations for example and once the match attendance (ticket) is confirmed, fans seek to simplify the selection by setting the price range according to their budget. In addition, this notion is supported by Jones & Chen (2010) and their two steps process. In the first consideration set for this study, price and location are suggested as defining factors. The second decision set could include all other attributes that are considered important (Table 6), as well as former experience.

Price and value for money was rated and ranked almost identically by the fans. The two attributes were placed in consecutive order in the questionnaire, number 24-25 and, that might confused the respondents who may have perceived them as one and the same. Nevertheless, both attributes were rated as most important by the majority of the fans, regardless of demographic characteristics as income, gender or age.

Cleanliness takes the third place of importance and that verifies previous studies (Callan & Bowman, 2000; Knutson, 1988; Lockyer, 2005; Tsai et al., 2011) which confirmed that the element of clean and tidy room is a decisive selection factor, for all tourist segments and backgrounds. Cleanliness addresses and satisfies an intrinsic, primitive and basic need of the human nature. Although it is impossible for the guest to gauge this attribute before staying, it is natural to look for cues that signify the hygienic quality and tidiness of an establishment. Cleanliness is not an initial choice factor, since it is evaluated during and after stay, but it is highly unlikely for guest to return in a hotel which does not satisfy this condition.

Previous studies have shown that location is rated high among the important factors (Chan & Wong, 2006; Knutson, 1988; Lockyer, 2005; McCleary, 1993; Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008), for all tourist groups. Locations serves the purpose of the trip by reducing commuting times to sights locations for leisure tourists, to business areas or conference centres for business travellers and, therefore increase the net time of the trip or holiday and the number of activities to do. For the travelling football fan, stadium is the centre of activities and needs to be accessible easily and fast. The location of the hotel can be a tremendous source of satisfaction or dissatisfaction for the sport tourist and proximity from the hotel to the sporting venue is an important factor for many travelers (Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008).

Location attributes, as public transport hubs and facilities in close proximity to the hotel, the

distance to the stadium and the safety of the neighbourhood are an important concern for travelling football fans. It is expected when fans travel without their own vehicles, to prefer having transportation options at hand and with the minimum possible cost. It can be also assumed that since those trips are short and occur during weekends that travellers want to avoid long commutes because of time restrictions. Proximity to stadium comes right after. It seems that more important is the commute time rather than physical distance, since transportation hubs are rated higher. Forum comments under the initial post noted that proximity to night-life activities are in the agenda of some fans. City break trips are built around one or more activities. In the case that the football event is focal (which happens most of the times), the location is defined by the event. However as more activities are pursued, other location variables enter the equation. Attractions and places of interests as shopping centres, cultural places, night-life entertainment and other sights, drag the location attribute towards other directions, according to the importance each individual fan puts on them.

We must take into consideration that the decision is a combination of a formed consideration set and rated attributes according to importance. Fans try to combine elements of price and location which are high on the list and make the choice that best serves their preferences and interests. City break travellers desire a less complicated process regarding the trip elements (Dune et al, 2009) and fans according to the results seem to be very practical on their hotel choice. Most likely they rank the hotels according to price attributes, exclude those which are not fit and then qualify those which have the location element they look for. After that stage and if more than options remain, the selection is inconclusive and probably is relied upon personal characteristics, previous experience, elements that are appealing to the eye or perhaps sheer luck.

All four personnel related attributes are ranked as somewhat important and scored above three. The same happens with services and amenities as Internet, breakfast, food & beverage quality, room quietness and appliances like TV. The result table shows that fans rate attributes from all five sets as important in their hotel selection. That implies that they have an all around expectation of services and amenities, despite the fact that not all attributes are decisive and influential to the final decision.

After price and location attributes are evaluated, fans are looking for basic hotel services and amenities. Brand and marketing tools, building properties as well as some peripheral (luxury) services, are unimportant for the travelling fan. An attempt to translate the thoughts of the travelling football fan, would look like that: "Arrive at the hotel, go to the match (fast and easy), return, take a shower, go out, return for sleep, wake up, have a good breakfast and depart". All of these by spending the least amount of money and receiving the highest value. This might seem as an oversimplification but it condenses the result table and fandom culture that accompanies it.

Table 7: Hotel Attribute Ranking of Importance (Cronbach's $\alpha = .924$)

Attribute	Mean score	Standard deviation
1. Value for Money	4,29	,913
2. Room Price	4,28	,942
3. Cleanliness	4,01	1,079
4. Transportation Hubs Nearby	3,73	1,163
5. Close distance to the Stadium	3,55	1,178
6. Clean & Safe Neighbourhood	3,45	1,158
7. Personnel Behaviour	3,40	1,133
8. Breakfast, Food & Beverage Quality	3,28	1,263
9. Internet	3,27	1,372
10. Personnel Efficiency	3,27	1,162
11. Quietness	3,23	1,248
12. Room Appliances (TV, Radio)	3,22	1,285
13. Personnel Appearance	3,08	1,139
14. Parking in the Premises	3,01	1,517
15. Personnel Training	3,01	1,177
16. Security	3,00	1,283
17. Hotel Type	2,93	1,191
18. Close to places of Interest	2,88	1,286
19. Bar & Restaurant Availability	2,76	1,356
20. Satellite, Cable TV in room	2,76	1,260
21. Hotel Brand	2,65	1,181
22. Decoration	2,62	1,106
23. Design	2,56	1,089
24. Offers & Travel Packages	2,45	1,231
25. Broadcast Live Games	2,21	1,236
26. Loyalty Programs	2,13	1,123
27. 24h Room Service	1,63	,985

4.2.1 Comparisons between subgroups within the sample

Gender

An independent t-test was conducted to check whether or not there are significant statistical differences between male and female fans. The Sig. value for Levene's test is larger than .05, therefore the data does not violate the assumption of equal variance (Pallant, 2007) and we can proceed to the next stage. The value of the sig. 2 tailed is above .05 for all selected attributes, consequently there is no significant difference between the two gender groups. Nevertheless caution is required because of the small amount of female respondents in the sample (16,5%). In the author's opinion no final conclusions should be drawn regarding this aspect and further studies with larger proportion of female participants should be carried in order to confirm or discard significant statistical differences.

ANoVa

To ascertain whether there were any significant differences in the importance placed on attributes according to age and income, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted, to calculate and compare the mean scores of each group category. Plus, the Tukey's honestly significant difference (HSD) post hoc tests will be applied to check the statistical significance. Often, Tukey's HSD test is recommended by statisticians because it is not as conservative as the Scheffé test (Pallant, 2007).

Age

The Levene's test will be applied in order to check the homogeneity and whether the variance in scores is the same for each of the six age groups. The significance value (Sig.) for Levene's test is less than .05, for seven variables: 1) Breakfast, F&B quality, 2) Cleanliness, 3) Parking, 4) Proximity to Stadium, 5) Behaviour, 6) Appearance and 7) Price). The assumption of homogeneity of variance for those variables is violated. It is suggested that the Robust Tests of Equality of Means table, should be consulted. The two tests shown there (Welch and Brown-Forsythe) are preferable when the assumption of the homogeneity of variance is violated (Pallant, 2007).

According to Pallant (2007) if the Sig. value is less than or equal to .05, there is a significant difference among the mean scores on the dependent variable for some of the groups. In our case this occurs for 1) Breakfast, F&B quality, 2) Appliances (TV), 3) Quietness, 4) Stadium proximity, 5) Behaviour, 6) Appearance and 7) Price. Statistical significance is indicated between the younger age groups (15-34) and all other according to Breakfast quality. Younger fans either don't make use of the breakfast service or they are not as demanding as the older regarding the quality. A second observation is that age groups from 35-65 value parking much more than the youngsters and the retired. A possible explanation is that they travel by their own vehicles, so parking facilities are important to them. This is obvious and further verified by the bigger mean scores. They also pay higher attention to the distance from the stadium, probably because they are unwilling in general to use public transport or waste time in commuting, maybe because they are not as time free as youngsters and senior travellers.

After performing the appropriate tests and by checking the means it can be claimed that younger fans don't really pay any attention to most of the hotel attributes apart from price. The statistical significant differences between them and all other groups are focused on that fact. The results indicate no more significant differences between other groups apart from those mentioned (parking, stadium proximity) which are interrelated. Football travelling fans, as far as it concerns their age grouping the behave in a statistical homogeneous manner. The purpose and the nature of the trip seems dominating factor regarding the attributes they are seeking in order to address and better satisfy their needs.

Income

For the income groups the assumption of homogeneity of variance is not violated for all attributes except price. ANOVA indicates significant differences at Breakfast, F&B quality, security, training, efficiency and price. However under post hoc multiple comparison (Tuckey HSD) there are no real differences between groups, apart the fact that affluent fans are more demanding in all personnel related performance attributes and less sensitive in price than the other groups. This finding is in line with previous studies which indicated that upper-scale affluent customers require a range of amenities, wider service options and with higher quality, regardless if they make use of them (Fawzy et al., 2010; Knutson, 1988). As it is expected they are less concerned about the absolute price figure, rather than they care more about the value received for their payment.

The other income groups are aligned according to their demand and the attributes the consider salient. In addition the distribution of the respondents between income groups is solid which further reinforces the results.

4.2.2 Fandom Driven Choices

Table 7 illustrates what role the purpose of the trip play on the decision of accommodation. Fans agree that the attributes under consideration and the selection are different when they travel to attend football matches, than in other occasions like holiday vacations. This fact confirms literature and the suggestion that the purpose of the trip, influence the weight put on various underlying factors and the needs each traveller seek to satisfy (Dube & Renaghan, 2000; Yavas & Bebakus, 2005).

As literature in city break travel suggests, those trips are much less complicated than other types of vacations (Dune et al, 2009). This is confirmed by the results in both hotel attribute ranking and the direct question about the difference in the selection process, where respondent more or less agree that it varies. To further strengthen this outcome, it is found that fans behave in a relatively homogeneous manner and value the attributes similarly, without much influence by their individual social and economical characteristics.

Table 8: Statement Agreement In relationship to Fandom (N=170, Valid=160)

Do you agree with the following statements?	Mean	Std. Deviation
The hotel selection is different when I travel as football fan than in other occasions (business, holidays, family)	3,50	1,336
When I am about to revisit a place for a game, I choose the hotel I had stayed the last time	3,26	,948
I will choose a hotel which is football fan friendly regardless of any other attributes	2,78	1,154
Keeping the fandom spirit is important for me, so I follow the group's decision about the hotel we are staying.	2,59	1,118
I will choose a hotel which organizes football related activities for the fans during the stay, regardless of any other attributes	2,00	,991
I will choose a hotel which is football fan oriented, themed regardless of any other attributes	1,91	,974

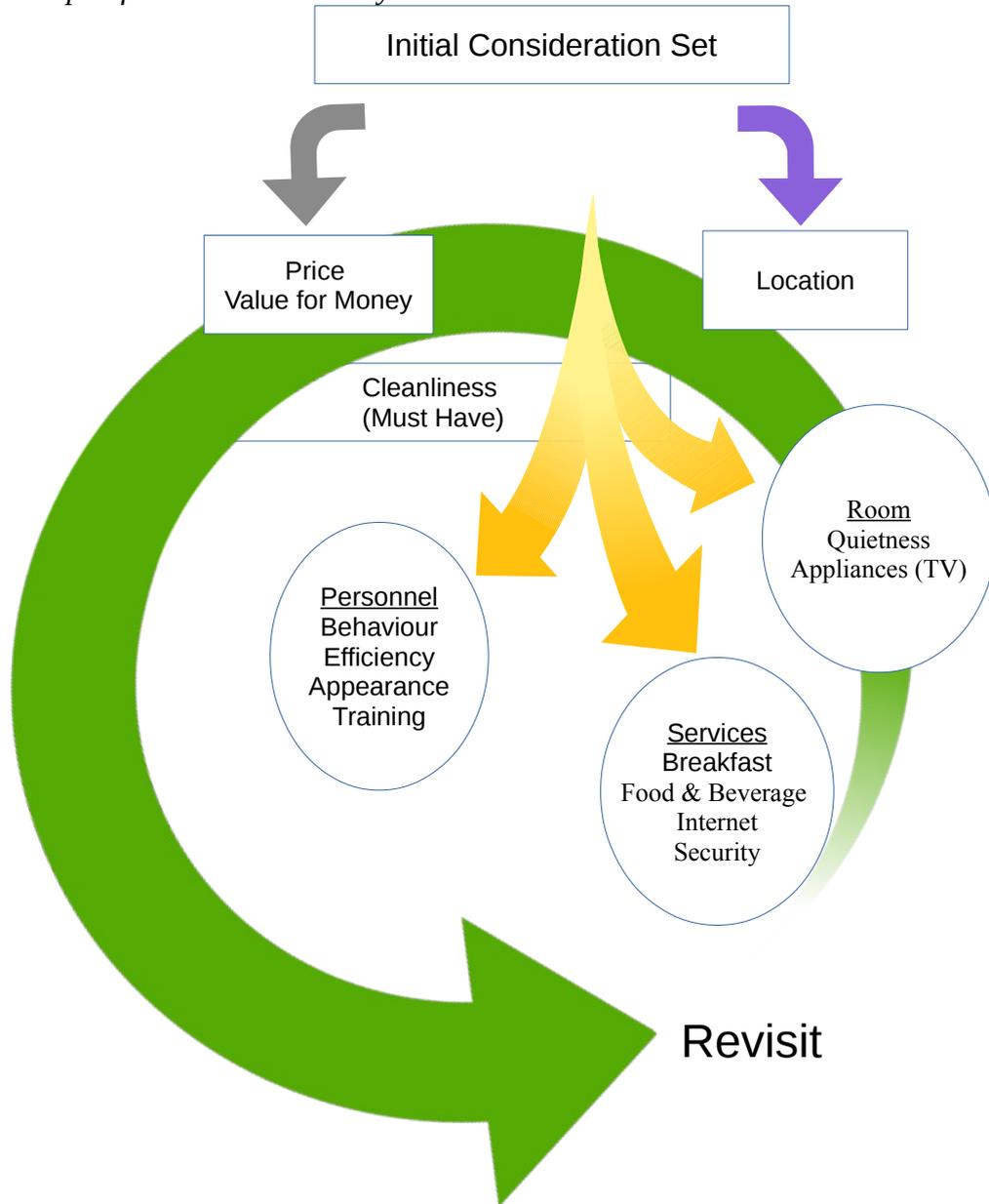
ANoVA in age groups reveals no statistical significant differences between groups. However senior travellers over sixty five, in contradiction to all other groups disagree about the difference in hotel selection when travel to attend a football event. The number of respondents in this subgroup is small so solid conclusions should be avoided. A possible explanation could be that since they are retired, they may combine the trip to do other activities as well, or the football match is among many and maybe not even the focal event or reason for travelling.

Travelling football fans are also positive in re-patronizing a hotel, when they pay a second visit to destination the following years. The first visit offer opportunities to leave lasting impressions and build market share (LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1996). And consequently, this is an area with great potential for hoteliers when aiming at the football traveller market.

This somehow contradicts the findings of the previous section, where specific brands and loyalty programs were at the lowest places, thus almost completely unimportant. An explanation is that fans don't look for specific brands or hotel chains when travel for football purposes, but after they have a positive and pleasant experience in one hotel, the next time they visit they don't risk or they don't put themselves in the same time consuming selection process. Their priority is not the company's linked image to tradition, ideology, business name and identity communicated by marketing channels (LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1996) but rather the lived experience of environmental cues, variety of services and the impression of quality, as they were shaped after the visit. It can be said that they prefer to walk in familiar ground, under the condition they made a well informed choice the first time. Thorough and well researched choices tend to be solid, lasting and unless something goes really bad customers are not paying attention to the process or are willing to change lightly (Dube & Renaghan, 2000).

This can be very useful for hoteliers, as once they achieve to attract a customer in their premises and as long as they deliver the promised value, they are likely to have walked the longest distance for repeated visitation. Hotels once visited they seem to be preferred over new hotels as far as the conditions remain similar. Visited hotels don't need to compete over again each time, at least not from zero point. The customer gives a priority and we can imagine this as a weak form of loyalty and bonding which can be reinforced even more visitation by visitation and eventually result in

Illustration 9: Impactful Attributes Priority



loyalty. Illustration 9 shows the positive attitude circle of the travelling fans towards the initial decision which results in repetitive visitations as far as the conditions the first choice are satisfied.

In addition it supports the notion of fandom and the impact it has on social and personal image, although not as strong or as solid it may have been expected. Fans are loath to compromise significant hotel attributes and trade them off with purely fandom connected context of activities. In the hypothetical questions regarding the importance of fandom related attributes as football theme, fan friendly and other football activities organized by the hotel, they keep traditional elements (price, location) in high priority rather than fandom related ones.

The questions was stated in an authoritative and exclusive manner to extract exactly this; whether the fandom subculture dominates over everything else or not. It can be suggested that fandom directed events can have an additional role of differentiation, as long as core and traditional

parameters keep the desired quality, although further research is required to address this matter specifically.

Fans seek to display and celebrate identification through attendance and participation in the event (Jones, 2008) and value highly the opportunity to be together with others to share a communal fandom related experiences (Weed, 2010). The results show that these experiences are confined to the stadium and other traditional fan activities and expressions as attending and drinking at pubs, collective singing at the roads or coach traveling. Hotel premises have not yet established their image as football fandom consumption places although fans' responses show some promise in that direction.

Fans do not seem to extend their fandom subculture to the hotel selection. The consuming rituals mostly circle around the core football product (the game), memorabilia and activities around the sport venue. Although there are hints that a football fan friendly hotel perhaps could make a difference in the decision. But the results are not that clear and deeper investigation is needed, preferably by thorough interviews. The same, though in smaller degree, is suggested by the keeping the fandom spirit responses. If the other basic parameters are met it would have a positive impact on the decision, nevertheless not decisive.

5. Conclusion

This research had two purposes. The first one was to rank the hotel attributes in order of importance for the travelling football fans. The second was to determine the significance of the impact of the trip and of the fandom subculture on the selection process. The attributes were ranked and the results pointed that price, value for money and location, along with cleanliness which is a must have, affect decisively the accommodation choice. Fandom subculture, although it is very strong in other fan related expressions, is not dominating in hotel selection and fans do not trade off traditional hotel elements for the sake of fandom spirit.

5.1 Hotel Attributes

Travelling football fans had rated as salient attributes that were identified in previous studies, with the the top of the list to be confirmed. Hotel selection by football fans can be divided into two stages: pre purchase or first time visit and post purchase or repeat patronage. Price and location attribute set was rated highest and consist of elements that a customer is aware and evaluate before booking. In addition, various attributes from all five basic sets were ranked as somehow important and they consist of post purchase evaluated elements. The latter attributes can encourage repeat visitation, since travelling fans are positive to return to an establishment where they have stayed before.

After ranking the attributes by the mean score, price and value for money were rated as the most crucial almost unanimously by all fan groups. It can be concluded that fans set the budget first and seek for the best value proposition (Victorino et al., 2005), followed by the formation of an early consideration set (Jones & Chen, 2010) which also includes reason for stay and level of service desired (Lockyer, 2005¹). Hotel accommodation during football related trips, is perceived by some fans as an unavoidable expense⁹ which has little to add to the fandom experience. Price also plays the role of a primary element which excludes hotel options and accelerates the selection process.

It is natural that the most club loyal the fan is, the strongest the desire to travel will be. Time and budget permitting the most committed fans, the “supporters” according to Guilianotti's taxonomy, will attempt to attend the most games. Since time is out of their grasp, they will try to maximize the number of games watched by minimizing the cost. In addition, fans don't expect to spend much time in the hotel premises, so as to maximize the value received by provided services, from the financial sacrifice the have undergone. City break travel is regarded as activity intense, meaning that apart from the game fans would probably like to do other things at the destination, as shopping, entertainment and sightseeing, which further reduces the time spend in the hotel. Consequently since they are not making much use of the services provided, they are unwilling to pay for them.

The early consideration set is completed by location properties. Although the fact that travelling fans perceive and seek for a vast array of hotel attributes, from all five sets categorized (services, accommodation, building, personnel and marketing), it is clear that the first time choice is heavily affected by price and location attributes. Location is focal for all tourist categories, business and

9. This is a general essence which derives from comments in the forum thread by participants.

leisure alike. Tourists want to be in the centre, or at least near it, of the place of the trip interest. Reducing commuting times enable them to have more net time for activities. In addition they can avoid unpleasant situations as traffic which may lead to delays or even miss the event. It is natural consequence that in shorter trips, like the weekend football related trips, time is even more valuable and fans regard (indirectly) it as a salient and decisive element of accommodation choice.

All other aspects that was rated as important are post evaluation elements and can build the first stage of behavioural loyalty which is based on practical characteristics. They are perceived so because of the intangible nature of the hotel product, as there are attributes that need to be consumed first in order to be evaluated. This is clear for example, for the personnel behaviour and efficiency, the breakfast quality or the room quietness which are rated as somehow important in the attributes list.

In addition, fans showed a positive pre-disposal to return to a hotel the following years, under the condition naturally they had a pleasant experience and their needs were satisfied. This can be seen as a form of loyalty or as unwillingness to go under the selection process every year they return to a place.

Since all other services rate as somewhat important, are intangible and is difficult for the customer to have an opinion before the stay, they constitute elements that affect the intention to return (Richard & Sundaram, 1994). Short city break trips' choices are much faster and with less effort consumed in evaluating various elements. The attribute table implies that fans are not going to opt a hotel because of personnel, Internet or breakfast quality, if the price (initially) and location (secondarily) attributes are not met. However, quality and availability of those elements will drag the customer to the hotel, next time she/he will be at the destination as it illustrated above (illustration 8).

5.2 Fandom

Previous studies examined and pointed the differences between tourist groups according to various segmentations. There are smaller or bigger differences between groups; business / leisure (Kim & Perdue, 2013; LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1996; Lockyer, 2005; Shanka & Taylor, 2003; Victorino et al., 2005; Yavas & Bebakus, 2005), leisure from different backgrounds and regions (Callan & Bowman, 2000; Richard & Sundaram, 1994; Tsai et al., 2011) and business with diverse trip purposes and backgrounds (Chan & Wong, 2006; Fawzy, 2010; Knutson, 1988; McCleary et al., 1993). Absolute comparisons between studies and group sub-segments are impossible, since they are situated in different time periods and contexts. In addition, every author uses a different questionnaire or model for analysis, but it can be said that differences appear in all studies¹⁰. Nevertheless, it is important to categorize each distinct group separately (Yavas & Bebakus, 2004), as this study showed there are significant differentiating factors and football fans cannot be examined just as leisure tourists, as they value attributes in different order of importance and admit that the choice set is different during those trips in relation to other vacations.

10. Although not all are statistically significant.

Travelling football fans are not homogeneous group regarding their demographic characteristics but the fandom subculture acts as a conjunctive tissue. Results have shown that during football related trips, they behave in a similar way and whatever difference is more likely ascribed to trip related personal pursuits and agendas. Statistical significant differences were revealed only on group extremes (youngest-oldest and highest-lowest income).

Despite the fact that sport related tourism and hospitality is about providing living experience, it does not seem to be translated into a synergistic relationship between the travelling football fan and the hotel choice. Fans seem to leave the hotel experience outside the general football trip concept. This notion has unexpectedly been further enhanced by the low ranking of the “live broadcasting” in the hotel premises attribute which is the only one directly related to fan service. Perhaps they prefer to watch other games or sport shows, in more traditional environment (as pubs) rather in the hotel. It cannot be said whether the fans leave the hotels out of their communal fandom expressions because they do not perceived them as appropriate places or even they are not inspired by the setting or, because the hotel do not provide the right experiencescape to unfold such activities.

Accommodation is perceived as a mean to satisfy basic human needs, of rest and sleep, rather than as part of the experiencescape. The results in that matter are at best inconclusive. It is clear that fans will not compromise price, location and various core hotel services, purely for the sake of fandom spirit. Although, the impact of fan and football oriented elements on the hotel choice, when the basic services are offered and the accommodation needs are met, remains to be investigated.

Fans admitted that they choose hotel differently when travelling for attending football events. The purpose of their trip forms their needs accordingly and shapes different priorities. It can be concluded that the trip purpose and the belonging to the fandom subcultural social group at the time, dominate over the personal characteristics and transform the individual to football fan with divergent needs.

However this is not to be misinterpreted as fans value higher fandom related activities or elements, over traditional and basic hotel attributes. Fandom subculture and tribal consumerism is not applicable separately but it may has a role to play in combination with traditional hotel services, as differentiation strategy to attract fans.

5.3 Contributions

This thesis made three major contributions to the area of hotel selection literature.

1. Construction of a theoretical framework and a model of study that connects and examines the attributes that affect hotel selection, under the context of the travelling football fan.

The first part of the thesis comprises an extended literature review of relevant hotel selection studies. The review lead to the construction of the model presented in tables one and two which consists of the selected hotel attributes that were the base of the questionnaire. Since the target group of this study was very specific, the travelling football fan of British Premier League clubs, the football fandom subculture was presented and an effort to draw connections as well as to investigate

the way fandom influences the accommodation selection was performed.

There is limited literature in the subject and mostly it is confined to sport tourists in general and to mega sport events (Olympic Games). This study offers more focused view on the football hotel guest which can be extended to other fandom and competitive sports across the globe. It is shown that football fans consist of a separate and distinctive category within the leisure tourism, mainly because of their belonging to the fandom subculture which transforms their personal characteristics into collective ones and the elements of the city break travel as duration, complexity, event structure and activities participation at the destination.

2. The ranking of the hotel attributes according to perceived importance by fans.

As in all previous studies focused on various tourist groups, different locations and context, the hotel attributes were ranked in order of importance. The findings provide a focused insight on the specific market sub-segment and indicate specifically what hotel aspects and services the fans consider as important to their choice. The ranking confirms the small consideration set (Jones & Chen, 2010) in this study price and location elements and the uncomplicated nature of the city break trip (Dune et al., 2010) as apart from the two aforementioned the other attributes despite their relevant importance they don't seem decisive for the selection.

3. The measurement of the strength of the fandom subculture and its impact on the trip and the hotel related elements.

It is suggested by the literature that fandom has strong impact on various expressions of the individual and when the person puts on the “clothes” of the fan behaves according to the norms and traditions of the subculture. This thesis explored the magnitude of the subculture over the lodging decisions. Fans consist of a different group and unlike other leisure or business group which take the individual characteristics of the person along the trip, football travellers seem to act more homogeneously when selecting accommodation. However, hotels are not integrated to the collective expression of the fan tribe and seem detached from the fan related activities. The hotel tie to the event experience and the fandom subculture can be described as weak, with potential however to be strengthen and become a part of the whole experience.

5.4 Managerial Implications

Football fans is a tourist sub-segment which travels mostly during weekends, frequently and in large numbers. It is an opportunity for hotel managers to fill up the weekends and increase the occupancy rates of their establishments. Fans are price and location sensitive. Properties that satisfy the location attributes (stadium and transportation hubs proximity, clean-safe neighbourhood), should target this group and direct their marketing-price efforts to attract them. Location is a fixed attribute that cannot be changed and therefore advantageous properties should benefit from this fact over the competition.

- Location advantageous properties should target on football fans

Results indicate that fans look for basic hospitality services in the lowest possible price or in the

highest value for money ratio. Managers could shape the product bundle, so as to include the necessary services and remove the unwanted (where possible) in order to lower the price. As we have seen because of the short duration of the trip and the activity orientation fans do not spend much time in the premises so as to benefit from various amenities included in the price (and consequently raising it).

- Customise the product with the desired services at the lowest price rate

Despite the fact that loyalty programs were at the bottom of the list, fans are positively predisposed in returning to a previously visited hotel. The two findings seem contradictory but hoteliers can spin them to their advantage. Forming specifically sport-fans loyalty programs could assist in building long term relationships and encourage repeating patronage.

- Create sport-fan specific loyalty programs

Fans seem to have similar hotel selection behaviour when they are travelling away from home to attend football games. Although it is inconclusive whether this homogeneity is because of their belonging to the fandom subculture and football consumer tribe at the time, the purpose and the nature of the trip or both of those elements, the results show similar behaviour regardless of personal, social and economic characteristics. Consequently hotel managers can focus their efforts on attracting them as a whole fan tribe group and not as individuals.

- Target marketing efforts towards the football consumer tribe group altogether

5.5 Limitations

The sample of the study is regarded adequate, since is well above average of relative hotel selection studies. One aspect that needs caution, is the collecting instrument was conducted exclusively online. This resulted in few distortions, as the female respondents proportion and the club supporters percent according to popularity. However there is no reason to believe that different club supporters behave differently when travelling and choosing accommodation.

The listed attributes were predetermined according to literature, that removed the opportunity from the fans to add other essential aspects or explain the reasoning behind their choice. Fandom subculture and hotel selection are very complex subjects even when they are studied separately. Combining them might be perplexing and apart from the “what”, examining the “how” and “why” is required in order to have a deeper insight.

5.6 Future Research Recommendations

An extension of study could be advanced to carry out an in-depth qualitative interview asking travellers’ opinions on other dimensions of selection criteria, as well as investigate the reasoning behind choice. This study focused on British Premier League and British Fans on a national base. It can be conducted on a wider population, concerning international football events (as Champions League), other sports or other nationalities.

Attribute list ranking is similar and verifies former studies in the area. It would be interesting to ask the fans what would enhance their accommodation experience during a football event. In that context, it would be intriguing for researchers and hotel marketers to organize fandom oriented activities and measure the magnitude of the impact on guest satisfaction, bookings, revenues and loyalty building.

Last, a very interesting concept which need to be examined more thoroughly, is the magnitude of the impact of the fandom subculture on the hotel selection and whether the hotels can work synthetically to the sport event. In this study we acquired an initial insight about the significance of the fandom spirit and whether it dominates the traditional hotel attributes. The results pointed to the contrary, however it shows potential since fans are unwilling to sacrifice basic hotel service for fandom, but whether they will choose lodging if the basic requirements are met and the fandom is supported, remains to be investigated. So it will be worthy of further research to learn how the hotel can be a part of the football trip experience and if that will be beneficial to the bottom line and consequently deserving an effort towards that direction from the hotel management.

Concluding Remarks

This study provides a useful insight about the the hotel attributes that affect selection, by football fans of Premier League clubs, when they travel away from home to attend games. The subject was approached from the city break travel perspective, as characteristics like the short duration and the opportunistic nature explain the motives behind trip and the nature of the football event oriented trip. Then, the profile of the football fan was built under the context of fandom subculture and the consumer tribe concept. Results have indicated that both the purpose of the trip and the social context of the fandom have critical impact on the hotel selection.

Finally, a review of existing literature in the field was exerted in order to identify hotel attributes and their importance, as well as to define the selection process. The most relevant attributes were selected and formed the questionnaire which was distributed online to fan forums. Results have shown that value for money and price, cleanliness, plus location related attributes are substantial for hotel selection. In addition football fans behave rather homogeneously influenced by the purpose of the trip and the fandom subculture.

The study aspires to equip the hotel managers with the appropriate knowledge in order to address and target the selected tourist sub-segment, since the author believes there is a lot of growth potential and revenue opportunities in the football and generally sport travelling groups. Finally the author hopes to motivate more researchers to study the popular sport tourists groups, so as to extend and expand the knowledge base.

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Few Things about You***2. Are you male or female?**

- Male
 Female

***3. What is your age?**

- 18 to 24
 25 to 34
 35 to 44
 45 to 54
 55 to 64
 65 or older

***4. Place of residence**

- London
 South East
 South West
 Central England
 North East
 North West
 Wales
 Scotland
 Ireland
 Northern Ireland
 Europe
 Rest of the World

5. What is your team?**6. What is your approximate yearly income (£)?**

- Less than 15,000
 15,001 - 30,000
 30,001 - 50,000
 50,001 - 70,000
 More than 70,000

Fan Related Questions

***7. How many times have you traveled this season (2014/5) to attend football games?**

- 1 - 3
 4 - 7
 8 - 10
 10 +

***8. How many of those times did you stayed overnight at a hotel?**

- 1
 2
 3
 4
 5+

***9. Do you agree with the following statements?**

	Totally Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Totally Agree
1. The hotel selection is different when I travel as football fan than in other occasions (business, holidays, family).	<input type="radio"/>				
2. I would choose a hotel which is football fan friendly regardless of any other attributes	<input type="radio"/>				
3. I would choose a hotel which organizes football related activities for the fans during the stay, regardless of any other attributes	<input type="radio"/>				
4. I would choose a hotel which is football fan oriented "themed" regardless of any other attributes	<input type="radio"/>				
5. Keeping the fandom spirit is important for me, so I follow the group's decision about the hotel we are staying.	<input type="radio"/>				
6. When I am about to revisit a place for a game, I choose the hotel I had stayed the last time	<input type="radio"/>				