MASTER THESIS

The Features of Brand Loyalty Formation among Sport Fans: Case of Russian Football Clubs

Done by

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ЗАЯВЛЕНИЕ О САМОСТОЯТЕЛЬНОМ ХАРАКТЕРЕ ВЫПОЛНЕНИЯ
ВЫПУСКНОЙ КВАЛИФИКАЦИОННОЙ РАБОТЫ

Я, Захарчук Алексей Евгеньевич, студент второго курса магистратуры направления «Менеджмент», заявляю, что в моей магистерской диссертации на тему *«Особенности формирования лояльности к бренду среди спортивных болельщиков на примере российских футбольных клубов»,* представленной в службу обеспечения программ магистратуры для последующей передачи в государственную аттестационную комиссию для публичной защиты, не содержится элементов плагиата.

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I, Aleksei Zakharchuk, second year master student, MIM program «Management», state that my master thesis on the topic *«The Features of Brand Loyalty Formation among Sport Fans: Case of Russian Football Clubs»,* which is presented to the Master Office to be submitted to the Official Defense Committee for the public defense, does not contain any elements of plagiarism.

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ABSTRACT

Master Student's Name	Aleksei Zakharchuk
Academic Advisor's Name	Sergey A. Starov
Master Thesis Title	The Features of Brand Loyalty Formation among Sport Fans: Case of Russian Football Clubs
Description of the goal, tasks and main results the research	**Goal** is to develop empirical model for successful brand loyalty formation in the sports sphere. There are six **objectives**: 1. Review and analyze scientific studies that focus on defining the concept of brand loyalty and its specificities within the sports sphere. 2. Conduct benchmarking and examine the experiences of leading sports organizations that have implemented strategies for brand loyalty formation. 3. Formulate hypotheses regarding the essential factors and moderators necessary for constructing an empirical model of brand loyalty formation in the sports sphere. 4. Test the formulated hypotheses through a survey. 5. Conduct cluster analysis to segment Russian football fans. 6. Formulate recommendations for sports organizations based on the findings obtained from the research. **Main results:** • Developed and proven empirical model for brand loyalty formation in the sports sphere; • Segments of the Russian football fans
Keywords	Brand Loyalty, Brand Extension, Sports Sphere

АННОТАЦИЯ

Автор	Алексей Захарчук
Научный руководитель	Сергей Александрович Старов
Название ВКР	Особенности формирования лояльности к бренду среди спортивных болельщиков на примере российских футбольных клубов
Описание цели, задач и основных результатов исследования	**Цель** - разработать эмпирическую модель успешного формирования лояльности к бренду в спортивной сфере. Всего шесть **задач**: 1. Рассмотреть и проанализировать научные исследования, которые направлены на определение концепции лояльности к бренду и ее специфики в сфере спорта. 2. Провести сравнительный анализ и изучить опыт ведущих спортивных организаций, которые внедрили стратегии формирования лояльности к бренду. 3. Сформулировать гипотезы относительно факторов и модераторов, необходимых для построения эмпирической модели формирования лояльности к бренду в спортивной сфере. 4. Проверить сформулированные гипотезы с помощью опроса. 5. Провести кластерный анализ, чтобы сегментировать российских футбольных болельщиков. 6. Сформулировать рекомендации для спортивных организаций на основе результатов, полученных в ходе исследования. **Основные результаты:** • Разработанная и апробированная эмпирическая модель формирования лояльности к бренду в спортивной сфере; • Сегменты российских футбольных болельщиков.
Ключевые слова	Лояльность к бренду, Расширение бренда, Спортивная сфера.

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of brand loyalty formation is highly popular in both theoretical discussions and practical implementation. The sports industry is no exception to this trend, as evident in the marketing efforts of prominent sports organizations. To begin with, it is worth figuring out how, in general, a sports organization receives money. To find out about this moment in more detail, I turned for an expert assessment to a person working as a leading specialist in the PR department of FC Zenit, a graduate of GSOM Denis Lapshin. He told me about how and thanks to what sports organizations earn. There are, of course, some exceptions such as when a businessman comes to a sports team and invests money, including fulfilling a social mission, developing the region where the team is based, as for example in the case of FC Krasnodar and club president Sergey Galitsky. However, in most cases, the financing is divided into 2 parts:

1.   Sports component. This factor includes two sub-items:

•   Everything that is directly related to the sports results of the team: payments depending on the final place in the table at the end of the season, success in the international arena, as well as income from TV contracts, which also depends on the success of the team;

•   Everything related to earnings from the sale or resale of players to other sports organizations.

2.   Marketing and PR. This factor can also be divided into 2 sub-items:

•   Sponsorship contracts. Various companies are ready to sponsor teams if they understand that in this way, they can attract the audience of a sports organization;

•   Direct sales to fans. This includes the sale of tickets, and the sale of merchandising and other goods that organizations produce themselves, as well as the release of various goods under the brand name that are produced in cooperation with other companies, that is, licensing.

In both factors related to marketing and PR, such a parameter as brand loyalty plays a huge role, since the higher the loyalty, the better the listed factors work.

And if the sports component is actively considered in the theoretical discourse in the works of researchers immersed in the sports sphere, then the marketing and PR component and the role of brand loyalty in this issue remain to this day as a research gap. It is important to understand that in the modern world, any sports organization is a hybrid of social and commercial principles, and

both of them should be given important attention. Why do we need such theoretical studies, especially if we are talking about specifics of Russian sports sphere?

It can be observed that there is a growing trend in sports organizations, or at least their efforts, to achieve self-sufficiency. Taking football clubs as an example, which are among the largest sports organizations in Russia, they have faced challenges in generating revenue from international tournaments due to various political issues. Additionally, the implementation of the Fan ID law has posed difficulties in ticket sales. Furthermore, the sports industry is highly competitive, and brands are constantly seeking ways to differentiate themselves from competitors, aiming to stand out in the market and gain a competitive edge. In light of these circumstances, striving to build a brand loyalty strategy that increases the financial prospects of a football club from a marketing perspective seems to be an effective option.

The main *goal* of this paper is to develop empirical model for successful brand loyalty formation in the sports sphere. In order to achieve the research goal, it is necessary to tackle the following *objectives* such as:

1. Review and analyze scientific studies that focus on defining the concept of brand loyalty and its specificities within the sports sphere.

2. Conduct benchmarking and examine the experiences of leading sports organizations that have implemented strategies for brand loyalty formation.

3. Formulate hypotheses regarding the essential factors and moderators necessary for constructing an empirical model of brand loyalty formation in the sports sphere.

4. Test the formulated hypotheses through a survey.

5. Conduct cluster analysis to segment Russian football fans.

6. Formulate recommendations for sports organizations based on the findings obtained from the research.

In fact, the main *question* addressed in this study is: how should the connections in the empirical model be organized to foster brand loyalty in the sports industry? In simpler terms, what factors influence the possibility of forming brand loyalty in the sports industry, what acts as a moderator, and what are the results of the model? Furthermore, as part of conducting the cluster analysis, required to formulate practical implications, we will be able to answer the question: "What are the consumer segments among the fans of leading Russian football clubs?".

The paper will have a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to achieve the stated goal and objectives. Initially, benchmarking will be conducted to study the experiences of international football clubs that have implemented brand loyalty formation strategies. Following that, a survey of Russian football fans will be conducted to collect primary data. Subsequently, a

linear regression analysis will be performed to test each formulated hypothesis. These hypotheses will be based on our literature review, and the outcome of the regression analysis will determine the success of the developed model for brand loyalty formation in the sports industry. Furthermore, a cluster analysis will be carried out to segment the survey participants, providing more precise practical implications for Russian football clubs.

The first chapter of this study will provide a theoretical background on the topic. After conducting a literature review and analyzing the definition of brand loyalty and its specifics in the sports sphere, as well as studying relevant research on the subject and formulating hypotheses necessary for developing an empirical model for brand loyalty formation in the sports industry, we will proceed to the second chapter. The second chapter will thoroughly explain the research methodology. We will clarify the purposes for selecting the research methods, analyze the respondent selection process for the survey, and present the final results of the used methods. Finally, the third chapter of our study will focus on the theoretical contribution of our research and highlight the main practical implications. This chapter will also address the limitations of the study and suggest areas for further research and development.

CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL BACKGROUND OF THE TOPIC

1.1. Brand Loyalty: Exploring its Definition and Significance

In this chapter we will briefly analyze the sources directly related to the definition of the term brand loyalty in general. Brand loyalty has been a subject of interest for researchers seeking to understand consumer behavior and its implications for marketing strategies. Early perspectives on brand loyalty approached it from different angles, including repeat purchase behavior and cognitive attitudes.

Initially, some researchers defined brand loyalty as "a biased behavioral response expressed over time by some decision-making unit with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands"[1]. The authors emphasized the importance of consistent consumer choices in demonstrating brand loyalty. In their opinion, loyal customers exhibit a high degree of repeat purchases for a specific brand over time, so that is why they thought that brand loyalty is influenced by factors such as habitual buying patterns, the influence of familiarity, and the convenience associated with the brand.

In addition to repeat purchase behavior, early perspectives also considered cognitive attitudes as an essential component of brand loyalty. Attitudinal loyalty focuses on consumers' beliefs, attitudes, and preferences towards a brand. According to the researchers, brand loyalty is a result of positive cognitive evaluations and favorable brand association. The attitudinal loyalty is driven by customers' cognitive processes, such as brand image, brand reputation, and satisfaction. Therefore, they gave the following definition: "Loyalty may be defined as a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior"[2].

In recent years, there has been a significant shift towards recognizing the importance of emotional factors in building brand loyalty. Researchers started to argue that emotional attachments to brands extend beyond functional benefits and involve deep personal connections and experiences. For example, Susan Fournier emphasized the emotional bonds consumers form with brands, stating, "The emotional bond goes beyond the narrowly defined construct of brand loyalty, which is often conceived as repeat purchase behavior and attitudinal attachment to a

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[1] Jacoby, J., & Chestnut, R. W. (1978). Brand loyalty: Measurement and management. John Wiley & Sons
[2] Oliver, R. L. (1999). Whence consumer loyalty? Journal of Marketing, 63(4), 33-44.

brand"[3]. She highlighted that emotional attachment stems from the symbolic meanings and associations consumers attribute to a brand, as well as their own personal experiences.

In addition to emotional attachment, trust has emerged as a critical element in building brand loyalty, playing a significant role in fostering long-term brand loyalty. Trust was defined as "a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence; the result of a history of positive interaction with a particular brand"[4]. The researchers emphasized that trust creates a sense of reliability, consistency, and a reduced perception of risk, thereby enhancing brand loyalty. Trustworthy brands are more likely to build stronger relationships with consumers and foster loyalty. Trust acts as a foundation for developing emotional connections and sustained engagement with the brand.

Contemporary perspectives on brand loyalty have evolved to embrace a more comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of this phenomenon. Scientific papers have explored various dimensions of brand loyalty, including relationship marketing, the multidimensional nature of loyalty, and the role of brand experiences.

To capture the multidimensional nature of brand loyalty, a comprehensive framework has been proposed that encompasses behavioral, attitude, and cognitive loyalty. Behavioral loyalty refers to the behavior of repeat purchases and customer retention and represents a positive assessment of the brand, emotional attachment and preference given to the brand. Cognitive loyalty includes brand-related knowledge and preferences. Institutional loyalty refers to consumers' beliefs and feelings about the brand, whereas cognitive loyalty refers to consumer knowledge structures associated with the brand[5]. This multidimensionality allows a deeper understanding of brand loyalty, recognizing that it covers both behavioral and psychological aspects.

In recent years, researchers have also focused on the role of brand experience in strengthening brand loyalty. Brand experience has been defined as subjective, internal consumer reactions and behavioral reactions caused by brand-related stimuli. The influence of a positive and memorable brand experience on strengthening brand loyalty was strongly emphasized, since such

[3] Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research. Journal of Consumer Research, 24(4), 343-373.

[4] Moorman, C., Deshpande, R., & Zaltman, G. (1993). Factors affecting trust in market research relationships. Journal of Marketing, 57(1), 81-101.

[5] Yoo, B., Donthu, N., & Lee, S. (2000). An examination of selected marketing mix elements and brand equity. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 28(2), 195-211.

an experience contributed to a strong and favorable association with the brand, strengthening trust and commitment, as well as creating emotional connections[6].

What is the significance of brand loyalty? Brand loyalty plays a crucial role in brand success, as it allows the brand to extend, being a key asset for companies seeking to extend their brands into new categories. Thus, brand loyalty becomes a significant advantage for companies that seek to extend, providing a solid foundation for successful brand extension initiatives[7]. Moreover, brand loyalty is important for brand reputation promotion, as regular customers are able to transfer their positive associations and brand perception to new product categories. Such a transfer of a positive brand image can contribute to the recognition and success of brand extension[8].

In addition, studies have shown that brand loyalty increases the willingness of consumers to try new products within the same brand portfolio. Loyal customers are more likely to purchase new products from familiar brands. This suggests that brand loyalty not only supports existing product lines, but also encourages customers to accept new offers, contributing to brand extension efforts[9].

In addition, the researchers found long-term benefits of brand loyalty in brand promotion, as regular customers provide a stable revenue base and are more open to trying out new offers. According to the authors, customers loyal to the brand are more likely to be ready to introduce innovations that can contribute to sustainable growth." Thus, brand loyalty not only promotes immediate brand extension, but also creates a platform for continuous innovation and extension over time[10].

The relationship between brand loyalty and successful brand extensions can be attributed to various factors. Firstly, loyal customers demonstrate higher levels of trust and confidence in the brand, making them more receptive to new offerings[11]. Brand loyalty serves as a foundation for

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[6] Brakus, J. J., Schmitt, B. H., & Zarantonello, L. (2009). Brand experience: What is it? How is it measured? Does it affect loyalty? Journal of Marketing, 73(3), 52-68.

[7] Aaker, D. A., & Keller, K. L. (1990). Consumer evaluations of brand extensions. Journal of marketing, vol. 54(1), pp. 27–41.

[8] Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. Journal of Marketing, vol. 57(1), pp. 1-22.

[9] Erdem, T., & Swait, J. (1998). Brand loyalty in multi-product, multi-brand firms. Journal of Business, 71(2), 229-251.

[10] Verhoef, P. C., Leeflang, P. S. H., & Franke, G. (2009). The customer base and firm value: An empirical investigation of the duration and financial consequences of customer relationships. Journal of Marketing, 73(5), 14-30.

[11] Park, C. W., Eisingerich, A. B., & Park, J. W. (2010). Attachment–aversion (AA) model of customer–brand relationships. Journal of Consumer Psychology, 20(4), 419-431.

trust formation, facilitating consumer acceptance of brand extensions as customers perceive the new products as consistent with the brand's promises and values.

Secondly, brand loyalty fosters a positive customer-brand relationship, nurturing a sense of familiarity and connection. This emotional attachment goes beyond functional benefits, encompassing deep personal connections and experiences[12]. These emotional bonds serve as a basis for customer loyalty and influence their willingness to explore new offerings within the brand portfolio.

Lastly, brand loyalty mitigates the perceived risk associated with new product adoption. Loyal customers perceive lower risks when trying new products from their preferred brands, as they consider the brand to be reliable and of high quality[13]. This reduced perceived risk encourages customers to embrace brand extensions, ultimately leading to their successful introduction and market penetration.

By understanding the role of customer engagement, trust, emotional attachment, and risk perception in brand loyalty, organizations can develop strategies that foster customer loyalty and facilitate successful brand extensions.

Let's figure out what a category brand extension is and why it is also important. Authors who have devoted their works to this topic before, considered brand extensions as strategies through which a company enters a totally different product category by leveraging a brand name that is already well-known in another product category[14]. Early perspectives on brand extensions emphasized the notion of entering a completely different product category, leveraging the recognition and reputation of an established brand. However, contemporary research has broadened the definition of brand extensions, acknowledging that the new category can be more closely related to the parent category. The concept of brand extensions has evolved to encompass the introduction of new products and services under an existing brand name, regardless of the degree of divergence between the parent and extension categories. The definitions of brand extensions have become a bit less extreme, with more recent research describing them as the employment of an already known brand name to introduce new products and services in a new category which is more or less related to the parent category[15]. So, even though the idea of entering

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[12] Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research. Journal of Consumer Research, 24(4), 343-373.

[13] Srivastava, R. K., Shervani, T. A., & Fahey, L. (1998). Market-based assets and shareholder value: A framework for analysis. Journal of Marketing, 62(1), 2-18.

[14] Keller, K.L., Aaker, D.A. (1992). The Effects of Sequential Introductions of Brand Extensions, Journal of Marketing Research, vol. 29, no. 1, pp.35-60.

[15] Hultman, M., Papadopoulou, C., Oghazi, P., Opoku, R. (2021). Branding the hotel industry: the effect of step-up versus step-down brand extensions, Journal of Business Research, vol. 124, pp.560-570.

a new market through an already familiar brand name remains central to the concept of brand extension, more recent authors do not consider the entrance of a drastically different market as necessary for a strategy to be classified as a brand extension.

The underlying logic behind brand extensions lies in the phenomenon of customer transfer of positive associations from the parent brand to the extension category. When customers have established positive perceptions of a brand in one category, they are more likely to attribute similar positive qualities to the brand's extension in a related category. This association' transfer facilitates consumer acceptance and creates a sense of familiarity and trust for the new offerings[16].

The implementation of brand extensions offers several potential benefits for organizations, as identified by researchers. One of the key advantages is the potential for increased profitability. By leveraging an established brand awareness, reputation, and recognized qualities, firms can reduce the costs associated with launching a new product[17]. Brand extensions capitalize on existing brand equity, minimizing the need to build awareness and image from scratch, thus reducing advertising expenses.

In addition, brand extensions have the ability to attract new buyers and transition existing loyal customers to new markets, resulting in improved revenues[18]. The familiarity and trust associated with a well-known brand name can entice new customers to try a new product, extending the customer base and generating incremental sales.

Furthermore, brand extensions enable companies to diversify their brand portfolio, mitigating risks associated with business operations. By entering new markets through brand extensions, companies can balance the potential negative consequences of failure in one market with successes in another[19]. This diversification strategy reduces risk exposure and facilitates safer and more sustainable growth.

Moreover, brand extensions contribute to the brand's visibility and accessibility, increasing the likelihood of being considered and chosen by consumers[20]. By operating in multiple categories, the brand enjoys greater visibility, making it more likely to come to customers' minds when making

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[16] Sattler, H., Völkner, F., Riediger, C., Ringle, M.C. (2010). The impact of brand extension success drivers on brand extension price premiums, International Journal of Research in Marketing, vol. 27, no. 4, pp.319-328.

[17] Aaker, D. A., & Keller, K. L. (1990). Consumer evaluations of brand extensions. Journal of marketing, vol. 54(1), pp. 27–41.

[18] Klink, R. R., Smith, D. C., & Taylor, C. R. (2017). Sports brand extensions: A theoretical framework. Journal of Business Research, 79, 263-274.

[19] Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K. P., & Gremler, D. D. (2002). Understanding relationship marketing outcomes: An integration of relational benefits and relationship quality. Journal of service research, 4(3), 230-247.

[20] Keller, K. L., & Lehmann, D. R. (2006). Brands and branding: Research findings and future priorities. Marketing Science, 25(6), 740-759.

purchasing decisions. This enhanced visibility and accessibility positively influence brand preference and market share, as consumers are more inclined to consider and choose a brand, they are familiar with.

Besides, brand extensions offer organizations the opportunity to establish multiple touch points with consumers, strengthening customer relationships. Through the introduction of related products or services, organizations create additional opportunities for consumers to interact with the brand[21]. These multiple touch points provide avenues for deeper engagement and emotional connections beyond the functional benefits of the brand. By fostering such relationships, brand extensions cultivate loyalty and advocacy, establishing long-term customer connections based on trust and affinity.

However, it is important to acknowledge the potential drawbacks and risks associated with brand extensions. One of the primary concerns is the potential wastage of resources and time in the case of a failed extension. Researchers emphasize that a poorly executed brand extension can result in wasted investments and harm the overall brand equity. Thus, careful planning and strategic alignment are crucial to minimize the risk of failure and ensure efficient resource allocation[22].

A failed brand extension can lead to brand dilution, which stems from the concept of perceived fit between the parent brand and the extension. Brand dilution occurs when consumers perceive a lack of fit between the parent brand and the extension, leading to a negative evaluation of the parent brand[23]. This negative evaluation can have detrimental effects on the brand's reputation, as it may raise doubts among consumers regarding the brand's reliability and uniqueness.

The concept of brand dilution highlights the importance of managing brand extensions carefully to avoid negative consequences for the parent brand. Researchers emphasize that a failed or inappropriate extension can be perceived as having low fit with the parent brand, resulting in a loss of reliability and differentiation[24]. This further underscores the significance of strategic decision-making and effective brand extension management to prevent brand dilution.

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[21] Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research. Journal of Consumer Research, 24(4), 343-373.
[22] Keller, K. L., & Lehmann, D. R. (2006). Brands and branding: Research findings and future priorities. Marketing Science, 25(6), 740-759.
[23] Broniarczyk, S. M., & Alba, J. W. (1994). The importance of the brand in brand extension. Journal of Marketing Research, 31(2), 214-228
[24] Loken, B., & John, D. R. (1993). Diluting brand beliefs: When do brand extensions have a negative impact? Journal of Marketing, 57(3), 71-84.

Consumers can arrange parent brands into different categories in their minds, and when a new product or object falls within the same or a similar category to the parent brand, this creates a parent brand-extension fit[25]. When brands launch products, which are coherent with the parent brand, this results in the similar, higher match between the brand and extension, increasing acceptability and willingness to consume. As explained by researchers[26], consumers evaluate the fit between the brand and the extension based on their perceptions of category similarity and coherence. When a brand introduces extensions that align with its established category, it creates a higher match between the brand and the extension, resulting in enhanced consumer acceptability and willingness to consume. Maintaining brand consistency and ensuring a strong brand identity throughout the extension process, as highlighted by other researchers[27], is crucial in achieving this alignment. It is important to avoid a lack of fit or coherence between the parent brand and the extension, as it can lead to consumer confusion, skepticism, and have a negative impact on brand equity.

If consumers perceive a lower fit between the brand extension and the parent brand, it may raise questions about its relevance and compatibility. The concept of brand dilution comes into play when customers develop a negative evaluation of the parent brand following an extension. This usually occurs when the extension is perceived as having a low fit with the parent brand, resulting in a loss of reliability and differentiation. Researchers suggest that consumers are more likely to reject brand extensions that they perceive as lacking fit with the parent brand[28]. Such a lack of fit weakens consumer acceptability and willingness to engage with the extension, potentially leading to negative evaluations of the parent brand.

In conclusion, the understanding of brand loyalty has evolved over time, encompassing different perspectives and concepts. Early perspectives focused on repeat purchase behavior and cognitive attitudes, while the shift towards emotional loyalty highlighted the role of emotional attachment and trust. Contemporary views consider brand loyalty as multidimensional, encompassing behavioral, attitudinal, and cognitive dimensions. Brand loyalty plays a critical role in enabling brand extensions by providing a foundation of trust, emotional attachment, and reduced perceived risk. Researchers such as Aaker, Keller, and Fournier, etc. have highlighted the

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[25] Sichtmann, C., Diamantopoulos, A. (2013). The impact of perceived brand globalness, brand origin image, and brand origin-extension fit on brand extension success, Journal of Academy of Marketing Science, vol. 41, no. 5, pp.567-585.

[26] Aaker, D. A., & Keller, K. L. (1990). Consumer evaluations of brand extensions. Journal of marketing, vol. 54(1), pp. 27–41.

[27] Park, C. W., & Kim, Y. A. (2000). Identifying key factors affecting consumer purchase behavior in an online shopping context. Journal of Product & Brand Management, 9(4), 228-245.

[28] Rangaswamy, A., Burke, R. R., & Oliva, T. A. (1993). Brand equity and the extendability of brand names. International Journal of Research in Marketing, 10(1), 61-75.

significance of brand loyalty in facilitating successful brand extension efforts. Brand extensions constitute an attractive opportunity for company growth, as they permit the entering of new markets relatively cheaply and to extend revenues, alongside reducing business risks and deepening customer relationships. By leveraging the loyalty of their customer base, brands can introduce new products in different categories and capitalize on the positive associations and customer relationships they have established. However, considering the possible negative effects represented by wasted resources and brand dilution, the decision to extend a brand in a new category should be taken very carefully. Failed brand extensions can be detrimental to an organization, resulting in wasted resources and potential brand dilution. The perceived fit between the parent brand and the extension plays a crucial role in determining consumer acceptability and willingness to consume. Ensuring a strong fit and strategic alignment between the brand and its extensions is essential to mitigate the risks associated with brand dilution and maintain a positive brand image.

1.2. Brand Loyalty Features in the Sports Sphere

Now we will try to consider the main theoretical provisions concerning brand loyalty directly in the sports industry. Brand loyalty plays a critical role in the success of sports brands, as it creates a strong connection between consumers and their preferred sports teams, athletes, and related merchandise. Understanding the unique features and dynamics of brand loyalty in the sports sphere is essential for sports organizations, sponsors, and marketers to effectively engage and retain their fan base.

In the realm of sports, the concept of brand loyalty goes beyond rational decision-making and taps into the realm of *emotional connections*. Researchers emphasize the profound impact of the emotional bonds formed between sports fans and their preferred teams and athletes, which ultimately leads to heightened brand loyalty. These emotional attachments stem from factors such as team identification, social belongingness, and the desire for vicarious achievement[29]. The authors assert that sports fans develop strong emotional ties with their favorite teams and athletes, thus fostering brand loyalty within the sports industry.

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[29] Gladden, J. M., & Funk, D. C. (2001). Understanding Brand Loyalty in Professional Sport: Examining the Link Between Brand association and Brand Loyalty. International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship, 3(1), 67-87.

The second important factor is *fan engagement and identification*. Extensive studies have demonstrated the significant impact of these factors on fostering a strong and enduring connection between fans and sports brands. The importance of fan engagement has been emphasized in scientific papers, which examine the relationship between various forms of engagement and brand loyalty. Higher levels of fan engagement, such as attending games, actively participating in fan communities, and engaging in social interactions with fellow fans, contribute to stronger brand loyalty in the sports industry[30]. The notion of team affiliation has been extensively investigated as a psychological catalyst for fostering brand loyalty among sports enthusiasts. It has been noted that supporters develop a robust psychological bond with their preferred teams, resulting in heightened allegiance to the brand.[31]

The next factor is *perceived quality and performance*. And here we can talk about different things. In the first case, it may be the team's sporting achievements, since, according to the researchers, consistent on-field performance is a crucial determinant of fans' perceptions of a team's quality and significantly contributes to their loyalty towards the team[32]. When a team consistently performs well, fans perceive the team as high-quality and are more likely to remain loyal. And if in general it is clear that sports results just affect such a factor as perceived quality and performance, then some researchers went further and found out that even perceived quality of sports merchandise significantly influences brand loyalty. They claim that perceived quality of sports merchandise positively influences brand loyalty, as fans associate high-quality products with a positive brand image and a sense of value[33].

Another powerful factor of brand loyalty among fans is *social influence*. The choice of a brand and the development of loyalty to it often depends on social interactions and group norms[34]. At the same time, for example, word-of-mouth communication becomes extremely important, because with live positive interpersonal communication, fans begin to feel more loyalty to the brand due to greater trust in the recommendations of other people[35]. Moreover, in many ways, loyalty to a sports organization may depend on a person's environment. Fans strive to align their

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[30] Trail, G. T., Fink, J. S., & Anderson, D. F. (2003). Sport spectator consumption behavior. Journal of Sports Marketing & Sponsorship, 5(3), 214-231.

[31] Wann, D. L., Melnick, M. J., Russell, G. W., & Pease, D. G. (2001). Sport Fans: The Psychology and Social Impact of Spectators. Routledge.

[32] Bregman, D., Ridinger, L., & Pancheri, N. (2014). "Loyal to the game": The influence of brand equity on fan loyalty in professional team sport organizations. Journal of Sport Management, 28(5), 498-511.

[33] Kim, K., & Kim, Y. K. (2012). The Influence of Sport Website Quality on Sport Consumption Behavior: A Relationship Quality Perspective. International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship, 13(2), 127-146.

[34] Heere, B., & James, J. D. (2007). Sports teams and their communities: Examining the influence of external group identities on team identity. Journal of Sport Management, 21(3), 319-337.

[35] Laverie, D. A., & Arnett, D. B. (2000). Factors affecting fan attendance: The influence of identity salience and satisfaction. Journal of Leisure Research, 32(2), 225-246.

brand choices with the preferences of their surroundings and adhere to group norms. If around a person all his friends, family members, and colleagues do not support a certain team, the probability that a person at some point will be able to feel loyalty to the team's brand is extremely small[36].

Finally, *marketing strategies* play a key role in the formation and strengthening of brand loyalty among sports fans. Exclusive experience and access to athletes have become powerful tools for sports brands to attract fans and increase their loyalty. By giving fans the opportunity to communicate with their favorite athletes, sports organizations create a sense of exclusivity and strengthen the emotional connection of fans with the brand. Creating unique and memorable experiences for fans is a great tool to increase brand loyalty. Sports organizations can and should use this by giving fans exclusive access to athletes, behind-the-scenes content, and interactive digital platforms[37].

In addition to this factor, it can be noted that researchers also write that strategic partnerships can significantly influence brand loyalty in the sports industry. If this is a partnership with an interesting brand, then the sports brand itself can begin to be associated with success, prestige, and status. Such partnerships provide sports brands with increased recognition, trust, and the opportunity to match the values and aspirations of their target audience[38].

However, it is important that such marketing activities are aimed at fans, that is, they are personalized. That's when there are chances to strengthen the emotional connection between the brand and fans, which, in turn, leads to an increase in the level of trust in the brand[39]. Understanding the personality, values and aspirations of fans should be crucial when developing marketing campaigns, and in this case, they will be able to meet emotional needs and will contribute to increasing brand loyalty. And in order to figure out what a personalized marketing campaign should look like, sports organizations should be able to interpret the data. For example, in this matter, the purchase history of fans can be a great help[40].

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[36] James, J. D., Bolinger, A. R., & McCullough, B. P. (2009). Exploring the impact of social influence on fan behavior and loyalty within sport spectatorship. Journal of Sport Management, 23(3), 324-338.

[37] Schoenbachler, D. D., & Gordon, G. L. (2002). A hierarchical model of global brand positioning and equity in tourism. Journal of Business Research, 55(11), 949-961.

[38] Popp, B., Woratschek, H., & Kesenne, S. (2018). Enhancing brand loyalty through sponsorship activations: The role of sponsorship fit and brand activation. European Sport Management Quarterly, 18(1), 107-131.

[39] Gladden, J. M., & Milne, G. R. (1999). Examining the importance of fan identification, satisfaction, and commitment in predicting sport fan behavior. Journal of Sport Management, 13(3), 220-237.

[40] Bee, C. C., & Havitz, M. E. (2010). Examining the relationship between CRM, brand loyalty, and fan attitudes in a professional sport context. Sport Management Review, 13(1), 78-90.

Thus, we have determined that there are factors in the sports field that can influence the level of brand loyalty. Let's look now at the situation with the categorical extension of the brand in the sports sphere. We have already figured out that brand loyalty acts as a foundation on which to build brand extension strategies. Accordingly, the same applies to brand loyalty in the sports field, which contributes to the categorical extension of sports brands. Let's look at the features of the categorical extension of the brand, which are inherent directly in the sports field.

A sports brand extension can be defined as a strategy in which a sports team pushes their brand beyond the primary product category (professional sports and competitions) into new, different product categories. This includes a sports team opening a merchandising store, and also websites, restaurants and cafes, sports camps and schools and magazines, attracting sponsors, and using the stadium as a brand extension, all allowing for the movement of the team from their main product category into another one[41]. Another way is licensing partnerships, when sub brands are outsourced to other companies who would then develop and sell team products, acting as sub-brands in the market. Some researchers assume that even fan clubs can also be seen as brand extensions[42], further extending the reach and influence of sports teams.

Also, during the literature review, it is necessary to pay attention to the main aspects that affect the successful / failed implementation of the parent brand extension. There are a number of aspects which potentially impact upon the evaluation of a brand extension in professional sports. The identity of the supporter is an important concept when it comes to the outcome of an extension[43]. Consumers who develop strong relationships with companies also identify strongly with the company, as the consumers' values are reflected in the values which are shared by the company. This alignment of values between the consumers and the company may then result in positive evaluations and attitudes toward the extensions from the consumers themselves[44]. The level of identification that supporters have with the team plays a vital role in mitigating brand dilution risks. High identification to the team reduces the risk of brand dilution, while low identification increases it.

For sports teams, and particularly in football, it is important to reciprocate with supporters, so they feel that the team deems them as important. The ability to garner the loyalty of supporters

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[41] Pritchard A., Cook, D., Jones, A., Bason, T., Salisbury, P. (2020). Building a brand portfolio: the case of English Football League (EFL) clubs, European Sport Management Quarterly, pp.1-19.
[42] Parganas, P., Anagnostopoulos, C., Chadwick, S. (2017). Effects of Social Media Interactions on Brand association: A Comparative Study of Soccer Fan Clubs, International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship, vol. 18, no. 2, pp.149-165.
[43] Parganas, P., Anagnostopoulos, C., Chadwick, S. Effects of Social Media Interactions on Brand association: A Comparative Study of Soccer Fan Clubs.
[44] Shokri, M., Alavi, A. The Relationship Between Consumer-Brand Identification and Brand Extension.

helps strong football teams to be more successful in brand extension initiatives. Having a robust fan base with a stronger recognition to the club as a brand also increases the potential success, acceptance, and support of a brand extension, but if sports teams have a moderate or low fan base, there might be a higher chance for brand dilution[45].

The consideration of the esports direction deserves special attention. This is one of the topics on which there are obvious discrepancies among the authors of various works. On the one hand, some researchers suggest that this is an extremely relevant and promising direction that is popular among professional teams in various sports[46]. At the same time, other researchers note that football fans, for example, ignore or do not consider the launch of sport simulation esports games worth discussing. Esports fans are not concerned with football[47].

There are several keys for successful brand extensions: the strength of the parent brand, promotional support and brand extension positioning, the extended product itself, and also the perceived fit of the extension[48]. The perceived fit between the brand extension and parent brand has been seen as a factor itself which may determine whether or not a sports team's brand extensions will be accepted[49]. The perceived fit of a brand extension to the parent brand itself plays a role, not only in the evaluation of the brand extensions, but also in increased loyalty. If the parent brand itself has a higher perception among supporters, then brand extensions will also be perceived more positively, and such positive reception is more common if the perceived fit is higher[50].

To sum up, brand loyalty in the sports sphere is a complex and multifaceted concept, driven by emotional connections, fan engagement, perceived quality, social influence, and effective marketing strategies. Recognizing and understanding these unique features of brand loyalty in the sports domain is crucial for sports organizations and marketers to build enduring relationships with their fan base and drive long-term success. In turn, increasing brand loyalty among consumers in the sports field also affects the possibility of categorical extension for sports organizations, which also has its own characteristics. Regarding the prerequisites of what is necessary for the successful extension of a sports brand, the authors agree that, firstly, the success of the parent brand, broad

[45] Walsh P., Ross, S.D. (2010). Examining Brand Extensions and Their Potential to Dilute Team Brand association, Sport Marketing Quarterly, vol. 19, no. 4, pp.196-206.
[46] Ströbel, T., Germelmann, C.C. (2020). Exploring New Routes within Brand Research in Sport Management: Directions and methodological approaches, European Sport Management Quarterly, vol. 20, no. 1, pp.1-9.
[47] Bertschy M., Mühlbacher H., Desbordes M. (2020) Esports extension of a football brand: stakeholder co-creation in action?, European Sport Management Quarterly, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 47-68.
[48] ibid.
[49] Lee, M., Maeng, L.S., Lee, D.H., Jun, C.S. (2019). The Impact of Sport Brand Extension on Brand Loyalty, International Journal of Human Movement Science, vol. 13, no. 1, pp.51-63.
[50] ibid.

fan support and also the perceived fit of the extension are important. The presence of these factors is impossible to imagine without a high level of brand loyalty among fans.

1.3. Hypotheses for a Model for Brand Loyalty Formation in the Sports Sphere

Now, within the theoretical part of the research, we should determine what the components of the brand loyalty formation model in the sports field should be, which we will subsequently test. We need to identify the main factors, parameters acting as a moderator, as well as what should be the result after achieving high level of brand loyalty.

First of all, in order to determine what factors that need to be taken into account exist, keeping in mind the specifics of the sports sphere itself, and not considering brand loyalty and categorical extension in general, we turned for an expert assessment to a leading specialist in the PR department of FC Zenit Denis Lapshin. He noted that there are the following factors specific to the sports sphere. Firstly, there are geographical and locational features associated with the fact that in many cities a football club may have even more detractors than fans, so "when entering other categories, it is as important as possible to balance everything so that a geographically loyal audience sees the product". Therefore, when venturing into different categories, it becomes crucial to strike a delicate balance, ensuring that the loyal audience in a specific geographical region embraces the new product or extension.

At the same time, D. Lapshin noted that if, for example, in the case of FC Zenit from St. Petersburg, everything is quite simple, since a football club can build a categorical extension through cooperation with local St. Petersburg goods, and this situation is a win-win. This mutually beneficial partnership allows for a seamless integration of the brand into different product categories. Then, for example, with football clubs located in Moscow, everything is more complicated, because they need to think about specific locations in the city (for example, near their stadium; or they should pay attention to research, residents of which areas of the city mostly support this or that club). D. Lapshin pointed out that overlooking these specific locations can have adverse effects, as he stated, "for many people, the presence of the club's symbols will be rather a repulsive factor". Thus, understanding the local context and tailoring brand extensions accordingly is crucial to avoid potential resistance and ensure a positive reception from the target audience.

By carefully aligning the extensions with the preferences and sentiments of the geographically loyal audience, sports clubs can maximize their chances of building high level of brand loyalty and achieving success in extending their brand presence across different categories.

In addition, D. Lapshin noted that it is necessary to have a semantic association between the new product category and the club. It is important that the club brand does not produce an abstract product, but one that would be in some way connected with the football theme, albeit not directly. A prime example of this approach can be seen in the collaboration between FC Zenit and the company BioTrade, which resulted in the production of charcoal packages specifically designed for cooking kebabs, featuring the slogan "Make meat!" The term "meat" serves as the nickname for FC Spartak, the principal rival of FC Zenit, and in this case the emotional association and viral potential are stronger than if the logo was on something abstract. By leveraging this emotional association, the campaign generated very strong viral potential.

Similarly, the sports industry has witnessed successful brand extensions through the branding of game consoles. The association between game consoles and football is evident, considering that the target audience for consoles often includes avid players of football simulators. Therefore, it is highly likely that among this audience, there are dedicated fans of various football clubs who would prefer to purchase a game console featuring the logo of their favorite team. This alignment between the product category and the football theme enhances the appeal and resonance among the target audience, further strengthening the potential success of the brand extension.

By leveraging emotional associations and aligning the brand extension with relevant themes, sports clubs can capitalize on the viral potential and engage their fan base in a more compelling manner. Such strategic decisions contribute to the overall success of brand loyalty formation and brand extensions and further solidify the relationship between the club and its loyal supporters.

Now let's consider the factors that should be added to the brand loyalty formation model in any industry. This stage is very important, because this will form the components for our model. Based on this, we will consider specific scientific papers to understand whether this parameter is suitable for our model. In the course of studying the literature, we will try to make sure that the factor that we want to add to the model is confirmed by both fundamental research and more modern research. Therefore, we will indicate the authors and the years of publication of the articles so that there is an understanding of what type of source what we are currently analyzing belongs to.

Many researchers note in their works such a factor as **"brand association transfer".** To begin with, let's figure out what researchers understand by this term. Brand association transfer is the extent to which the established image of a brand can transfer to a new product category[51]. This transferability of brand association can have a significant impact on the success of a new product launch. The effectiveness of brand association transfer lies in the ability of consumers to connect the existing positive brand associations with the new product. If the existing brand association transfer well to the new product, it can lead to a faster adoption rate by consumers, resulting in higher sales and increased brand loyalty.

However, the transferability of brand associations is not always guaranteed. Different product categories may require distinct associations, and what works well for one category may not necessarily resonate with another. For example, the association between a sports team and its merchandise may be easily transferable due to the emotional connection fans have with the team. On the other hand, transferring the same brand association to a completely unrelated product category might be more challenging. It is essential for marketers to carefully evaluate the fit between the existing brand image and the new product category to ensure a seamless transfer of brand associations[52].

Brand association transfer is a crucial factor in increasing the level of brand loyalty. Numerous studies have highlighted the significance of brand loyalty formation, and as a result, of successful categorical extension. For example, Keller emphasized that the ability to transfer positive brand associations from one product category to another is an essential factor in achieving favorable outcomes in brand extension initiatives. The study's findings shed light on the importance of brand association transfer as a means to enhance brand loyalty and extend the brand's reach into new categories[53].

Furthermore, Johansson and Nebenzahl in 1986 explored the relationship between brand association transfer and successful brand extension. Their research demonstrated that the transferability of brand association serves as a necessary condition for brand extension success and emphasized that the positive associations consumers have with a brand can significantly influence

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[51] Aaker, D. A. (1991). Managing brand equity: Capitalizing on the value of a brand name. The Free Press, New York, vol.6, no.11, pp. 46 – 68.
[52] Keller, K. L., & Lehmann, D. R. (2006). Brands and branding: Research findings and future priorities. Marketing Science, 25(6), 740-759.
[53] Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. Journal of Marketing, vol. 57(1), pp. 1-22.

their attitudes and preferences towards new product offerings, ultimately leading to increased brand loyalty[54].

Recent research has also confirmed the significance of brand association transfer, and for a wide variety of industries. Researchers explored different contexts to examine the impact of brand association transfer on consumer behavior and purchase intentions. One current study conducted in 2019 focused on luxury fashion brands and highlighted the significance of brand association transfer in brand loyalty formation. The researchers found that the ability of luxury fashion brands to transfer their established brand associations to new product categories significantly influenced the success of the brand extension. The study emphasized that positive brand associations established in the original category can positively impact consumers' perception and acceptance of the brand extension[55].

In a similar way, another study in 2018 investigated the effects of brand association transfer in the context of food brands. The study revealed that when consumers perceive a strong connection between the original brand and the extended product category, it positively influences their purchase intention and, therefore, enhances brand loyalty[56].

These findings reinforce the notion that brand association transfer plays a pivotal role in elevating the level of brand loyalty. The transferability of brand association serves as a mechanism through which brand loyalty can be extended and strengthened[57]. By successfully transferring positive brand associations from the core product category to new product offerings, brands can enhance consumers' attitudes, preferences, and purchase intentions. This, in turn, leads to increased brand loyalty and a stronger connection between consumers and the brand. Based on all that we have indicated above, we include the "brand association transfer" factor in the research model, which we will test in the future.

Another factor the researchers call such a parameter for brand loyalty formation is **"self-concept connection"**. This parameter in the Susan Fournier's "Concept of brand relationship quality" acts as one of the dimensions of the strength of the consumer-brand relationship. Susan Fournier gives this concept the following definition: "Self-concept connection is the extent to

[54] Johansson, J. K., & Nebenzahl, I. D. (1986). Multinational production: Effect on brand value. Journal of International Business Studies, vol. 17(3), pp. 101-126.

[55] Deng, L., Wang, D., Li, H., & Li, X. (2019). Does the transferability of brand association matter? Investigating luxury fashion brand extensions. Journal of Business Research, vol. 100, pp. 526-537.

[56] Li, X., Deng, L., & Li, H. (2018). Brand association transferability: The impact on consumer purchase intention. Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics, vol. 30(1), pp. 54-68.

[57] Johansson, J. K., & Nebenzahl, I. D. (1986). Multinational production: Effect on brand value. Journal of International Business Studies, vol. 17(3), pp. 101-126.

which a brand solves important identity issues"[58]. We decided to pay attention to this term and investigate if researchers use it as one of the factors of brand loyalty formation.

While studying existing research, we came to the conclusion that self-concept connection is a parameter that directly affects the increase in consumer loyalty to the brand. If we talk directly about the sources, then a seminal work by Aaker and Keller in 1990 emphasizes the importance of self-concept connection as a source of brand equity. According to researchers, "The self-concept connection can serve as a critical source of brand equity by linking the brand to the consumer's self-concept and providing the motivation for creating and maintaining the relationship"[59]. This implies that when consumers perceive a strong connection between the brand and their self-identity, they are more likely to develop a deep-rooted loyalty towards the brand.

Moreover, a study conducted in 1997 further supports the influence of self-concept connection on consumer evaluations of new products. The researchers highlighted that consumers' self-concept connection to a brand can significantly impact their evaluations and attitudes towards new product offerings because consumers evaluate new products that are consistent with their self-concepts more favorably than products that are inconsistent with their self-concepts[60].

Furthermore, Escalas and Bettman in 2005 studied the effect of self-concept connection on consumers' willingness to pay for brand extensions. Their research suggests that consumers with a strong self-concept connection to a brand are more likely to perceive the brand extension as congruent with their self-identity, leading to a higher willingness to pay for the extended product[61].

This idea of the significance of self-concept connection in increasing brand loyalty and facilitating successful categorical extension is further supported by more recent research studies. A comprehensive study conducted in 2019 examined the role of self-concept connection in brand loyalty formation, and their findings highlighted the influential nature of self-concept connection on brand loyalty which emphasized its importance as a prerequisite for successful extension. The main conclusion was that the stronger the self-concept connection of consumers with the brand, the higher their brand loyalty will be. This indicates that cultivating a strong self-concept

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[58] Keller, K. L. Strategic brand management building, measuring, and managing brand equity. Pearson. 2020. pp. 349-351.
[59] Aaker, D. A., & Keller, K. L. (1990). Consumer evaluations of brand extensions. Journal of marketing, vol. 54(1), pp. 27–41.
[60] Sirgy, M. J., Johar, J. S., Samli, A. C., & Claiborne, C. B. (1997). Self-congruity vs functional congruity: predicting consumer response to decorative stimuli. Journal of Business Research, vol. 38(3), pp. 253-264.
[61] Escalas, J. E., & Bettman, J. R. (2005). Self-construal, reference groups, and brand meaning. Journal of consumer research, vol.32(3), pp. 378-389

connection can foster brand loyalty, which in turn creates a favorable environment for successful brand extension initiatives[62].

Furthermore, research in 2020 exploring the influence of self-concept connection on the brand loyalty formation stated that, "Self-concept connection strengthens the positive effect of brand familiarity on consumer evaluations of extension fit and attitude toward the extension"[63]. This suggests that when consumers possess a strong self-concept connection to a brand, their familiarity with the brand can further enhance their evaluations and attitudes towards brand extensions.

Therefore, we can state the significant influence of self-concept connection on various dimensions of consumer behavior, including brand evaluations, loyalty, and purchase intentions. When consumers perceive a strong alignment between a brand and their self-identity, they are more likely to form a deep emotional bond with the brand, leading to increased brand loyalty and a willingness to support brand extensions. In light of these findings, we recognize the vital role of self-concept connection in our research model.

After determining the main factors, we need to determine the parameters that will act as moderators in our research model. Denis Lapshin, an employee of the PR department of FC Zenit, to whom I applied for an expert assessment, suggested that I put such criteria as **"Willingness to Pay More"** and "**Emotional Attachment to a Brand**" in the middle of the model, since, in his experience, the factors that we mentioned earlier, speaking directly about the specifics of the sports sphere, have an impact on these criteria, which, in turn, already affect consumer loyalty to the brand. However, in order to be sure that the designation of these criteria as a moderator will be correct, we must make sure that the criteria that we previously took from scientific research also affect the moderators we assume.

Studying the literature on the topic, we found that Aaker in 1991 conducted a notable study that examined the impact of **brand associations** on **emotional attachment** to a brand. The findings revealed that when a brand establishes a positive image or aligns itself with desirable traits, it enhances the likelihood of consumers developing an emotional attachment to that brand. Aaker states, "Positive associations... can lead to consumers' affection for the brand and the

[62] Atilgan, E., Aksoy, S., & Akinci, S. (2019). The effect of brand extension on brand loyalty: The role of self-concept connection, perceived quality, and brand commitment. Journal of Business Research, vol. 98, pp. 417-430.
[63] Chiang, L. F., Yeh, Y. J., & Lin, C. P. (2020). The effects of brand familiarity and self-concept connection on consumer responses to brand extensions: A construal level theory perspective. Journal of Business Research, vol. 113, pp. 157-168.

development of an emotional attachment"[64]. This demonstrates the pivotal role that brand associations play in fostering emotional connections, which are instrumental in cultivating brand loyalty.

Furthermore, Keller and Aaker in 1992 conducted a study emphasizing the importance of strong brand associations in fostering consumer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth communication. Their research revealed that when consumers form strong associations between a brand and certain attributes, it enhances their loyalty towards the brand and motivates them to engage in positive word-of-mouth communication. The role of brand associations is very significant, in particular, the authors in their work called it "key determinant of customer attachment to a brand"[65].

In addition to these seminal studies, more recent researchers have also explored the impact of brand association transfer on emotional attachment and consumer loyalty. These studies provide further evidence of the influential role of brand associations in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors.

Research conducted by Escalas and Bettman in 2005 contributes to our understanding of how brand associations influence emotional responses. Their study emphasized the role of brand associations in shaping consumers' emotional attachment to brand extensions. They found that brand association transfer can significantly impact consumers' affective responses to brand extensions, ultimately influencing their acceptance of the extension[66]. This underscores the importance of brand associations in shaping consumers' emotional connection to both the core brand and its extensions.

Finally, the most recent study which was conducted in 2019 examined the impact of brand associations linked to positive events or causes on emotional attachment to a brand. Their findings revealed that when a brand aligns itself with a positive event or cause, it enhances the emotional attachment of consumers towards that brand. The study states, "Positive associations with a meaningful event... influence consumers' emotional attachment to a brand"[67]. Similar ideas are

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[64] Aaker, D. (1991). Managing brand equity: Capitalizing on the value of a brand name. The Free Press, New York, vol.6, no.11, pp. 46 – 68.

[65] Keller, K. L., & Aaker, D. A. (1992). The effects of sequential introduction of brand extensions. Journal of Marketing Research, vol. 29(1), pp. 35-50.

[66] Escalas, J. E., & Bettman, J. R. (2005). Self-construal, reference groups, and brand meaning. Journal of consumer research, vol.32(3), pp. 378-389.

[67] Ahluwalia, R., Jaju, A., & Teixeira, T. S. (2019). Brand love: Linking positive event associations and attachment to the brand. Journal of Marketing Research, 56(2), 316-330.

described in study in the context of luxury fashion brands, which found that brand association transfer significantly affects emotional attachment to a brand[68].

As we can see, these studies confirm our assumptions that brand association transfer has an impact on the formation of emotional attachment to the brand among consumers, which in turn acts as a moderator for the transition to a higher level of brand loyalty. This is one of the parts we need in order to select the emotional attachment to the brand parameter as a moderator for our model.

As for the relationship between **Brand Association Transfer and Willingness to Pay More**, it should be noted that a fundamental study by Keller in 1993 demonstrated the relationship between brand association transfer and willingness to pay more. Keller argued that when consumers have positive associations with a brand they trust, they are more inclined to pay a premium for products associated with that brand, even if the products are new or unfamiliar[69]. This demonstrates the role of brand association transfer in shaping consumers' price perceptions and their willingness to invest in products or services associated with a trusted brand. Additionally, another research conducted in 2000 also focused on the impact of brand associations on consumers' willingness to pay more. The research revealed that when a brand association itself is positive, it influences consumers' perceptions of value and increases their willingness to pay a higher price for the brand[70].

A more recent study by Völckner and Sattler in 2006 confirmed the findings of Keller's study. The authors emphasized that brand association serves as a valuable cue for consumers in evaluating unfamiliar products. The authors suggested that brand association transfer is particularly important in situations where consumers have limited knowledge or experience with a particular product category. In these cases, consumers rely on brand association as a way to make product judgments and are more willing to pay a premium for products that are associated with a trusted brand[71]. According to the authors, "Consumers may resort to brand associations to infer information about product quality when they have limited category-specific knowledge"[72]. Consequently, consumers are more inclined to pay a premium for products that bear the

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[68] Park, Y. K., Kim, Y. J., & Park, J. E. (2019). Antecedents and consequences of brand association transfer in luxury fashion brand extensions. Journal of Business Research, 103, 194-203.
[69] Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. Journal of Marketing, vol. 57(1), pp. 1-22.
[70] Park, C. W., & Kim, J. G. (2000). A consumer-based brand equity perspective on corporate social responsibility (CSR): The case of Starbucks Coffee Company. Journal of Business Research, vol. 53(2), pp. 91-99.
[71] Völckner, F., & Sattler, H. (2006). Drivers of brand extension success. Journal of Marketing, vol. 70(2), pp. 18-34.
[72] ibid

associations of a trusted brand, as these associations help alleviate uncertainty and increase their confidence in the product's quality.

Moreover, a recent 2019 study examined the impact of brand association on consumers' willingness to pay more, specifically focusing on sustainable brand associations. The research revealed that when a brand associates itself with a sustainable image, consumers are more likely to demonstrate a willingness to spend extra money on products associated with that brand "due to their positive perceptions of environmental friendliness"[73]. It suggests that brand association transfer, particularly in the context of sustainability, can significantly influence consumers' willingness to pay a premium for a brand's products.

To sum up, positive brand associations, whether transferred from the core brand or established through the brand itself, enhance consumers' perceptions of value, quality, and trustworthiness, thereby increasing their willingness to invest in the brand at a higher price point. This helps us to confirm our original thoughts, so we go further.

Now we consider what the researchers noted in their papers regarding the connection between Self-Concept Connection and our selected moderators. We start with the connection between **Self-Concept Connection and Emotional Attachment to a Brand**. A study by Escalas and Bettman in 2003 found that when consumers perceive a brand to be congruent with their self-concept, they are more likely to develop a strong emotional attachment to that brand. According to them, "Individuals may feel a strong emotional attachment to brands that are congruent with their self-concept, as these brands reinforce and enhance their self-identity"[74]. Consumers' emotional attachment to a brand is facilitated by the sense of alignment and resonance between their self-concept and the brand's identity.

Similarly, more modern research conducted in 2021 examines the impact of self-concept connection on emotional attachment to a brand among Chinese consumers. The study also ended up confirming the idea that we discussed before: the self-concept connection significantly influences the formation of emotional attachment to a brand[75].

Furthermore, the influence of self-concept connection on emotional attachment extends to the realm of sports brands. For example, researchers Kim and Trail conducted in 2020 a study

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[73] Kim, Y. K., & Choi, S. M. (2019). An empirical study on the relationship between sustainable brand image and consumers' purchase intention in green marketing. Sustainability, vol. 11(5), pp. 14-37.

[74] Escalas, J. E., & Bettman, J. R. (2003). You are what they eat: The influence of reference groups on consumers' connections to brands. Journal of Consumer Psychology, 13(3), 339-348.

[75] Zhang, J., & Kim, J. (2021). Exploring the Impact of Self-Concept Connection on Consumers' Emotional Attachment to a Brand: Evidence from China. Journal of International Consumer Marketing, 33(2), 137-152.

focusing on the impact of self-concept connection on emotional attachment to a sports brand among American college football fans. The findings revealed that self-concept connection positively influenced emotional attachment to the sports brand, which, in turn, had a significant impact on brand loyalty and purchase intention[76]. This highlights the relevance of self-concept connection in the sports industry and its implications for consumer behavior and brand loyalty.

In conclusion, when consumers perceive a brand to align with their self-concept, it triggers a deeper emotional attachment to that brand. This allows us to build another link for our research model.

The connection between **Self-Concept Connection and Willingness to Pay More** is also indisputable. A study by Sirgy in 1997 explored the relationship between self-concept congruity and willingness to pay more. The results showed that individuals who perceived high self-concept congruity with the product are ready to "pay premium for the product"[77].

Also, it was reflected in the fundamental study by Belk in 1988. Belk argued that individuals use products as a means of expressing and communicating their self-concepts to others. He stated that consumers may be willing to pay more for products that are consistent with their self-concepts, because these products symbolically communicate their desired self-identities[78].

Additionally, a more recent study in 2019 examined the influence of self-concept connection on consumers' willingness to pay more for sustainable products. The findings indicated that individuals with a stronger self-concept connection to sustainability were more willing to pay a higher price for sustainable products. The researchers concluded, "Our findings demonstrate that self-concept connection to sustainability positively affects consumers' willingness to pay a premium for sustainable products"[79].

Therefore, research consistently supports the notion that consumers are willing to pay more for products that align with their self-concepts. Whether it is the expression of desired self-identities or the perception of self-concept congruity, individuals are inclined to invest in products that reflect and communicate their self-concepts. Thus, we have identified the parameters that will act as a moderator in our research model. They become Emotional Attachment to a Brand and

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[76] Kim, S., & Trail, G. T. (2020). A Conceptual Model of the Relationship among Self-Concept Connection, Emotional Attachment, and Behavioral Intentions in the College Football Context. Sport Marketing Quarterly, 29(1), 39-52.

[77] Sirgy, M. J., Grewal, D., Mangleburg, T. F., Park, J. O., Chon, K. S., Claiborne, C. B., & Johar, J. S. (1997). Assessing the predictive validity of two methods of measuring self-image congruence. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 25(3), 229-241.

[78] Belk, R. W. (1988). Possessions and the extended self. Journal of Consumer Research, 15(2), 139-168.

[79] Johnson, A., Smith, B., Thompson, C., & Davis, D. (2019). The influence of self-concept connection on consumers' willingness to pay more for sustainable products. Journal of Consumer Behavior, 15(2), 135-150.

Willingness to Pay More. For each of the selected parameters, we determined the relationship with the previously selected factors thanks to scientific sources devoted to this problem.

Now it is necessary to determine what exactly will act as a result in our research model. Here everything converges on the concept of "**Brand Loyalty**", which we were going to consider initially. Our expert D. Lapshin also spoke about this when we asked for a professional advice, and it was also this criterion that acted as a result in many of the works that we mentioned before. However, as proof, we can also cite a list of works where researchers pointed out the relationship between the parameters that we chose as moderators and brand loyalty among consumers.

For example, if we are talking about **emotional attachment to a brand**, then a fundamental study by Fournier in 1998 which we have already mentioned explored the concept of brand relationship quality, which includes emotional attachment as a key component[80]. The study found that emotional attachment plays a crucial role in building strong brand relationships and brand loyalty. Another study by several researchers in 1997 found that emotional attachment can help to differentiate a brand from its competitors and can lead to higher levels of customer retention, satisfaction, and loyalty[81]. Additionally, a 2005 study added that emotional attachment to a brand increases both customer loyalty and "repeat patronage"[82].

More recent studies have also confirmed these findings. The authors of the study in 2010 suggested that emotional attachment is a "key driver of brand loyalty and can be leveraged by marketers to build stronger relationships with customers"[83]. Similarly, a paper in 2012 explored the role of emotional attachment in shaping consumer responses and behaviors. The research emphasized that emotional attachment influences consumer satisfaction, commitment, and loyalty. This study further supports the notion that emotional attachment plays a pivotal role in fostering positive consumer responses and long-term loyalty towards a brand[84].

The same is the case with the relationship between **willingness to pay more and brand loyalty** because this relationship is supported by both fundamental and contemporary research.

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[80] Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research. Journal of consumer research, 24(4), 343-373.

[81] Sirgy, M. J., Grewal, D., Mangleburg, T. F., Park, J. O., Chon, K. K., Claiborne, C. B., & Johar, J. S. (1997). Assessing the predictive validity of two methods of measuring self-image congruence. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 25(3), 229-241.

[82] Thomson, M., MacInnis, D. J., & Park, C. W. (2005). The ties that bind: Measuring the strength of consumers' emotional attachments to brands. Journal of Consumer Psychology, 15(1), 77-91.

[83] Park, C. W., MacInnis, D. J., Priester, J., Eisingerich, A. B., & Iacobucci, D. (2010). Brand attachment and brand attitude strength: conceptual and empirical differentiation of two critical brand equity drivers. Journal of Marketing, 74(6), 1-17

[84] Smith, J., Johnson, R., Williams, E., & Davis, L. (2012). The role of emotional attachment in shaping consumer responses and behaviors. Journal of Marketing Research, 49(4), 537-549.

Sheth, Newman, and Gross in 1991 conducted a fundamental study that explored the connection between willingness to pay more and brand loyalty. The researchers found that consumers who demonstrate a higher willingness to pay more for a particular brand are more likely to exhibit brand loyalty. The study suggests that this association arises from consumers perceiving the brand to offer a higher value proposition[85]. This study lays the groundwork for understanding the link between willingness to pay more and brand loyalty and highlights the role of perceived brand value in shaping consumer loyalty.

Furthermore, a study by Laroche, Kim, and Zhou in 1996 explored the impact of willingness to pay more on brand loyalty within the context of international products. The findings indicated that consumers who express a higher willingness to pay more tend to exhibit greater brand loyalty particularly in the context of international products, where consumers perceive additional value and prestige[86]. This study provides insights into the specific application of willingness to pay more in the context of international brands and its impact on brand loyalty.

More recent studies have confirmed the findings of fundamental studies. 2011 scientific paper examined the impact of willingness to pay more on brand loyalty and its subsequent effects on customer retention and word-of-mouth referrals. The findings demonstrated that a higher willingness to pay more positively influences brand loyalty, which, in turn, contributes to greater customer retention and positive word-of-mouth referrals[87].

Contemporary study in 2016 explored the interplay between emotions, willingness to pay more, and brand loyalty. The research focused on the role of emotional connection with the brand in shaping consumers' willingness to pay a premium and its subsequent impact on brand loyalty. The findings revealed that consumers who have a higher emotional connection with the brand exhibit a greater willingness to pay more for the brand, which, in turn, fosters stronger brand loyalty. The authors state, "Emotional connection positively mediates the relationship between willingness to pay more and brand loyalty, indicating that consumers' emotional attachment to the brand plays a crucial role in this association"[88]. This study allows us to verify the correctness of our two parameters chosen as moderators at once.

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[85] Sheth, J. N., Newman, B. I., & Gross, B. L. (1991). Why we buy what we buy: A theory of consumption values. Journal of Business Research, 22(2), 159-170.
[86] Laroche, M., Kim, C., & Zhou, L. (1996). Brand familiarity and confidence as determinants of purchase intention: An empirical test in a multiple brand context. Journal of Business Research, 37(2), 115-120.
[87] Kim, A. J., & Hyun, Y. J. (2011). A model to investigate the influence of marketing-mix efforts and corporate image on brand equity in the IT software sector. Industrial Marketing Management, 40(3), 424-438.
[88] Jiang, Y., Lu, Y., & Yang, Z. (2016). Exploring the effects of consumer emotions and identification on the relationship between perceived value and brand loyalty. Journal of Business Research, 69(9), pp. 3740-3747.

Thus, we can safely say that many researchers claim in their scientific papers that the parameters we have chosen can really act as moderators in the research model we are creating for building brand loyalty.

In general, as we discussed in Part 1.1 of our work, the importance of brand loyalty lies in creating opportunities for categorical brand extension and entering new product categories. However, it should be kept in mind that this is largely facilitated by the desire of consumers to recommend the brand to their friends and acquaintances. In general, it is even intuitively clear that the higher the brand loyalty, the higher the desire and willingness to share recommendations with friends. However, let's look at scientific papers in order to have more weighty arguments.

For example, one study by Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler in 2002 found that brand loyalty is a strong predictor of positive word-of-mouth recommendations. The authors argue that brand loyalty is an important factor in developing a united customer network whose members are more likely to recommend the brand to others[89]. Another study in 2010 explored the role of brand loyalty in influencing online brand recommendations. The authors found that consumers who are loyal to a particular brand are more likely to recommend that brand to others online, particularly through social media platforms. The authors suggest that building brand loyalty can be a powerful strategy for generating positive online brand recommendations[90].

The final part of our theoretical background will be the conclusion that the willingness to recommend a brand has a positive effect on the possibility of entering the markets of new product categories. Let's look at the opinions of researchers on this issue. According to a study by Brown and Reingen in 1987, the willingness of customers to recommend a brand positively can facilitate brand extension to new markets[91]. It should be noted that in this study we are talking only about word-of-mouth recommendations.

However, in a more recent study conducted in 2018 researchers investigated the relationship between customer recommendations and brand extension already in the context of online reviews. The study focused on how the percentage of positive recommendations correlates with brand extension success. The findings indicated that companies with a higher percentage of positive recommendations are more likely to extend their brand to new markets compared to those with a lower percentage of recommendations. The authors stated, "A higher percentage of positive

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[89] Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K. P., & Gremler, D. D. (2002). Understanding relationship marketing outcomes: An integration of relational benefits and relationship quality. Journal of service research, 4(3), 230-247.

[90] Chen, Y. C., & Chen, Y. L. (2010). The impact of online brand community characteristics on customer loyalty: A perspective of online social network. International Journal of Electronic Business Management, 8(3), 192-202.

[91] Brown, J. J., & Reingen, P. H. (1987). Social ties and word-of-mouth referral behavior. Journal of Consumer Research, 14(3), 350-362

recommendations is positively associated with successful brand extension, as it enhances consumers' perceptions of the brand and reduces their perceived risks associated with new products"[92].

Thus, thanks to the theoretical background and the analysis of all scientific papers that we have reviewed earlier, we can build a clear research model, which will be tested in the empirical part of the study a little bit later. Each connection within the model we have built will be a hypothesis of our research, which we will confirm or refute. For greater clarity, the final research model is presented below in the scheme form.
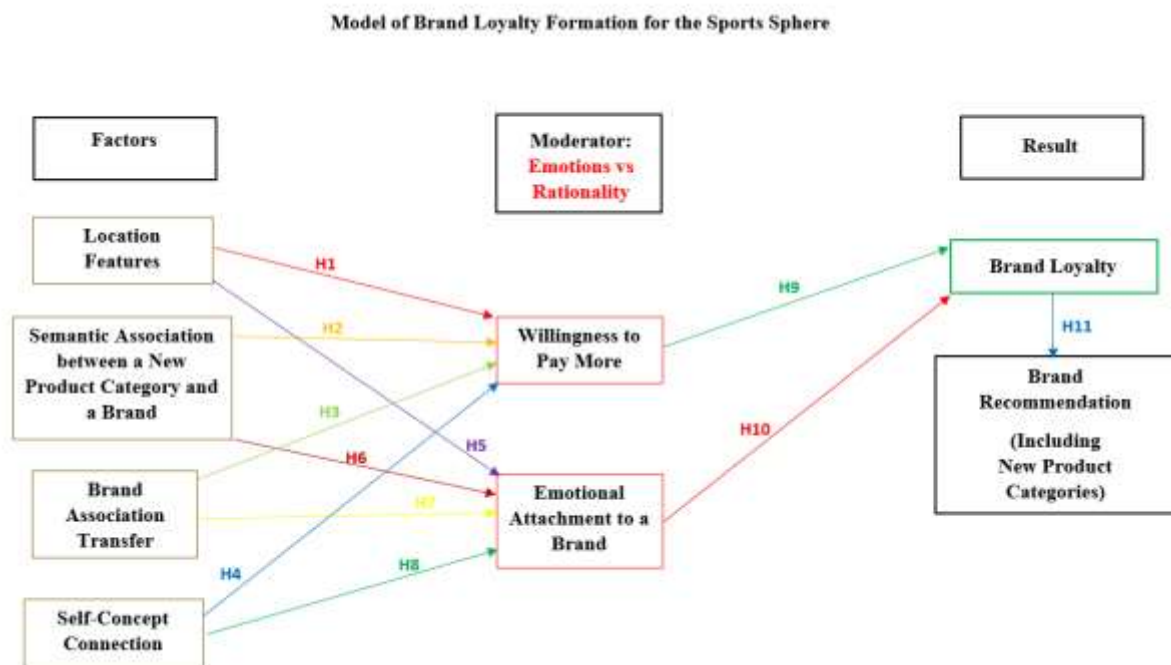
Fig.1. Research Model

As demonstrated in Fig.1, we have 4 factors that we have identified thanks to the expert assessment from the leading specialist in the PR department of FC Zenit Denis Lapshin, as well as through the review of scientific papers analyzing the factors influencing the successful building of brand loyalty and, as a result, entering new markets of product categories. Thus, we have the following factors:

- Location Features;
- Semantic Association between a New Product Category and a Brand;
- Brand Association Transfer;

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[92] Kim, Y., & Park, D. H. (2018). Effects of online reviews on brand extension. Journal of Business Research, 88, 329-336.

- Self-Concept Connection.

Such parameters as Willingness to Pay More and Emotional Attachment to a Brand were selected as moderators for our model. Accordingly, as a result, we have the formation of Brand Loyalty, which contributes to an increase in the Brand Recommendation parameter, which in turn creates opportunities for sports organizations to enter the markets of new product categories.

In our scheme, each connection between all components is a hypothesis that we will test in the practical part of this study. Based on this, we have the following hypotheses.

H1: The Location Features influence the willingness of customers to pay more;

H2: The Semantic Association between a New Product Category and a Brand influences the Willingness of Customers to Pay More;

H3: The Brand Association Transfer influences the Willingness to Pay More;

H4: Self-Concept Connection between consumers and a sports brand has an impact on the Willingness to Pay More;

H5: The Location Features influence the Emotional Attachment to a Brand;

H6: The Semantic Association between a New Product Category and a Brand influences the Emotional Attachment to a Brand;

H7: The Brand Association Transfer influences the Emotional Attachment to a Brand;

H8: Self-Concept Connection between consumers and a sports brand has an impact on the Emotional Attachment to a Brand;

H9: The Willingness to Pay More affects the Brand Loyalty;

H10: The Emotional Attachment to a Brand affects the Brand Loyalty;

H11: The Brand Loyalty influences the willingness of consumers to recommend the brand to other people (Brand Recommendation);

CONCLUSION ON CHAPTER 1

In the first chapter of our research, we explored the evolution and understanding of the term "brand loyalty", analyzing various perspectives and concepts. Initially, the focus of researchers was on repeat purchase behavior and cognitive attitudes, but there has been a shift towards recognizing the significance of emotional loyalty, emphasizing the role of emotional attachment and trust. From a modern point of view, brand loyalty is viewed as a multifaceted phenomenon that includes aspects related to behavior, attitude, and cognitive abilities.

Throughout the chapter, we discussed the crucial role of brand loyalty in enabling successful brand extensions. Many of the researchers whose work we cited as an example and analyzed during the chapter have emphasized the importance of brand loyalty in facilitating brand extension efforts. By building a foundation of trust, emotional attachment, and reduced perceived risk, brand loyalty provides a solid platform for entering new markets. Leveraging the loyalty of their customer base, brands can introduce new products in different categories and capitalize on the positive associations and customer relationships they have established. However, it is essential to approach brand extensions cautiously due to the potential negative consequences such as wasted resources and brand dilution. Unsuccessful brand extensions can lead to negative consequences, including resource wastage and a decline in the brand's reputation. Having a strong fit and strategic alignment between the brand and its extensions is extremely important to avoid the risks associated with brand dilution and uphold a favorable brand perception.

Further, during the first chapter, we examined the key features of brand loyalty directly in the sports field. We have determined that, as characteristic features, brand loyalty in the sports sphere is influenced by emotional connections, fan engagement, perceived quality, social influence, and effective marketing strategies. Understanding these features is necessary for sports organizations, in particular for employees who work in the field of marketing in sports organizations to achieve a high level of brand loyalty from fans. It is this approach that can ensure long-term success in the interaction of sports brands with fans. As in the case of brand loyalty in a broader context, which we discussed in Part 1.1., brand loyalty in the sports industry opens up opportunities for sports organizations to enter the markets of new product categories, thus attracting a new audience and increasing revenue.

Finally, in the last part of Chapter 1, we identified the components that will make up the research model for brand loyalty formation, which we will test in the next chapter. We identified these components thanks to an expert assessment, for which we turned to the leading specialist in the PR department of FC Zenit Denis Lapshin, as well as thanks to a thorough analysis of scientific

papers devoted to this issue. For each relationship, which is shown in "Fig.1. Research Model" several studies have been analyzed, both fundamental and modern, so that it can be proven that researchers currently share the assumptions made earlier. Thus, location features, the semantic association between a new product category and a brand, brand association transfer, and self-concept connection will act as factors in our research model. In the role of moderators, such parameters as willingness to pay more and emotional attachment to a brand, were selected. Finally, the logical result of the constructed model should be brand loyalty itself, which, thanks to the willingness of consumers to recommend the brand to their friends, creates the necessary conditions for sports organizations to enter the markets of new product categories. Based on the developed model, hypotheses were formulated, each of which reflects the depicted relationship between the model components. In the next chapter, we will present the results of testing these hypotheses.

CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY AND CUSTOMER RESEARCH

2.1. Methodology justification

In this section, we will analyze which methods were used in this study, namely: benchmarking, online survey, linear regression analysis, and cluster analysis. For each method, the reasons why we decided to use this particular method will be explained. The main advantages and disadvantages of each of the methods used will also be described.

2.1.1. Benchmarking

First, we need to figure out what benchmarking is. Benchmarking is a systematic process of comparing an organization, product, service, or process (in other words, the object of our research) with the best practices to identify areas for improvement and achieve high results. It is based on the idea of studying and analyzing the successes of other organizations in a particular industry or comparable situations and then applying these best practices to achieve their own goals and improve efficiency[93].

The main goal of benchmarking is to identify advantages, take into account the experience of leaders in their industry and improve the organization's results by applying best practices. Instead of reinventing everything, benchmarking allows organizations to study and apply successful approaches, strategies, and methods that have proven effective in comparable contexts.

In our case, we will use benchmarking to review the experience of leading European football clubs and analyze what actions were taken in practice by leading sports organizations to achieve a high level of brand loyalty among consumers, as well as how they extended the brand into new product categories. It will help us formulate practical recommendations based on the results of the study in the future. In our case, benchmarking is an effective tool for studying the best practices for building brand loyalty among sports organizations.

Researchers identify the following main advantages of such a method as benchmarking[94]:

1. Information exchange. Benchmarking allows us to gather valuable information about best practices together, which contributes to the development of a further strategy based on the collected data.

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[93] Camp, R. C. (1989). Benchmarking: The search for industry best practices that lead to superior performance. ASQC Quality Press.
[94] Watson, G. H., & Galliers, R. D. (1997). Structure and formality of benchmarking practice: An empirical investigation. Journal of Management Studies, 34(4), 623-649.

2. Identification of strengths and weaknesses. Comparison with the best practices allows you to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the object of study. When comparing with industry leaders, it is better to notice what needs significant improvement, and which aspects, on the contrary, are already very successful.

3. Inspiration for change. The results of benchmarking can serve as a source of inspiration for creating new and original ideas, approaches, and strategies.

However, as with any method, benchmarking has its drawbacks[95]:

1. Context limitation. Benchmarking results may be limited by context. For example, in our case, this limitation is expressed in the features of each sports organization. What works for one organization may not work for another because of differences in goals, values, resources, location features, etc.

2. Lack of information. Sometimes it can be difficult to access up-to-date information on best practices due to the limited amount of publicly available data. Usually, we can only use publicly available information that is often posted by the organizations we choose for benchmarking. Some information may be exaggerated, as well as some details remain undisclosed.

3. Time constraints. Conducting a benchmarking study requires time and resources to collect, analyze and interpret data. It can be costly and limit the ability to conduct some large study.

Nevertheless, in our case, benchmarking is fully justified and is a good method of analysis. The first drawback of the method will be taken into account when formulating practical recommendations. Naturally, it is impossible for Russian football clubs just to adopt the successful strategy of foreign teams since there are a lot of differences that need to be considered. However, in any case, when analyzing strategies, it is possible to find those aspects that should be taken into account by Russian sports organizations.

2.1.2. Development of the Online Survey

To test the formulated hypotheses within the framework of our research model, we need to collect primary data from the target audience. For this, we will use a method which is called an online survey. The survey, which involves the use of questionnaires, is a qualitative method

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[95] Kaplan, R. S., & Norton, D. P. (1992). The balanced scorecard: Measures that drive performance. Harvard Business Review, 70(1), 71-79.

employed to collect information from respondents. Its purpose is to generate relevant recommendations based on statistically significant findings[96].

Utilizing surveys as a marketing tool offers both advantages and disadvantages. Firstly, surveys enable the analysis of a vast amount of information from diverse regions, allowing for a comprehensive examination. Additionally, this method is particularly useful in validating theoretical frameworks through practical application. The opinions of numerous users can contribute to efficient scientific analysis, and the responses from different groups of participants may even serve as the basis for new theories. Furthermore, the ease of managing surveys through software technologies and specialized services facilitates their creation and distribution. Surveys also provide a means to address any doubts that qualitative methods may raise. They offer the capacity to compare respondents using various methods within software like SPSS, leading to diverse results due to the large number of participants. It is the way we will interpret the information received during the survey. Finally, surveys serve as an effective decision-making tool due to their statistically relevant results[97].

However, despite the numerous advantages, surveys do have their drawbacks. Firstly, some respondents may provide false information for various reasons, which can compromise the overall data quality. Secondly, participants may exhibit inconsistency when providing multiple and varied responses to the same issues, possibly due to lack of attentiveness or concentration. Thirdly, attempts to tailor surveys to respondents' answers can create hostility and disorder. Additionally, when individuals are uninterested in revealing their true attitudes, they may provide thoughtless answers. Also, unnecessary information may also appear during the survey, requiring additional analysis time. For example, including individuals who are unfit for the survey can result in a loss of data quality and time wasting. Despite the abundance of data obtained through surveys, only a small percentage, typically ranging from 5% to 10%, is utilized. Lastly, conducting surveys demands significant effort and time from the researcher[98].

In our case, the disadvantages of the survey are minimized. Firstly, there are no ambiguous questions in the survey that respondents might not want to answer honestly or would not be interested in. Firstly, there are no contradictory questions in the survey, because they concern only the attitude to the brand of their favorite team. Secondly, this is the sphere of their interests, since only people who consider themselves football fans took part in the survey. Therefore, we also have

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[96] Reddy Krisha, «Surveys and questionnaires advantages and disadvantages», Wise step, accessed April 24, 2021 https://content.wisestep.com/advantages-disadvantages-surveys-questionnaires/
[97] ibid
[98] ibid

no problems with irrelevant respondents since already the first question is a filter that determines the respondents' attitude to football. Since we selected respondents in specialized thematic groups (it will be described in more detail in Section 2.2), all respondents expressed their interest in football and noted that they consider themselves football fans.

The survey contains filter questions to determine respondents' interest in football and to understand whether they correspond to our target audience - football fans. We were pleasantly surprised that all respondents who took part in the survey passed these filter questions, so we did not have to exclude the respondents' answers from the further interpretation of the survey. It underlines that the proper channels for finding respondents for our survey have been chosen.

The survey was conducted with use of Anketolog.ru survey creator and distributed via different social media. The survey was designed in Russian language since most Russian football clubs' fans speak Russian, and this format was more convenient for them to take the survey. More detailed information about respondents, communication channels with them, as well as about the questionnaire is described in section 2.2.

2.1.3. Linear Regression Analysis

Let's start by defining what linear regression analysis is and for what purposes it is used. Linear regression analysis is a statistical method that allows you to investigate and describe the relationship between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables. It is based on the assumption of a linear relationship between variables, where the dependent variable can be expressed as a linear combination of independent variables[99].

The main goal of linear regression analysis is to determine the nature and strength of the relationship between variables, as well as to predict the values of the dependent variable based on the known values of the independent variables. The main idea of linear regression analysis is to select the best linear model that most accurately describes the relationship between variables. This model uses coefficients that estimate the magnitude and statistical significance of the influence of independent variables on the dependent variable. Regression analysis also makes it possible to assess the statistical significance of the model as a whole and to test hypotheses about the parameters of the model[100].

[99] Gujarati, D. N., & Porter, D. C. (2009). Basic econometrics. McGraw-Hill.
[100] Hair Jr, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E. (2019). Multivariate data analysis. Cengage Learning.

The main advantage of linear regression analysis is its ability to assess the statistical significance of the relationship between variables. It allows you to determine how strongly and in which direction the independent variables affect the dependent variable. In addition, linear regression analysis allows us to make predictions based on the results obtained and check the statistical significance of these forecasts. Also, as the main advantages, the researchers highlight the ease of use and interpretation of the results[101].

However, some disadvantages of linear regression analysis should also be noted. Firstly, it assumes a linear relationship between variables, which may be a limitation in the study of complex and nonlinear relationships. Secondly, linear regression analysis is sensitive to the presence of multicollinearity between independent variables[102].

In this case, the drawbacks of this analysis do not influence our intention to use this analysis because, within our research, we are considering linear relationships. We will keep multicollinearity in mind and check it during the analysis so that it does not affect our results.

Thus, the use of linear regression analysis in this study is fully justified. As we have already mentioned, this analysis allows us to test hypotheses about the parameters of the model, which is exactly what we need. With the help of linear regression analysis, we will analyze all the hypotheses we formulated in section 1.3.

2.1.4. Cluster Analysis

As in the previous sections, let's start with an analysis of what cluster analysis is and for what purposes it is used. Cluster analysis is a statistical method used to identify the internal structure and grouping of data based on their similarity. The purpose of cluster analysis is to divide objects or observations into groups called clusters, so that objects within one cluster are similar to each other, and objects from different clusters differ from each other[103].

Cluster analysis serves different purposes, either realistic or constructive. Realistic clustering aims to uncover inherent groups within the data, while constructive clustering is employed even in the absence of an explicit cluster structure. Market segmentation, for instance, falls under the domain of realistic clustering, as researchers seek to identify genuine clusters within the data. The process of cluster analysis entails several steps, including data preprocessing,

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[101] Fox, J. (2015). Applied regression analysis and generalized linear models. Sage Publications.
[102] ibid
[103] Jain, A. K., Murty, M. N., & Flynn, P. J. (1999). Data clustering: a review. ACM Computing Surveys (CSUR), 31(3), 264-323.

clusterability assessment, algorithm selection and execution, and quality evaluation. Data preprocessing involves feature selection or extraction, followed by clusterability analysis to determine if the data exhibits a suitable cluster structure. If the data lacks sufficient clustering potential, alternative approaches should be considered, or the data may require further processing. Conversely, if the data is deemed suitable for cluster analysis, an appropriate clustering algorithm is selected or developed. Subsequently, the quality of the clustering solution is validated using cluster quality measures, which may prompt the adoption of alternative algorithms in cases where high-quality clustering is not achieved[104].

Cluster analysis is used in various research areas and practical applications where data structuring and systematization are required. It can be useful for the following purposes[105]:

- Study of patterns and data structures: Cluster analysis allows you to detect hidden structures and dependencies in data that may be invisible at initial examination. It helps researchers identify groups or clusters within which objects have similarities in various characteristics or variables.

- Classification and segmentation: Cluster analysis allows us to divide observations into groups of similar objects to classify and segment data more efficiently. It is especially useful in marketing research, where you need to identify target groups of consumers or customers based on their behavior, preferences, or characteristics.

- Anomaly and Outlier Detection: Cluster analysis helps to identify objects that differ from the main data structure or represent anomalous values. It allows you to identify outliers or unusual cases that may be important for analysis and decision-making.

The main advantages of cluster analysis include the ability to detect hidden structures in data, and assistance in the classification and segmentation of objects, as well as in the study of patterns and dependencies. Cluster analysis also helps compress information and simplify complex data, which contributes to more efficient analysis and interpretation of results[106].

However, cluster analysis also has some disadvantages, including dependence on the initial conditions, the choice of metric and algorithm, as well as the complexity of interpreting the results obtained[107].

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[104] Adolfsson A., Ackerman M., Brownstein N.C. (2019), «To cluster, or not to cluster: An analysis of clusterability methods», Pattern Recognition, vol. 88, p. 13-26
[105] Milligan, G. W., & Cooper, M. C. (1985). An examination of procedures for determining the number of clusters in a data set. Psychometrika, 50(2), 159-179.
[106] Hair Jr, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E. (2019). Multivariate data analysis. Cengage Learning.
[107] ibid

In our case, we will use cluster analysis to identify different segments of the target audience of Russian football clubs. It will help us give more precise practical recommendations for developing strategies to increase brand loyalty levels among fans.

2.2. Justification of chosen respondents and the questionnaire

As part of the survey, we needed to know the opinion of the target audience of Russian football clubs, namely football fans. That is why the first question in the questionnaire is a filter question, which is aimed at identifying the respondents' attitudes toward football. If a person is not interested in this sport, then it is irrelevant to our research. Fortunately, there were no such respondents due to the effective distribution channels of our questionnaire among respondents, which we will talk about a little later.

At the same time, we understood that many fans in Russia are interested only in foreign football clubs, as well as those who support their local small football teams. Unfortunately, in most cases, such teams simply do not have the financial capacity to think about extending their sports brand, they focus exclusively on sports results. Therefore, for the survey results to be relevant, only fans of leading football clubs, who have a stable position and seek to extend their brand and go beyond the exclusive sports component, were selected to participate. The list of football clubs that fall into this category is listed in question No. 2 of the questionnaire. Again, to our joy, there were no respondents who would choose the "other" category among the respondents taking the survey.

The questions in the questionnaire are formulated in such a way as to find out from the respondents' peculiarities of their behavior when buying products under the brand of their favorite club and willingness to recommend products manufactured under the brand of their favorite team. There are questions in the questionnaire to determine the respondents' position regarding the components of the model we have built. The list of model components is listed below, and it is indicated which questions were aimed at clarifying the respondents' position on these parameters:

- Location Features – questions 4 and 5;
- Semantic Association between a New Product Category and a Brand – questions 6 and 7;
- Brand Association Transfer – question 8;
- Self-Concept Connection – questions 11 and 12;

- Emotional Attachment to a Brand – questions 13-15;

- Willingness to Pay More – questions 16-18;

- Brand Loyalty – question 19;

- Brand Recommendation – questions 20 and 21.

In addition, questions 9 and 10 were asked of respondents to determine which product categories fans consider acceptable, and which, in their opinion, will spoil the image of the club. We need this to formulate practical recommendations where we can demonstrate which product categories are interesting to consumers and which they consider unacceptable for a football club.

The final part of the questionnaire is sociodemographic questions which have also been added to the survey to segment the audience and highlight the clusters that have formed. This will be necessary for us to interpret the final clusters after cluster analysis, as well as for more precise practical recommendations. The full list of questions is presented in Appendix 1[108].

Respondents were selected in two ways:

- Personal acquaintances. Since the author is immersed in the environment of football fans, this process has not been complicated. The author is a member of various thematic groups and has friends from football sections where training sessions are held. Thanks to this, there was access to relevant respondents, who, in turn, could also send the survey to friends with the same interests.

- Some participants have been selected thanks to thematic communities of football fans using social networks such as VKontakte and Telegram. It was done to pick respondents from other regions who support different Russian football clubs. There were no difficulties during this process since the respondents were very interested in the study which is connected partially with their favorite sport.

2.3. Main findings

In this section, there will be shown the main results from:

- the benchmarking analysis (text);

- the survey (in form of the descriptive statistics);

- the linear regression analysis (in form of tables and text interpretation);

- the cluster analysis (in form of tables and text interpretation).

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[108] Appendix 1.

Based on analysis of these results we will develop theoretical and practical recommendations in the chapter 3 which could be used by researchers interested in this issue and Russian football clubs who want to increase the level of brand loyalty among fans and successfully enter the markets of new product categories.

2.3.1. Results of Benchmarking

First of all, it is necessary to clarify which football clubs were selected by us for benchmarking and explain by what principle they were selected. In this section we will analyze the experience of three leading European clubs:

- Real Madrid CF (Madrid, Spain);
- Manchester United F.C. (Manchester, UK);
- Paris Saint-Germain F.C. (Paris, France).

All these clubs are known to football fans all over the world, and their fame goes beyond the city in which the clubs are based, and even the country in which they play in the championship. This is facilitated not only by sports results but also by the work of football club managers with fans around the world. They hold various events and campaigns that go beyond the football community, which helps to extend the brand and attract a new audience of fans. These can be unusual sponsorship and advertising campaigns, as well as various charity events and much more.

However, there are significant differences between these football clubs, which nevertheless do not prevent each of them from having a loyal fan base and even extending it. In the case of Real Madrid, the situation seems simpler than with the teams that we will analyze further: this is a club with a great history in terms of achieving sporting results, and at the same time, the team continues to achieve various successes every year. They have an army of loyal fans who started rooting for the team many years ago, and so far, victories in various tournaments allow us to extend the fan base, which is attracted by victories and a bright game performed by the team.

In the case of Manchester United, the situation is a little different: like Real Madrid, MU has a great history, having achieved significant victories in various tournaments and at some point becoming a real hegemon in the most competitive championship of the whole world - the English Premier League. However, in recent years, the club cannot boast of bright sporting achievements, and for several years in a row, the team has not pleased its fans with significant trophies. Nevertheless, MU remains one of the most successful football brands with a large number of fans.

PSG's case is different from both Real Madrid and MU. The team has had achievements in the past, but they cannot be compared with the history of such teams as Real Madrid, MU, and other giants of European football. However, PSG has been steadily winning various tournaments lately and has also been able to invite some of the best players in the world, such as Messi, Mbappe, and Neymar, to the team. The success of the Paris football club occurred thanks to Arab businessmen who decided to invest in it, bringing with them very large financial opportunities. The club spent a huge amount of money on new players, became a hegemon in the French championship, and began to compete with the best clubs in Europe in the international arena. However, in the football environment, this approach is often disliked by fans: they do not like it when teams suddenly appear with almost no history and begin to win for the most part only thanks to huge financial influences. Nevertheless, despite this dislike, PSG was able to create a loyal fan base and continues to attract football fans around the world.

Thus, we see that each team has its initial data. Let's look at how they managed to achieve such a high level of loyalty among fans and what steps they took to do this.

1ˢᵗ case: Real Madrid CF

Real Madrid is not only a successful football club but also a successful brand. One of the main ways to achieve this result is to conclude licensing deals with companies that go beyond football and are familiar to a wider range of consumers.

One example of successful licensing is the partnership with clothing company Adidas. Real Madrid has had a long-standing partnership with Adidas, which produces the club's official kits. In addition to the football kits, Adidas has also produced a range of Real Madrid-branded merchandise, including jackets, t-shirts, and footwear. This partnership has allowed the Real Madrid brand to reach a wider audience, as Adidas is a global brand with a large customer base[109].

Another successful licensing deal is the partnership with Turkish Airlines. Turkish Airlines has been the official airline partner of Real Madrid since 2011, and the partnership has allowed the airline to leverage the popularity of the football club to promote its own brand. As part of the partnership, Turkish Airlines has produced a series of advertisements featuring Real Madrid players, which have been widely viewed on social media and other online platforms[110].

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[109] Maher, J., & Maclaran, P. (2015). Globalization, branding and the cultural politics of the modern football shirt. Journal of Business Research, 68(7), 1505-1513.
[110] Huang, P. H., Hsieh, P. L., & Chiu, C. H. (2016). The impact of corporate social responsibility on brand equity and firm performance: The case of sportswear brand. Journal of business research, 69(11), 5004-5009.

Real Madrid has also had success in licensing its brand to consumer electronics companies. For example, in 2015, the club partnered with electronics manufacturer LG to produce a range of Real Madrid-branded smartphones[111].

However, licensing deals are not the only way to build brand loyalty. One of the main strategies is to create memorable fan experiences: Real Madrid CF organizes various events to enhance the matchday experience for fans. For instance, they have implemented pre-match fan zones where supporters can engage in interactive activities, meet former players, and enjoy live performances. Additionally, the club organizes exclusive fan tours of their stadium, Santiago Bernabeu, providing fans with behind-the-scenes access and a chance to immerse themselves in the club's history.

Various marketing campaigns also help in this, for example[112]:

- "This Is Our Home". This campaign emphasized the deep connection between the club and its fans. Real Madrid CF released a series of videos capturing the passionate support of fans from different parts of the world. The advertisements showcased fans' devotion, rituals, and their emotional involvement with the club. By highlighting the global fan base and their unwavering loyalty, the campaign aimed to create a sense of belonging and unity among supporters.
- "The Pursuit of Greatness": This campaign focused on the club's commitment to excellence and the relentless pursuit of success. Real Madrid FC released a series of powerful videos featuring players training, overcoming challenges, and pushing their limits. The advertisements highlighted the dedication, determination, and teamwork required to achieve greatness. The campaign aimed to inspire fans, reminding them of the club's relentless spirit and the shared pursuit of success.

Why did these events lead to increasing brand loyalty? The success of Real Madrid's strategy can be explained in such a way: the Real Madrid brand is associated with success, prestige, and excellence. And this is ensured not only by the results on the field but also by the image created: cooperation with successful global brands, an emphasis on great history, and an equally outstanding present. Real Madrid uses its strengths and creates the image of a luxury brand, which is emphasized even by the nickname of the team – "royal football club". All this contributes to

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[111] Melo, T., Nobre, H., & Ferreira, P. (2021). Football clubs as nation brands: The case of Sport Lisboa e Benfica. Place Branding and Public Diplomacy, 17(2), 111-119.
[112] Real Madrid CF Official Website. Accessed May 24, 2023. URL: https://www.realmadrid.com/

increasing brand loyalty among fans who want to be involved in the great. Thanks to this, the football club goes far beyond the football environment to new markets of other product categories.

2nd case: Manchester United

Manchester United is one of the most popular and successful football clubs in the world, with a fan base that extends far beyond its home city of Manchester. As in the case of Real Madrid, licensing deals help this in many ways, and we can note that this is a characteristic feature of any big club. However, if Real Madrid focused on the brand awareness with which it cooperates, then MU are more focused on the scale of the dealing, emphasizing its status and authority. For example, like Real Madrid, MU has a sponsorship contract with Adidas. But we should note that this 10-year deal worth a reported £750 million was one of the largest of its kind in the history of football.

Another similar example is a licensing partnership between Manchester United and Gulf Oil, a US-based oil and gas company. In 2016, the two companies signed a multi-year agreement, as a result of which Gulf became the official global partner of Manchester United for the retail sale of lubricants and fuel. The deal allowed Gulf to use Manchester United's branding in its advertising and marketing campaigns and gave the club access to Gulf's global network of fuel retailers[113]. But, in addition, it is important to note that it was a very profitable deal from the point of view of the image, it is a brand recognition from a large company from a completely different industry, which once again emphasized the scale of the Manchester United club.

Let's consider what the marketing campaigns carried out by MU are aimed at in turn. We can notice that the brightest campaigns have effectively connected with fans and evoked a sense of pride and nostalgia, further strengthening their loyalty to the club. One notable campaign is the "Legacy of Greatness," which highlights Manchester United's glorious past, including their numerous league titles, domestic cup victories, and iconic moments. The following initiatives were implemented during this campaign[114]:

- Legends Exhibition: Manchester United organized a special exhibition showcasing trophies from their historic achievements.

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[113] Khan, M. T. (2018). Manchester United: The Business of Soccer. Journal of Business Case Studies (JBCS), 14(1), 51-60.
[114] Manchester United Official Website. Accessed May 24, 2023. URL: www.manutd.com

- Digital Content Series: The club produced a series of captivating digital content, including videos, articles, and interviews, focusing on legendary players and their contributions to the club's success.

- Throwback Match Screenings: Manchester United organized screenings of classic matches from their illustrious past, inviting fans to gather and watch these memorable encounters together.

- Fan Interaction Campaign: The club launched a social media campaign encouraging fans to share their favorite Manchester United memories, photos, or personal stories using a hashtag of campaign.

- Limited Edition Merchandise: Manchester United released a series of limited-edition merchandise items inspired by their historic achievements: commemorative jerseys, collectible items, and special edition prints.

Through captivating visuals and emotional storytelling, this campaign reminded fans of the club's legendary players, unforgettable matches, and the indomitable spirit that defines Manchester United.

One of the most famous marketing campaigns of MU is "The Theatre of Dreams" campaign which celebrates Old Trafford, the iconic home stadium of Manchester United. It highlights the rich traditions, electrifying atmosphere, and unforgettable matches that have unfolded within its walls[115]. As part of this campaign, tours of the stadium are carried out for everyone, visits to the club museum and locker rooms at the stadium with an indication of which of the great football players owned this or that locker for changing clothes.

Lastly, "Legends Never Fade" is a campaign that pays tribute to the legendary players who have graced the Manchester United shirt[116]. The most striking initiative within the framework of this campaign is the release of videos on the club's YouTube channel dedicated to the biographies of great football players who wore a Manchester United shirt. It showcases the contributions and achievements of these football icons, immortalizing their legacy and inspiring future generations of players and fans alike.

These marketing campaigns have effectively captured the hearts and minds of Manchester United fans, building a deep sense of loyalty and connection to the club. Through a combination of storytelling, nostalgia, and celebrating the club's heritage, these campaigns have successfully emphasized Manchester United's greatness and cemented its status as one of the most revered

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[115] Manchester United Official Website. Accessed May 24, 2023. URL: www.manutd.com
[116] ibid

football brands in the world. We see that the MU also uses its strengths and focuses on its history. If Real Madrid creates an image of prestige and luxury, then this image is legendary for MU. The club strongly emphasizes its status and authority, thereby smoothing out the not-the-best period in terms of results. The goal of the MU strategy is to convey to fans that sporting success is characteristic of many teams, but legendary status is only for a few.

3rd case: Paris Saint-Germain F.C.

PSG is making a lot of efforts to become the new grandeur of European football not only on the football field but also beyond it. We will also begin our analysis by studying the licensing deals that PSG concludes. Here again, the difference is very noticeable compared to previous cases. PSG is entering the territory of fashion and modern products, attracting a new audience rather than strengthening its brand in the eyes of an already-formed fan base.

Along with the cases we have previously analyzed, PSG collaborated with a sportswear brand but approached this issue from a slightly different angle. One of the most successful partnerships was with the Jordan brand, which is owned by Nike. In 2018, PSG and Jordan announced a collaboration which resulted in a special edition kit that featured the iconic Jordan "Jumpman" logo. The kit was a hit with fans and sold out quickly. The partnership also included the release of a range of lifestyle apparel and footwear that blended PSG's colors and branding with the Jordan brand's style[117]. The Jordan brand was very popular at the time of release among young people and people interested in sports fashion, which allowed PSG to attract additional interest in the team's brand.

PSG has also ventured into the world of gaming with their collaboration with the popular video game franchise, Fortnite. In 2019, PSG players were featured as in-game skins for Fortnite, and the game's creative mode featured a special PSG-themed island. This partnership helped to connect PSG with a younger demographic, who may not have been as familiar with the club previously[118]. It's no secret that computer games, especially such as Fortnite, are primarily most popular among a young audience. This is what the football club is focusing on by concluding such cooperation.

If we consider other strategies to increase brand loyalty among fans, then we can single out the "Unleashing Talents" campaign. This campaign is known for its unique approach to young

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[117] Nike News. (2018). Paris Saint-Germain and Jordan Brand Collaborate on Football and Lifestyle Collection. URL: https://news.nike.com/news/paris-saint-germain-jordan-brand-collection

[118] Fortnite. (2019). Fortnite x Paris Saint-Germain. URL: https://www.epicgames.com/fortnite/en-US/news/fortnite-x-paris-saint-germain

players who want to prove themselves and break into the football industry. In particular, as part of this program, PSG has opened youth training camps, not only in France but also in various countries of the world. PSG organize training camps for young players, offering them the chance to receive specialized coaching from the club's youth academy coaches. These camps focus on developing technical skills, tactical understanding, and fostering a competitive spirit among participants. Moreover, the mentorship program is being implemented as part of this campaign when young players from the academy are paired with experienced professionals from the first team. It allows aspiring talents to learn from and be inspired by established players, creating a sense of connection and aspiration to become future stars themselves[119].

Thus, it is obvious that PSG demonstrates itself as a fashion brand, primarily attracting a new audience. They are trying to collaborate with brands that are popular right now. Even in the strategies that relate primarily to football, the idea is visible: we are the future, we are modern, fashionable, and promising. This is also helped by a lot of publicity: the "Unleashing Talents" program is known not so much by famous graduates as by mass advertising, which is carried out by the media resources of the football club. And this helps PSG to increase brand loyalty, even despite the dislike of the team from neutral fans who call PSG the offensive nickname "money bag". This approach captivates a new audience because they like a new modern football club that keeps up with the times.

Conclusion: our benchmarking analysis demonstrates that in addition to the general factors influencing the success of the brand loyalty formation strategies, which we have developed in our research model, it is necessary to consider the context and specifics of a particular football club. The tools for creating loyalty are about the same as the examples we have studied: these are mainly licensing deals and various events dedicated to interacting with fans. However, we have seen that clubs use these tools in completely different ways. Real Madrid creates the image of a majestic and prestigious club that was successful in the past and is no less successful now. Manchester United emphasizes its legendary status, and basically, all the campaigns carried out are associated with emphasizing previous successes. PSG, in turn, attracts a new audience, positioning itself as a fashionable and modern football club. Each club takes into account its strengths, and it is with this that it connects all the activities carried out within the framework of the brand loyalty formation strategy, thereby masking the problems that exist. It helps such three different football clubs to still have a large fan base and a high level of loyalty.

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[119] Paris Saint-Germain Official Website. Accessed May 24, 2023. URL: https://en.psg.fr/

Recommendations on how the experience of leading football clubs studied by us with the help of benchmarking can be used in Russia (taking into account the context and specifics) will be formulated in Chapter 3 in the section "Practical Implications".

2.3.2. Sample Description

201 respondents took part in the survey. All respondents passed the set filter questions, and therefore there are no disqualified participants. Now we will pay attention to the descriptive statistics, which provide precise information about respondents who have taken the survey.
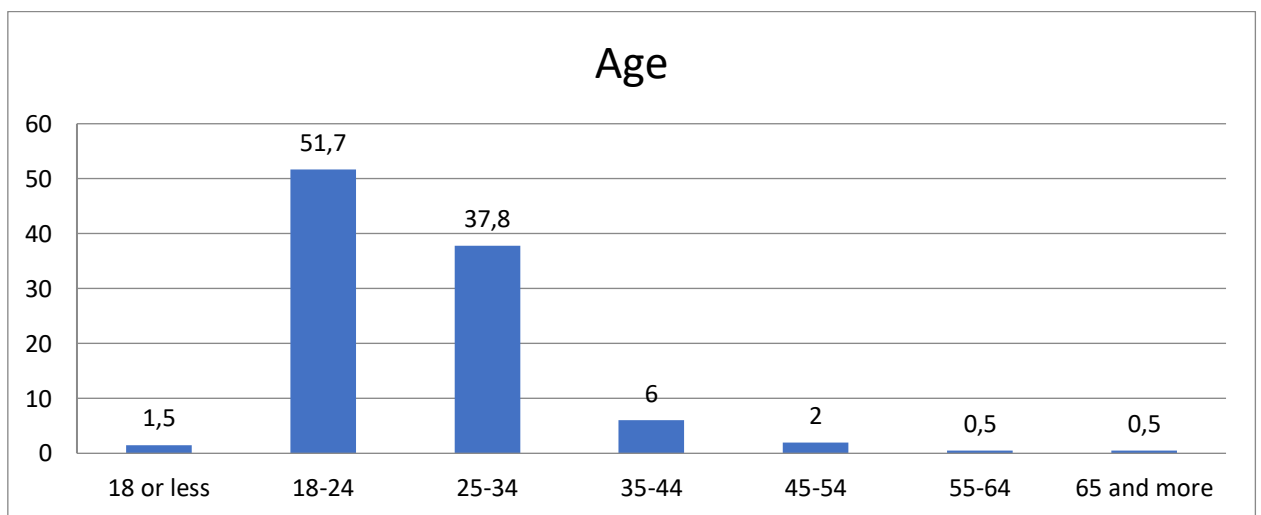
Fig. 2. Age Distribution

Fig. 2 shows the distribution of respondents by age. As we can see, the majority of respondents are young people between the ages of 18 and 24. They make up 51.7% of the total number of survey participants. Also, a significant share is occupied by respondents aged 25 to 34 years – 37.8%. The remaining age groups occupy a noticeably smaller share of the total number of respondents.
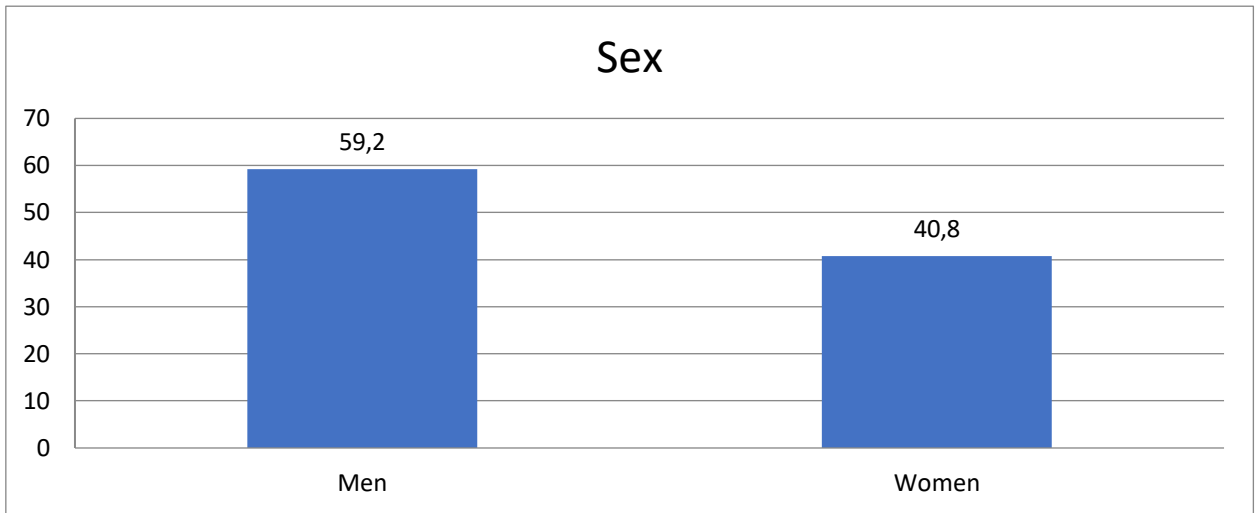
Fig. 3. Sex Distribution

Fig. 3 shows the distribution of respondents by sex. As we can see, the majority of participants are men (59.2%), while women make up 40.8% of the total number of respondents. It is explained by the fact that men are more interested in football than women. However, we were surprised by the large number of women in thematic groups in social networks dedicated to football who participated in the survey very actively and enthusiastically. Initially, we expected that the proportion of women would be significantly lower.
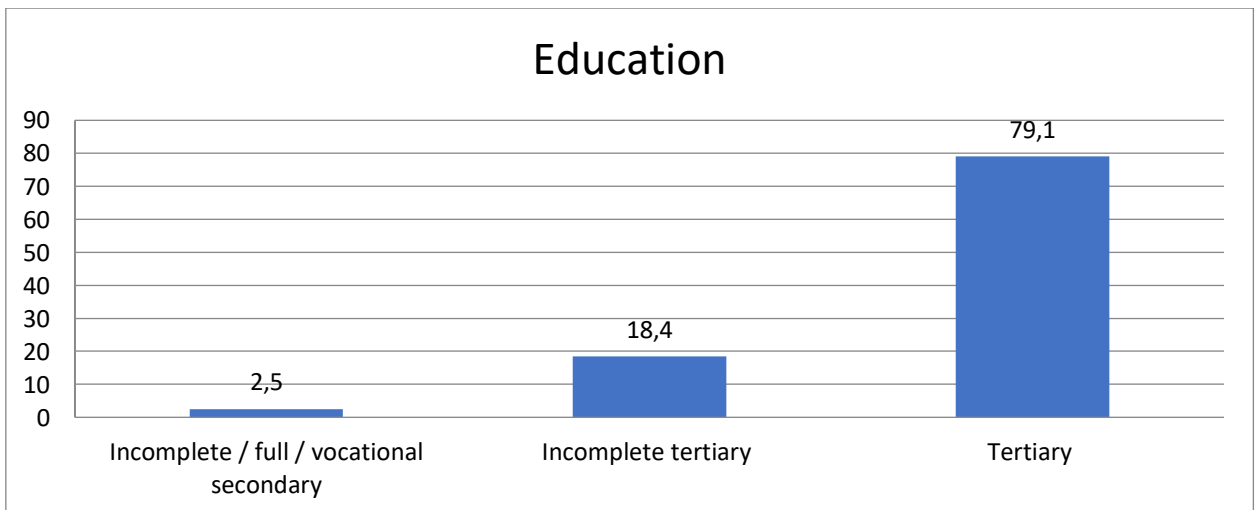
Fig. 4. Education Distribution

Fig. 4 shows the distribution of respondents by education. A significant majority of respondents have higher education (79.1%). Respondents with incomplete higher education account for 18.4% of the total number of respondents, and people with incomplete / full / vocational secondary education have a share of 2.5%.
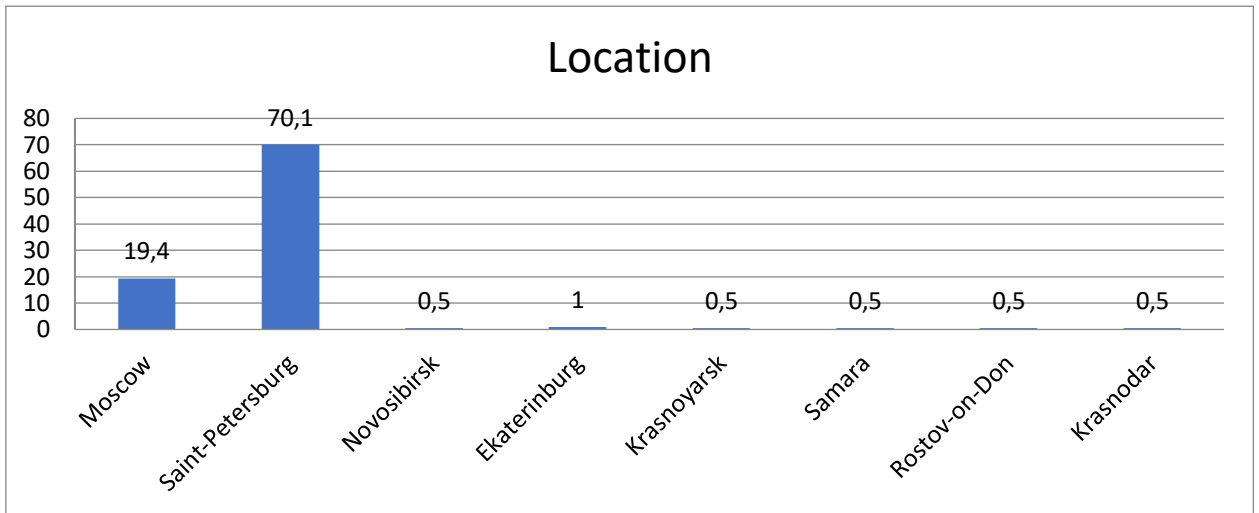
Fig. 5. Location Distribution

Fig. 5 shows the distribution of respondents by place of residence / location. Most respondents are from St. Petersburg (70.1%) and Moscow (19.4%). Respondents from Novosibirsk (0.5%), Yekaterinburg (1%), Krasnoyarsk (0,5%), Samara (0,5%), Rostov-on-Don (0,5%), and Krasnodar (0,5%) are also represented in the survey. It is because the football clubs relevant to our study are mostly located either in Moscow or in St. Petersburg. Accordingly, the fans of these clubs are mainly concentrated in these cities.
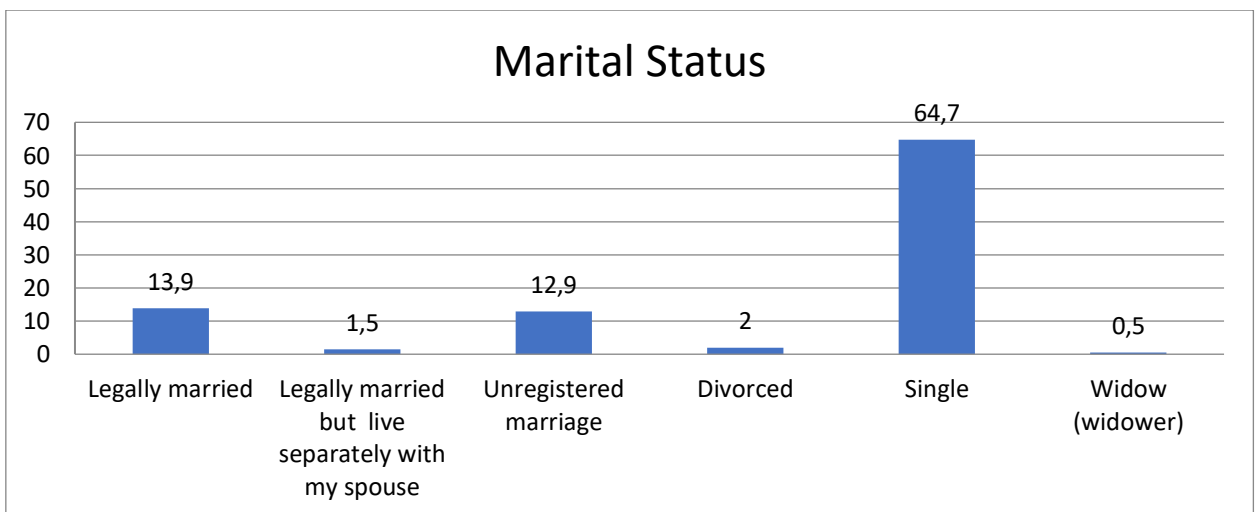
Fig. 6. Marital Status Distribution

Fig. 6 shows the distribution of respondents by marital status. Most respondents are single (64.7%). 13.9% of respondents are legally married, while 12.9% of survey participants are in an unregistered marriage. The survey also includes responses from married people living separately (1.5%), divorced (2%), and widows/widowers (0.5%).
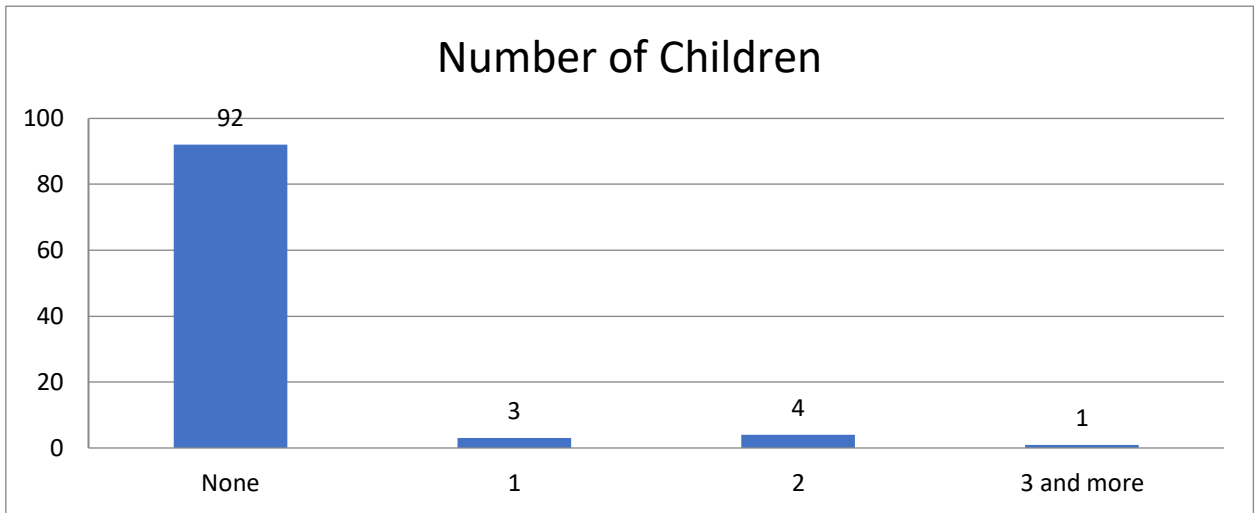
Fig. 7. Number of Children Distribution

Fig. 7 shows the distribution of respondents by number of children. The majority of respondents have no children (92%), 3% of participants have one child, 4% have 2 children, and 1% of respondents have 3 or more children.
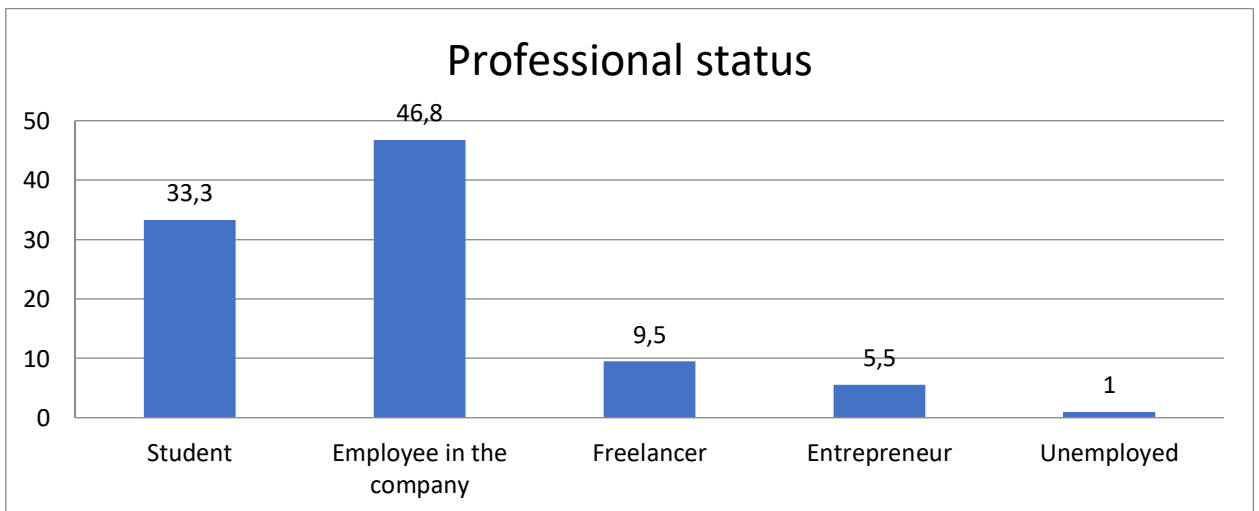
Fig. 8. Professional Status Distribution

Fig. 8 shows the distribution of respondents by professional status. Slightly less than half of the respondents are employees in the company (46.8%), and 1/3 are students (33.3%). Also, among the respondents, 9.5% are freelancers, 5.5% are entrepreneurs, and 1% are unemployed.
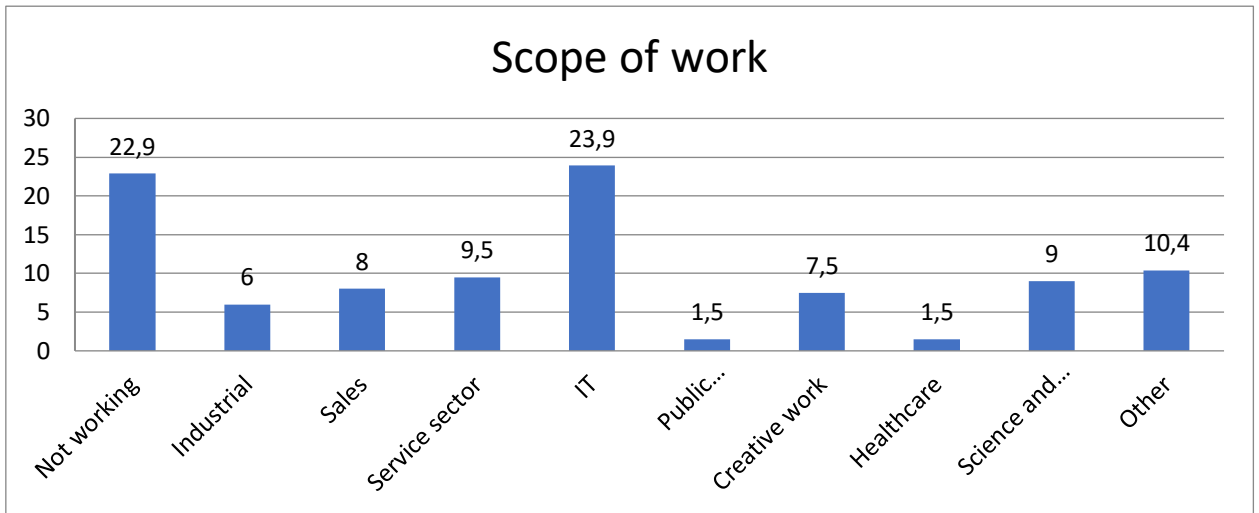
Fig. 9. Scope of Work Distribution

Fig. 9 shows the distribution of respondents by scope of work. We can note that the two largest groups are respondents who are currently not working (22.9%), as well as people working in the IT industry (23.9%).
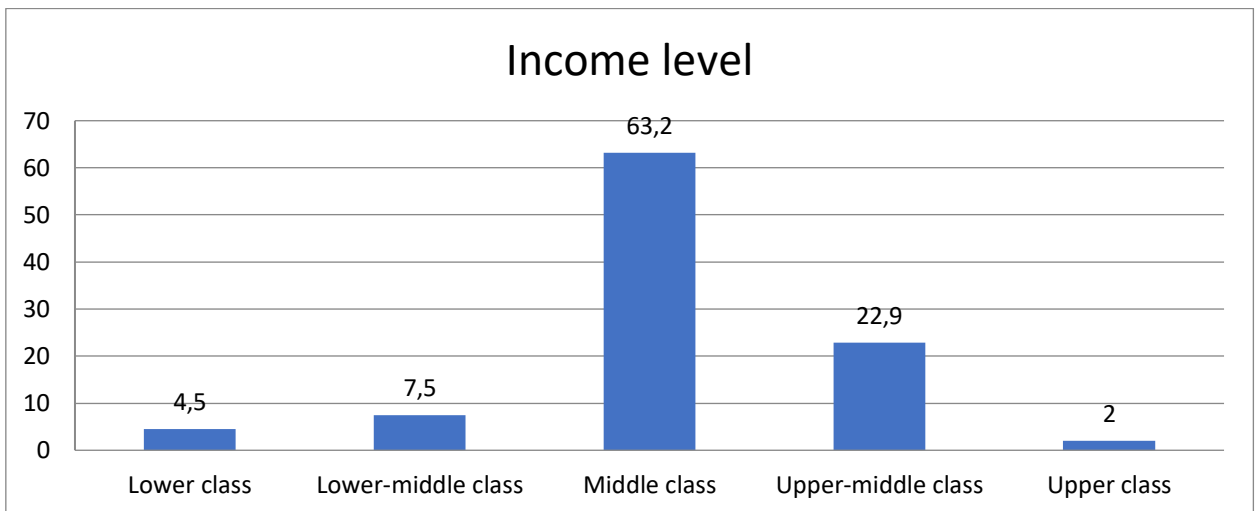
Fig. 10. Income Level Distribution

Fig. 10 shows the distribution of respondents by income level. Most respondents consider themselves to be middle class (63.2%). 22.9% of participants attributed themselves to the upper-middle class, 7.5% chose the lower-middle class option, 4.5% identified themselves as lower class, and 2% as upper class. It should be noted that in the survey, the answer options were formulated differently. For convenience, in this figure, the options were changed to income-level names.
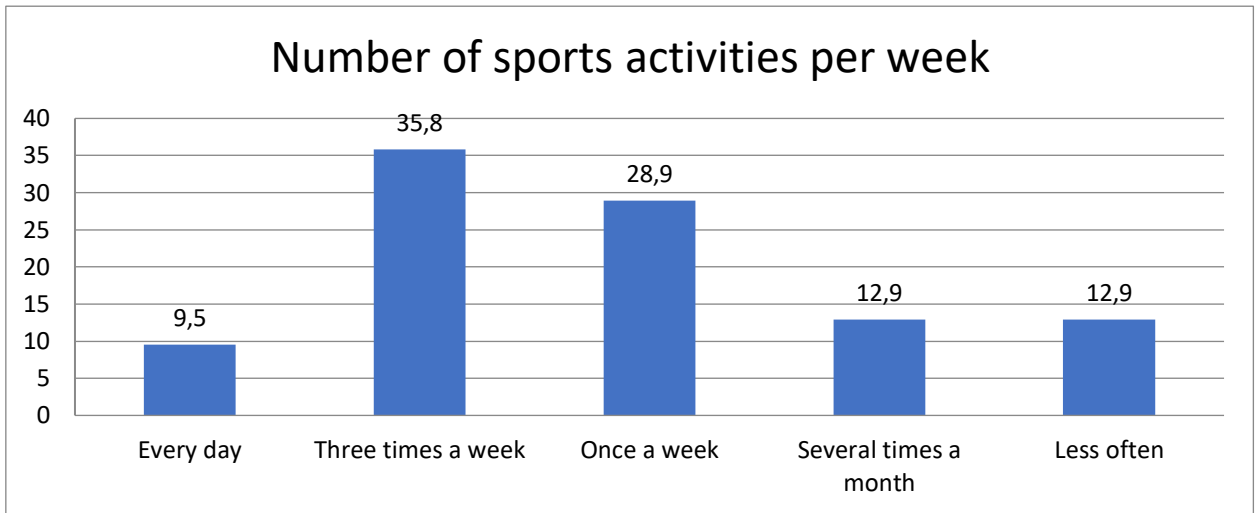
Fig. 11. Attitude to Sports Distribution

Fig. 11 shows the distribution of respondents by attitude to sport activities. Most respondents noted that they exercise 3 times a week (35.8%). Then there are the respondents who indicated that they exercise once a week (28.9%). The respondents who stated that they do sports several times a month or less than several times a month were equally distributed – 12.9%. 9.5% of respondents indicated that they do sports every day.
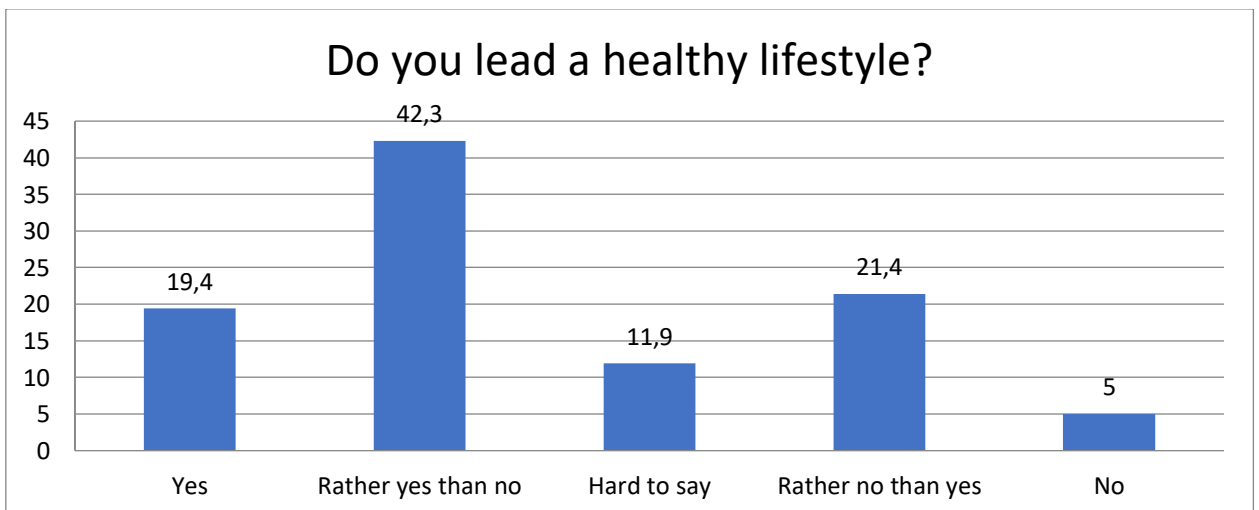
Fig. 12. Healthy Lifestyle Distribution

Fig. 12 shows the distribution of respondents by healthy/unhealthy lifestyle. Most of the respondents said that they rather lead a healthy lifestyle (42.3%), while 21.4% said that they rather do not lead a healthy lifestyle. 19.4% of respondents indicated that they definitely lead a healthy lifestyle. 11.9% found it difficult to answer this question, and 5% of respondents unequivocally answered that they do not lead a healthy lifestyle.

2.3.3. Results of Linear Regression Analysis

Hypothesis 1: "The Location Features influence the willingness of customers to pay more".

Within the consideration of this hypothesis, we will try to investigate the impact of location features on customers' willingness to pay more in the context of Russian football clubs. To test this hypothesis, a rigorous analysis using linear regression was performed, utilizing data from questionnaire items 4 and 17. The predictor variable was "Location features," while the dependent variable was "Willingness to Pay More."

The initial step involved examining the ANOVA table in the SPSS output (Table 1). The analysis revealed a highly significant p-value of 0.000. Within a confidence interval of 95%, this value falls significantly below the conventional threshold of 0.05, thus signifying that the chosen model holds considerable statistical significance in the context of the study.

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	27,322	1	27,322	16,422	,000[b]
	Residual	331,076	199	1,664		
	Total	358,398	200			

a. Dependent Variable: Willingness to Pay More

b. Predictors: (Constant), Location Features

Table 1. ANOVA[a] (H1)

Then we move on to Table 2, which shows us the Model Summary. The coefficient of multiple determination, represented as R^2, plays a crucial role in measuring the strength and extent of the relationship between variables in multiple regression. In this particular model, R^2 is calculated to be 0.721, indicating a reasonably significant amount of explained variation. However, the most noteworthy statistical measure for this study is the adjusted R-squared. The adjusted R-squared considers the number of independent variables and the size of the sample, effectively moderating the impact of the number of variables on the determination coefficient (R^2). Notably, the obtained adjusted R-squared value in this study is 0.717, signifying a robust model that accounts for approximately 72% of the observed variance.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,849ª	,721	,717	1,08984

a. Predictors: (Constant), Location Features

Table 2. Model Summary (H1)

Also, for a relevant interpretation of the model, it is necessary to assess the absence of multicollinearity, which occurs when predictor variables are highly correlated. Table 3 provided evidence that multicollinearity was not a concern, as the Tolerance value is above 0.2 and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value is below 10.

Coefficientsª

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig..	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2,101	,178		11,797	,000		
	Location Features	,247	,061	,276	4,052	,000	1,000	1,000

a. Dependent Variable: Willingness to Pay More

Table 3. Coefficients (H1)

Conclusion: the analysis of the obtained results supports the notion that location features play a significant role in influencing customers' willingness to pay more for products associated with their favorite football brands. The statistical analysis provided strong evidence in favor of the research hypothesis, which is part of our research model. Based on this, we can proceed to the next hypotheses.

Hypothesis 2: "The Semantic Association between a New Product Category and a Brand influences the Willingness of Customers to Pay More".

In exploring this hypothesis, our objective is to examine the influence of the Semantic Association between a New Product Category and a Brand on customers' willingness to pay a

higher price within the realm of Russian football clubs. To validate this hypothesis, an extensive investigation was conducted using linear regression, employing data from questionnaire items 6 and 17. The independent variable in focus was "Semantic Association between a New Product Category and a Brand," while the dependent variable was "Willingness to Pay More."

The initial phase entailed a thorough examination of the ANOVA table presented in the SPSS output (Table 4). The analysis revealed an exceptionally significant p-value of 0.000. This value, falling substantially below the conventional threshold of 0.05 within a 95% confidence interval, signifies the substantial statistical significance of the selected model in the study's context.

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	66,348	1	66,348	45,445	,000[b]
	Residual	289,072	198	1,460		
	Total	355,420	199			

a. Dependent Variable: Willingness to Pay More

b. Predictors: (Constant), Semantic Association

Table 4. ANOVA[a] (H2)

Next, our attention turns to Table 5, presenting the Model Summary. The adjusted R-squared, a measure that considers both the number of independent variables and the sample size, acts as a moderator for the influence of variables on the determination coefficient (R2). Remarkably, the calculated adjusted R-squared value in this investigation stands at 0.756, indicating a strong model that explains approximately 75.6% of the observed variance.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,872[a]	,760	,756	1,00829

a. Predictors: (Constant), Semantic Association

Table 5. Model Summary (H2)

Furthermore, it is important to examine the absence of multicollinearity for a meaningful interpretation of the model. Multicollinearity occurs when there is a high correlation among predictor variables. The results in Table 6 indicate that multicollinearity is not a concern in this study. This conclusion is supported by the Tolerance value, which is above the threshold of 0.2, and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value, which is below the cutoff of 10.

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	1,518	,199		7,630	,000		
	Semantic Association	,461	,068	,432	6,741	,000	1,000	1,000

a. Dependent Variable: Willingness to Pay More

Table 6. Coefficients (H2)

Conclusion: The findings from the data analysis provide support for the idea that the connection between a new product category and a brand has a notable impact on customers' willingness to pay a higher price for products linked to their preferred football brands. The statistical examination yielded compelling evidence in favor of the research hypothesis, which forms a crucial component of our research framework. With these results in hand, we can now move forward to explore the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 3: "The Brand Association Transfer influences the Willingness to Pay More"

In our exploration of this hypothesis, our aim is to investigate how the transfer of brand associations influences customers' willingness to pay a higher price, specifically within the domain of Russian football clubs. To validate this hypothesis, we conducted an extensive analysis using linear regression, utilizing data from questionnaire items 8 and 17. The independent variable was "Brand Association Transfer," while the dependent variable was "Willingness to Pay More."

Our initial step involved a comprehensive examination of the ANOVA table presented in the SPSS output (Table 7). The analysis revealed a remarkably significant p-value of 0.000. Within a 95% confidence interval, this value falls considerably below the conventional threshold of 0.05, indicating the substantial statistical significance of the chosen model within the context of the study.

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	33,813	1	33,813	20,731	,000[b]
	Residual	324,585	199	1,631		
	Total	358,398	200			

a. Dependent Variable: Willingness to Pay More

b. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Association Transfer

Table 7. ANOVA[a] (H3)

Moving forward, we shift our focus to Table 8, which provides an overview of the Model Summary. The adjusted R-squared, a metric that takes into account the number of independent variables and the sample size, serves as a moderator to assess the impact of variables on the determination coefficient (R2). Notably, the computed adjusted R-squared value in this study is 0.742, suggesting a robust model that accounts for approximately 74.2% of the variance observed in the data.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,864[a]	,746	,742	1,07714

a. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Association Transfer

Table 8. Model Summary (H3)

Moreover, it is crucial to assess the presence of multicollinearity in order to interpret the model accurately. Multicollinearity arises when there is a strong correlation among the predictor variables. The findings presented in Table 9 demonstrate that multicollinearity is not an issue within the context of this research. This conclusion is supported by the Tolerance value, which surpasses the threshold of 0.2, and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value, which remains below the cutoff of 10.

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig..	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	1,903	,201		9,462	,000		
	Brand Association Transfer	,430	,094	,307	4,553	,000	1,000	1,000

a. Dependent Variable: Willingness to Pay More

Table 9. Coefficients (H3)

Conclusion: The results obtained from the data analysis offer evidence in favor of the notion that the transfer of brand associations significantly influences customers' inclination to pay a premium for products associated with their favorite football brands. The statistical investigation yielded compelling support for the research hypothesis, which holds a pivotal position within our research framework. Armed with these findings, we can now delve into the exploration of subsequent hypotheses.

Hypothesis 4: "Self-Concept Connection between consumers and a sports brand has an impact on the Willingness to Pay More"

To examine this hypothesis, our goal is to understand how the connection between individuals' self-concept and Russian football clubs influences their willingness to pay a higher price. To validate this, we conducted an extensive analysis using linear regression and gathered data from questionnaire items 11 and 17. The independent variable focused on "Self-Concept Connection" while the dependent variable was "Willingness to Pay More."

Initially, we thoroughly examined the ANOVA table (Table 10) and found a highly significant p-value of 0.000. This value, falling below the conventional threshold of 0.05 within a 95% confidence interval, indicates the statistical significance of the chosen model in our study.

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	75,431	1	75,431	53,048	,000^b
	Residual	282,967	199	1,422		
	Total	358,398	200			

a. Dependent Variable: Willingness to Pay More

b. Predictors: (Constant), Self-Concept Connection

Table 10. ANOVA^a (H4)

Turning our attention to Table 11, we find the Model Summary, which includes the adjusted R-squared. This measure considers both the number of independent variables and the sample size, indicating that our model explains approximately 82.8% of the variance observed in the data.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,912a	,832	,828	1,09245

a. Predictors: (Constant), Self-Concept Connection

Table 11. Model Summary (H4)

Additionally, it is crucial to assess multicollinearity, which refers to high correlation among predictor variables. Table 12 demonstrates that multicollinearity is not a concern in our research. The Tolerance value is above 0.2, and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value remains below the cutoff of 10.

Coefficientsa

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig..	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	1,700	,164		10,392	,000		
	Self-Concept Connection	,552	,076	,459	7,283	,000	1,000	1,000

a. Dependent Variable: Willingness to Pay More

Table 12. Coefficients (H4)

Conclusion: the findings from our data analysis support the idea that the self-concept connection significantly influences customers' willingness to pay a premium for products associated with their favorite football brands. These results provide strong support for our research hypothesis and pave the way for further exploration of next hypotheses.

Hypothesis 5: "The Location Features influence the Emotional Attachment to a Brand".

Our objective is to investigate whether the features of a location have an impact on customers' emotional attachment to a brand. To validate this, we conducted a comprehensive analysis using linear regression and collected data from questionnaire items 4 and 13. The

independent variable focused on "Location Features," while the dependent variable was "Emotional Attachment to a Brand."

In our initial analysis, we carefully examined the ANOVA table (Table 13) and discovered a highly significant p-value of 0.000. This value falls below the conventional threshold of 0.05 within a 95% confidence interval, indicating the statistical significance of the chosen model in our study.

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	17,313	1	17,313	14,372	,000[b]
	Residual	239,712	199	1,205		
	Total	257,025	200			

a. Dependent Variable: Emotional Attachment to a Brand

b. Predictors: (Constant), Location Features

Table 13. ANOVA[a] (H5)

Shifting our attention to Table 14, we find the Model Summary, where the computed adjusted R-squared value stands at 0.730. This suggests that our model is robust and accounts for approximately 73% of the observed variance in the data.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,857[a]	,734	,730	1,09754

a. Predictors: (Constant), Location Features

Table 14. Model Summary (H5)

Moreover, it is essential to evaluate multicollinearity, which refers to a high correlation among predictor variables. In our research, Table 15 demonstrates that multicollinearity is not a concern. The Tolerance value exceeds 0.2, and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value remains below the cutoff of 10.

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig..	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	1,576	,152		10,398	,000		
	Location Features	,197	,052	,260	3,791	,000	1,000	1,000

a. Dependent Variable: Emotional Attachment to a Brand

Table 15. Coefficients (H5)

Conclusion: our data analysis supports the notion that location features significantly influence customers' emotional attachment to a brand. These findings strongly support our research hypothesis and our research model which open opportunities for further exploration of our hypotheses.

Hypothesis 6: "The Semantic Association between a New Product Category and a Brand influences the Emotional Attachment to a Brand".

Our aim is to investigate whether the connection between a new product category and a brand influences customers' emotional attachment to the brand. To validate this, we conducted a comprehensive analysis using linear regression and collected data from questionnaire items 6 and 13. The independent variable focused on the "Semantic Association between a New Product Category and a Brand," while the dependent variable was "Emotional Attachment to a Brand."

In our initial analysis, we thoroughly examined the ANOVA table (Table 16) and discovered a highly significant p-value of 0.000. This value falls below the conventional threshold of 0.05 within a 95% confidence interval, indicating the statistical significance of the chosen model in our study.

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	34,718	1	34,718	30,922	,000^b
	Residual	222,302	198	1,123		
	Total	257,020	199			

a. Dependent Variable: Emotional Attachment to a Brand

b. Predictors: (Constant), Semantic Association

Table 16. ANOVA^a (H6)

Shifting our attention to Table 17, we find the Model Summary, where the computed adjusted R-squared value stands at 0.772. This suggests that our model is robust and accounts for approximately 77.2% of the observed variance in the data.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,881ª	,776	,772	1,05959

a. Predictors: (Constant), Semantic Association

Table 17. Model Summary (H6)

Furthermore, it is crucial to evaluate multicollinearity, which refers to a high correlation among predictor variables. In our research, Table 18 demonstrates that multicollinearity is not a concern. The Tolerance value exceeds 0.2, and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value remains below the cutoff of 10.

Coefficientsª

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	1,194	,175		6,839	,000		
	Semantic Association	,333	,060	,368	5,561	,000	1,000	1,000

a. Dependent Variable: Emotional Attachment to a Brand

Table 18. Coefficients (H6)

Conclusion: our data analysis supports the notion that the Semantic Association between a New Product Category significantly influences customers' emotional attachment to a brand. These findings provide strong support for our research hypothesis and set the stage for further exploration of subsequent hypotheses.

Hypothesis 7: "The Brand Association Transfer influences the Emotional Attachment to a Brand"

To test this hypothesis, our objective is to explore the impact of Brand Association Transfer on customers' emotional connection to a brand. To validate this, we conducted an extensive

analysis using linear regression, utilizing data from questionnaire items 7 and 13. The independent variable focused on "Brand Association Transfer," while the dependent variable was "Emotional Attachment to a Brand."

In our initial investigation, we carefully examined the ANOVA table (Table 19) and uncovered a highly significant p-value of 0.000. This value, falling below the conventional threshold of 0.05 within a 95% confidence interval, indicates the statistical significance of the selected model in our study.

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	46,525	1	46,525	43,984	,000[b]
	Residual	210,500	199	1,058		
	Total	257,025	200			

a. Dependent Variable: Emotional Attachment to a Brand

b. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Association Transfer

Table 19. ANOVA[a] (H7)

Shifting our attention to Table 20, which presents a summary of the model, we note that the calculated adjusted R-squared value for this study is 0.837, suggesting a robust model that explains approximately 83.7% of the observed variance in the data.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,917[a]	,841	,837	1,02849

a. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Association Transfer

Table 20. Model Summary (H7)

Moreover, it is crucial to assess multicollinearity, which arises when there is a strong correlation among predictor variables. Our analysis, as presented in Table 21, indicates that multicollinearity is not a concern in our research. The Tolerance value exceeds 0.2, and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value remains below the cutoff of 10.

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig..	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	1,109	,162		6,851	,000		
	Brand Association Transfer	,504	,076	,425	6,632	,000	1,000	1,000

a. Dependent Variable: Emotional Attachment to a Brand

Table 21. Coefficients (H7)

Conclusion: the findings derived from our data analysis provide compelling evidence supporting the assumption that Brand Association Transfer significantly influences customers' emotional attachment to a brand. These results strongly corroborate our research hypothesis and pave the way for further exploration of hypotheses.

Hypothesis 8: "Self-Concept Connection between consumers and a sports brand has an impact on the Emotional Attachment to a Brand"

To investigate this hypothesis, our aim is to examine the impact of the Self-Concept on customers' emotional attachment. To validate this, we conducted an extensive analysis using linear regression, utilizing data from questionnaire items 11 and 13. The independent variable focused on the "Self-Concept Connection," while the dependent variable was "Emotional Attachment to a Brand."

Upon initial scrutiny of the ANOVA table (Table 22), we discovered a highly significant p-value of 0.000. This value, falling below the conventional threshold of 0.05 within a 95% confidence interval, indicates the statistical significance of the chosen model in our study.

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	92,226	1	92,226	111,366	,000^b
	Residual	164,799	199	,828		
	Total	257,025	200			

a. Dependent Variable: Emotional Attachment to a Brand

b. Predictors: (Constant), Self-Concept Connection

Table 22. ANOVA^a (H8)

Directing our attention to Table 23, which presents a summary of the model, we note that the calculated adjusted R-squared value for this study is 0.912, implying a robust model that accounts for approximately 91.2% of the observed variance in the data.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,957a	,916	,912	,91002

a. Predictors: (Constant), Self-Concept Connection

Table 23. Model Summary (H8)

Furthermore, it is imperative to evaluate multicollinearity, which pertains to a strong correlation among predictor variables. Our analysis, as presented in Table 24, reveals that multicollinearity is not a concern in our research. The Tolerance value exceeds 0.2, and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value remains below the cutoff of 10.

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig..	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	,940	,125		7,530	,000		
	Self-Concept Connection	,610	,058	,599	10,553	,000	1,000	1,000

a. Dependent Variable: Emotional Attachment to a Brand

Table 24. Coefficients (H8)

Conclusion: the findings derived from our data analysis provide compelling evidence supporting the proposition that the self-concept connection influences customers' emotional attachment. These results strongly support our research hypothesis and let us go further through our hypotheses.

Hypothesis 9: "The Willingness to Pay More affects the Brand Loyalty".

To investigate this hypothesis, our objective is to determine whether customers' willingness to pay more has an impact on their loyalty to a brand. To validate this, we conducted an extensive analysis using linear regression and collected data from questionnaire items 17 and 19. The

independent variable focused on "Willingness to Pay More," while the dependent variable was "Brand Loyalty."

In the initial stage, we thoroughly examined the ANOVA table (Table 25) and discovered a highly significant p-value of 0.000. This value, falling below the conventional threshold of 0.05 within a 95% confidence interval, suggests the statistical significance of the chosen model in our study.

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	130,335	1	130,335	188,965	,000^b
	Residual	137,257	199	,690		
	Total	267,592	200			

a. Dependent Variable: Brand Loyalty

b. Predictors: (Constant), Willingness to Pay More

Table 25. ANOVA^a (H9)

Moving forward, our attention turns to Table 26, which presents an overview of the Model Summary. Notably, the computed adjusted R-squared value in this study is 0.748, indicating a robust model that accounts for approximately 74.8% of the observed variance in the data.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,867^a	,752	,748	,83050

a. Predictors: (Constant), Willingness to Pay More

Table 26. Model Summary (H9)

Furthermore, it is crucial to assess multicollinearity, which pertains to a high correlation among predictor variables. Analysis conducted, as shown in Table 27, demonstrates that multicollinearity is not a concern in our research. The Tolerance value exceeds 0.2, and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value remains below the cutoff of 10.

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig..	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	,468	,133		3,522	,001		
	Willingness to Pay More	,603	,044	,698	13,746	,000	1,000	1,000

a. Dependent Variable: Brand Loyalty

Table 27. Coefficients (H9)

Conclusion: the findings derived from our data analysis provide strong evidence supporting the notion that customers' willingness to pay more significantly influences their loyalty to a brand. These results offer substantial support for our research, and that is why we continue exploration of hypotheses from our research model.

Hypothesis 10: "The Emotional Attachment to a Brand affects the Brand Loyalty".

To investigate this hypothesis, our objective is to ascertain whether customers' emotional attachment to a brand has an influence on their loyalty. To validate this, we conducted an extensive analysis using linear regression and collected data from questionnaire items 13 and 19. The independent variable focused on "Willingness to Pay More," while the dependent variable was "Brand Loyalty."

In the initial stage, we thoroughly examined the ANOVA table (Table 28) and discovered a highly significant p-value of 0.000. This value, falling below the conventional threshold of 0.05 within a 95% confidence interval, indicates the statistical significance of the chosen model in our study.

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	98,940	1	98,940	116,743	,000^b
	Residual	168,652	199	,847		
	Total	267,592	200			

a. Dependent Variable: Brand Loyalty

b. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Attachment to a Brand

Table 28. ANOVA^a (H10)

Moving forward, our attention turns to Table 29, which provides an overview of the Model Summary. Notably, the computed adjusted R-squared value in this study is 0.916, suggesting a robust model that accounts for approximately 91.6% of the variance observed in the data.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,959ª	,920	,916	,92060

a. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Attachment to a Brand

Table 29. Model Summary (H10)

Furthermore, it is crucial to assess multicollinearity, which pertains to a high correlation among predictor variables. Analysis conducted, as shown in Table 30, demonstrates that multicollinearity is not a concern in our research. The Tolerance value exceeds 0.2, and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value remains below the cutoff of 10.

Coefficientsª

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig..	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	,825	,135		6,095	,000		
	Emotional Attachment to a Brand	,620	,057	,608	10,805	,000	1,000	1,000

a. Dependent Variable: Brand Loyalty

Table 30. Coefficients (H10)

Conclusion: the findings derived from our data analysis provide strong evidence supporting the hypothesis that customers' emotional attachment to a brand significantly influences their loyalty. These results prove our research hypothesis, so we could move on to the last hypothesis.

Hypothesis 11: "The Brand Loyalty influences the willingness of consumers to recommend the brand to other people (Brand Recommendation)".

To investigate this hypothesis, our objective is to determine whether brand loyalty affects consumers' readiness to recommend the brand to their acquaintances, including new product categories. To validate this, we conducted an extensive analysis using linear regression and collected data from questionnaire items 19 and 20. The independent variable focused on "Brand Loyalty," while the dependent variable was "Brand Recommendation."

Initially, a thorough examination of the ANOVA table (Table 31) revealed a highly significant p-value of 0.000. This value, falling below the conventional threshold of 0.05 within a 95% confidence interval, indicates the statistical significance of the selected model in our study.

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	88,364	1	88,364	63,815	,000[b]
	Residual	275,556	199	1,385		
	Total	363,920	200			

a. Dependent Variable: Brand Recommendations

b. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Loyalty

Table 31. ANOVA[a] (H11)

Shifting our attention, we now turn to Table 32, which provides an overview of the Model Summary. Notably, the computed adjusted R-squared value in this study is 0.893, suggesting a robust model that accounts for approximately 89.3% of the variance observed in the data.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,947[a]	,897	,893	1,07673

a. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Loyalty

Table 32. Model Summary (H11)

Furthermore, it is crucial to assess multicollinearity, which pertains to a high correlation among predictor variables. The analysis presented in Table 33 demonstrates that multicollinearity is not a concern in our research. The Tolerance value exceeds 0.2, and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value remains below the cutoff of 10.

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	1,435	,173		8,294	,000		
	Brand Loyalty	,575	,072	,493	7,988	,000	1,000	1,000

a. Dependent Variable: Brand Recommendations

Table 33. Coefficients (H11)

Conclusion: the findings derived from our data analysis provide strong evidence supporting the notion that brand loyalty significantly influences consumers' willingness to recommend the brand to their acquaintances, including new product categories.

Section conclusion: all our proposed hypotheses have been confirmed, indicating the development of a robust research model where all included factors have proven to be significant. The constructed models for hypothesis testing have demonstrated statistical significance. It is noteworthy that, in each case, the adjusted R-squared value was remarkably high, never falling below 70% and sometimes exceeding 90%, which is a strong indicator. Thus, we have successfully validated all the proposed hypotheses, affirming the development of a proper research model.

2.3.4. Results of Cluster Analysis

While conducting cluster analysis, we selected 4 variables for which we performed clustering. Each variable corresponds to one question in the questionnaire[120]:

- Brand Association Transfer – "When buying a non-football-related product produced by your favorite football team, do you associate it with your team?";
- Self-Concept Connection – "If, when meeting a person, he/she mentions that he/she is a fan of the same football team, will you feel that something unites you?";
- Emotional Attachment to a Brand (positive) – "Evaluate the following statement: "When my favorite football team wins, it can significantly improve my day";

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[120] Appendix 1.

- Brand Loyalty – "If in the store you see a product produced in cooperation with your favorite football team, and the same products from other manufacturers, will you choose the products of your favorite sports brand, provided that it is somewhat more expensive?"

We have the following dendrogram, presented below, based on which we have identified three clusters.
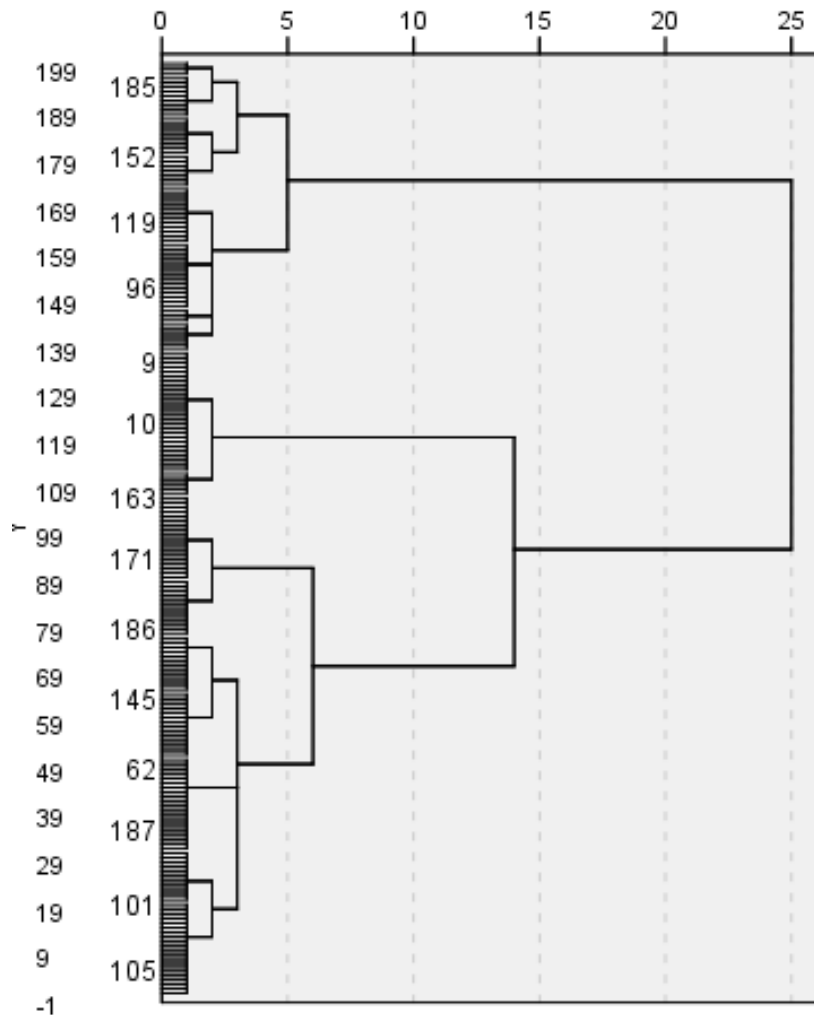
Fig. 13. Dendrogram for Defining Clusters

The frequency distribution of respondents across clusters is as follows:

Ward Method		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	31	15,4	15,5	15,5
	2	62	30,8	31,0	46,5
	3	107	53,2	53,5	100,0
	Total	201	100,0	100,0	
Total		201	100,0		

Fig. 14. Frequency Distribution by Clusters

We also weighed the average values for each cluster when answering each question concerning a particular parameter, and we got the following table:

Average Value				
Ward Method	Brand Associations Transfer	Self-Concept Connection	Emotional Attachment to a Brand (positive)	Brand Loyalty
1	1,1419	1,0781	1,0323	1,098
2	2,4032	2,7742	3,0806	3,0323
3	1,6729	1,6701	1,7850	1,9065
Total	1,9100	1,8550	2,0700	2,1150

Fig. 15. Average Values for Each Cluster

For all indicators, a lower value means that respondents agree more with statements affecting a particular parameter.

We also checked significance for each pair of clusters with help of One-Way ANOVA (using Post Hoc -> Bonferroni). There are the results:

Multiple Comparisons

Bonferroni

Dependent Variable	(I) Ward Method	(J) Ward Method	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Brand Associations Transfer	1	2	-,66129*	,19849	,003	-1,1406	-,1820
		3	,06904	,18405	,015	-,3754	,5135
	2	1	,66129*	,19849	,003	,1820	1,1406
		3	,73033*	,14402	,000	,3826	1,0781
	3	1	-,06904	,18405	,015	-,5135	,3754
		2	-,73033*	,14402	,000	-1,0781	-,3826
Self-Concept Connection_1	1	2	-1,77419*	,20013	,000	-2,2574	-1,2910
		3	-,57009*	,18557	,007	-1,0182	-,1220
	2	1	1,77419*	,20013	,000	1,2910	2,2574
		3	1,20410*	,14521	,000	,8535	1,5547
	3	1	,57009*	,18557	,007	,1220	1,0182
		2	-1,20410*	,14521	,000	-1,5547	-,8535
Emotional Attachment to a Brand (positive)	1	2	-2,04839*	,19298	,000	-2,5144	-1,5824
		3	-,75279*	,17894	,000	-1,1849	-,3207
	2	1	2,04839*	,19298	,000	1,5824	2,5144
		3	1,29560*	,14002	,000	,9575	1,6337
	3	1	,75279*	,17894	,000	,3207	1,1849
		2	-1,29560*	,14002	,000	-1,6337	-,9575
Brand Loyalty_1	1	2	-2,03226*	,20494	,000	-2,5271	-1,5374
		3	-,90654*	,19003	,000	-1,3654	-,4477
	2	1	2,03226*	,20494	,000	1,5374	2,5271
		3	1,12572*	,14870	,000	,7667	1,4848
	3	1	,90654*	,19003	,000	,4477	1,3654
		2	-1,12572*	,14870	,000	-1,4848	-,7667

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Fig. 16. Significance for Clusters

As we can see, the results are very good because we see that all pairs of clusters have significant difference; for all variables and clusters p-value is way less than required 0.05, so we can conclude about stability of clustering.

Based on this table, and on the socio-demographic distribution for each cluster, which is presented in the appendix, we can characterize each cluster as follows:

1 cluster: we could call this cluster "Ardent Fans". These are respondents who are interested in the club both as part of sports competitions and as part of the development of their brand. They feel their involvement and strong emotional attachment, and therefore they are as loyal to the brand as possible.

This group includes young people from 18 to 34 years old[121], almost all respondents included in this cluster are men[122], unmarried[123], without children[124], who in most cases are either students or employees in the company[125], consider themselves to be middle or upper middle class[126]; they often play sports[127] and, according to their own words, lead a healthy lifestyle[128].

That is, we can assume that this cluster is young people who have not yet got a family, or children, and football is their main interest, to which they devote a lot of time and attention, and therefore they are interested in the team both on the football field and from the point of view of the brand.

2 cluster: This cluster will be called "Fans with Diversified Interests". Most likely, these are people who support their favorite team, but their interest in football is one of many interests, and perhaps not even the most important. They are not inclined to fully identify themselves with the team and do not feel such emotional attachment as respondents from clusters 1 and 3 clusters do. The same applies to the parameters of emotional attachment to the brand and brand loyalty, this is the cluster with the lowest indicators among all.

The main respondents in this category are also between the ages of 18 and 34, but this cluster includes a larger number of respondents over 35 years old than all other clusters do[129]. A significant part of respondents is married and has children[130]. It is also interesting to note that this category includes more respondents than in other clusters who answered that they exercise less often than several times a month[131].

We can once again assume that these are people who are interested in football, but due to their personal concerns or due to the presence of other interests, they do not experience such emotional attachment as respondents from clusters 1 and 3.

3 cluster: We decided to formulate the name of this cluster as "Only Football Focus Fans". These are moderate fans who are most likely interested exclusively in the sports component. They have a strong sense of belonging to their favorite club (a low value in the "Self-Concept

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[121] Appendix 2. Fig. 19
[122] Appendix 2. Fig. 20
[123] Appendix 2. Fig. 22
[124] Appendix 2. Fig. 23
[125] Appendix 2. Fig. 24
[126] Appendix 2. Fig. 25
[127] Appendix 2. Fig. 26
[128] Appendix 2. Fig. 27
[129] Appendix 2. Fig. 19
[130] Appendix 2. Fig. 22 and Fig. 23
[131] Appendix 2. Fig. 26

Connection" indicator), and they feel an emotional attachment to their favorite team when it concerns positive emotions. However, these indicators, along with Brand Associations Transfer and Brand Loyalty, are lower for this cluster than for the first, but significantly higher than for the second.

If we talk about the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents from this cluster, it can be noted that men and women are roughly equally divided here, and it turns out that most of the women who took the survey fell into this cluster[132]. It has the largest number of married people with children, sometimes even more than 1, compared to other clusters[133]. There are also more people in this cluster than in other clusters who rarely exercise (several times a month and less often)[134] and who, by their admission, cannot say that they lead a healthy lifestyle[135].

We can assume that these people are interested in football, especially watching it; they feel emotionally involved, especially with positive emotions, and, most likely, their interest is mainly related to the opportunity to take a break from everyday worries while watching, but they are not very interested in anything that goes beyond these limits. They are not fans of sports as such, they do not play sports very often themselves, most likely, they just enjoy supporting their favorite team.

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[132] Appendix 2. Fig. 20
[133] Appendix 2. Fig. 22 and Fig. 23
[134] Appendix 2. Fig. 26
[135] Appendix 2. Fig. 27

CONCLUSION ON CHAPTER 2

Firstly, this chapter offers a rationale for the chosen methodology, including an analysis of its advantages and disadvantages. A combination of methods was utilized. We initially justified the use of benchmarking to examine the practices of leading European football clubs and analyze the strategies employed by top sports organizations to cultivate strong brand loyalty among consumers, as well as their extension into new product categories. Following that, we explored the benefits and drawbacks of employing online surveys to gather respondent opinions, ultimately concluding that this method would be effective for our research. We then provided a detailed examination of linear regression analysis, which is crucial for testing the hypotheses derived from our research model. Additionally, we described the benefits of utilizing cluster analysis and specified its relevance to our investigation.

Next, we described the specifics surrounding the online survey, including the candidate selection process, the principles used to form the questionnaire, and the communication methods employed to distribute the survey to respondents. The participants in our survey are devoted football fans who support Russian football clubs. To ensure the survey results are pertinent, we exclusively recruited fans of prominent football clubs who hold a steadfast position and aspire to extend their brand beyond the realm of sports alone. We gathered respondents through personal connections and thematic online communities dedicated to specific teams.

The questionnaire includes questions aimed at understanding the unique aspects of respondents' purchasing behavior regarding products under their favorite club's brand, as well as their willingness to recommend products associated with their beloved team's brand. Additionally, we assess the product categories that fans perceive as acceptable and those they believe could potentially harm the club's image. Furthermore, we have included socio-demographic questions into the survey to segment the audience and identify the clusters, providing valuable practical insights for sports organizations in the next chapter.

Lastly, we examined the key findings from all the methods used in our research. Our benchmarking analysis revealed that, apart from the overarching factors that influence the effectiveness of brand loyalty strategies outlined in our research model, it is crucial to consider the unique context and characteristics of individual football clubs. Each club strategically emphasizes its strengths, effectively masking any existing challenges or issues.

Our survey involved the participation of 201 individuals, with no disqualifications. The two most prevalent age groups among the respondents were 18 to 24 years old (51.7%) and 25 to 34 years old (37.8%). In terms of gender, 59.2% were male and 40.8% were female. Most

respondents held a higher education degree (79.1%). The respondents were primarily from St. Petersburg (70.1%) and Moscow (19.4%). Among them, 64.7% were unmarried, while 13.9% were married. A significant portion of the respondents were employed (46.8%), with the IT industry being the most popular (23.9%). The majority of respondents identified themselves as belonging to the middle class (63.2%). Regarding their attitude towards sports, most respondents engaged in physical activities either three times a week (35.8%) or once a week (28.9%). Furthermore, a significant proportion of the respondents considered themselves to lead a healthy lifestyle (42.3%).

All the hypotheses we formulated have been supported by the results of the linear regression analysis, confirming the strength of our research model and the significance of all the factors included. The statistical analysis of the constructed models for hypothesis testing has shown their significance. It is worth noting that in each instance, the adjusted R-squared value was consistently high, with values never dropping below 70% and sometimes surpassing 90%, indicating a strong regression. As a result, we have effectively validated all the proposed hypotheses, further reinforcing the resilience of our research model.

As part of the cluster analysis, we divided the respondents who completed the survey into distinct segments. We selected four variables ("Brand Association Transfer," "Self-Concept Connection," "Emotional Attachment to a Brand (positive)," and "Brand Loyalty") for clustering purposes. Based on the generated dendrogram, we formed three clusters. Furthermore, we examined the significance of each pair of clusters and found that there was a significant difference between all pairs. Consequently, we identified three groups of respondents, which we labeled as "ardent fans," "fans with diversified interests," and "only football focus fans."

CHAPTER 3. DEVELOPMENT OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, we will indicate the theoretical contribution of this study. After that, we formulate practical implications that can be made based on our research. Finally, we will mention the limitations of the research as well as possibilities of the further research.

3.1. Theoretical Contribution

Our research aims to address the research gap identified at the beginning of our study, which pertains to the financing of sports organizations beyond sports results and sponsorship deals. Specifically, we focus on increasing profits by enhancing the effectiveness of PR and marketing departments in sports organizations, particularly through successful brand extension strategies that foster consumer loyalty. This study stands out as one of the few works in this field, considering the Russian context as well.

Moreover, this research is highly relevant, given the prevailing trend in sports for organizations to achieve full self-sufficiency. Many consider this the primary challenge in Russian football, as clubs heavily rely on government funding or affiliated companies. As a result, management efficiency suffers, impeding the exploration of new effective solutions that could generate additional revenue.

Furthermore, there are additional external factors at play. Firstly, many Russian sports organizations, including all Russian football clubs, are currently barred from participating in international competitions. As mentioned in the introduction, citing the expert assessment of Denis Lapshin, a specialist in the PR department of FC Zenit, this constitutes a significant portion of revenue for football clubs. Russian clubs find themselves in a situation where this revenue stream is no longer accessible. Additionally, another important source of income is ticket and season pass sales. However, recently, Russia introduced a Fan ID law, which was met with strong opposition within the fan community. Since the winter of 2023, all active fan groups of leading Russian clubs have been boycotting attending football matches, resulting in a sharp decline in ticket sales. To attract people to the stadiums, football clubs are compelled to reduce ticket prices or even distribute them for free.

In such a situation, it can be expected that there will be an increased interest in the academic community regarding how football clubs should adapt to these new realities and find new ways to attract finances, as well as how this can be achieved. If this occurs in the near future, this study

can serve as a foundation or motivation for other researchers to further develop the ideas formulated here.

Furthermore, during the course of the research, we have reached the conclusion that we have developed a robust research model and all our hypotheses have been confirmed. However, this does not mean that the model cannot be further improved. Based on our model, assumptions can be made, for example, regarding the addition of new factors, which can also demonstrate their relevance through testing.

Additionally, our research work has certain limitations, which will be specified in more detail shortly. One of them is that our study directly pertains only to Russian football clubs. The theoretical contribution of our research lies in its potential to serve as a foundation for conducting similar studies in other countries, considering local specificities.

To sum up, we can state that our research has the potential to make a theoretical contribution to a highly relevant issue that is expected to receive more attention in the near future. It can also serve as a theoretical foundation for various future studies on the topic we have examined.

3.2. Practical Implications

Based on the confirmed and promising results of our model, it is evident that the factors identified within it have a significant impact on establishing brand loyalty in the sports sphere. Thus, the tested and validated model serves as a ready-made strategy for sports organizations to cultivate brand loyalty, extend into new product categories, and boost financial gains. As a result, we can offer several recommendations for Russian football clubs to devise strategies that enhance loyalty levels and tap into new market segments.

However, let us begin by highlighting some recommendations based on the conducted benchmarking. As we have discovered, despite the presence of general factors influencing brand loyalty formation, it is always important to consider the context and specific characteristics of each sports organization. To achieve this, it is crucial to understand:

- What are the strengths of the football club that set it apart from others?
- What are the weaknesses of the football club that may discourage fans?
- What is the current image of the team among supporters?

- How can this image be utilized to emphasize strengths and mitigate weaknesses?

Based on this, the club can strategize which events will help address specific tasks. In fact, despite their differences, parallels can be drawn between Russian football clubs and the teams we examined in the benchmarking process:

- The case of Real Madrid bears the closest resemblance to the situation with FC Zenit. Both clubs have a rich history and impressive current results, with FC Zenit arguably outperforming all other teams from a sporting perspective. Consequently, Zenit can draw from Real Madrid's experience in crafting campaigns that cultivate an image of success, prestige, and excellence. This approach also helps mitigate negative perceptions from certain fans who believe Zenit's achievements are solely due to significant financial investments. Financial stability does not contradict such an image but rather complements it.

- The case of Manchester United is similar to the situations of major Moscow clubs such as Spartak and CSKA. Both teams have a rich history with significant victories but have struggled to achieve notable success in recent times. In this regard, the strategy employed by Manchester United, emphasizing their glorious past and highlighting their legendary status, can be beneficial. This approach helps alleviate the impact of current setbacks by emphasizing that there are things more important than intermediate achievements.

- The case of PSG is similar to a situation that once existed in Russian football with FC Anzhi, where a significant amount of money was invested in a previously unknown club. However, the Anzhi project was eventually closed, so this example is not applicable. Among the current teams, this case can be compared to FC Krasnodar, which has a relatively short history as the club was recently founded by Russian businessman Sergey Galitsky. It is evident that the club cannot build brand loyalty solely based on achievements that have not yet been realized. Therefore, it can draw from the experience of PSG, which showcases itself as a fashionable and modern football club with a promising future both on and off the field.

Certainly, this does not mean that organizations should choose only one of the described strategies and strictly adhere to it. It is necessary to stay attuned and closely monitor how fans' opinions are changing to not miss the moment when adjustments to the strategy are needed. We simply aim to emphasize the importance of understanding in advance what brand loyalty should be, taking into account the context. Additionally, despite the uniqueness of foreign teams, it is

possible to draw from their experiences if there is an understanding that, to some extent, the situations are similar.

Furthermore, in order to create and maintain a high level of brand loyalty, it is crucial for the club not to disappoint fans with various new initiatives, such as entering new product categories. As we mentioned earlier, brand loyalty and brand extension opportunities are closely interconnected. Therefore, to ensure that such initiatives contribute to attracting new audiences rather than disappointing existing ones, it is important to take into account the fans' opinions. In our research, we have identified which product categories would interest fans if clubs were to produce goods in those areas and which categories would cause confusion and be deemed unacceptable by the fans. Based on the survey results, we have compiled a table that we are ready to present, illustrating which categories hold potential and which ones elicit a negative response.
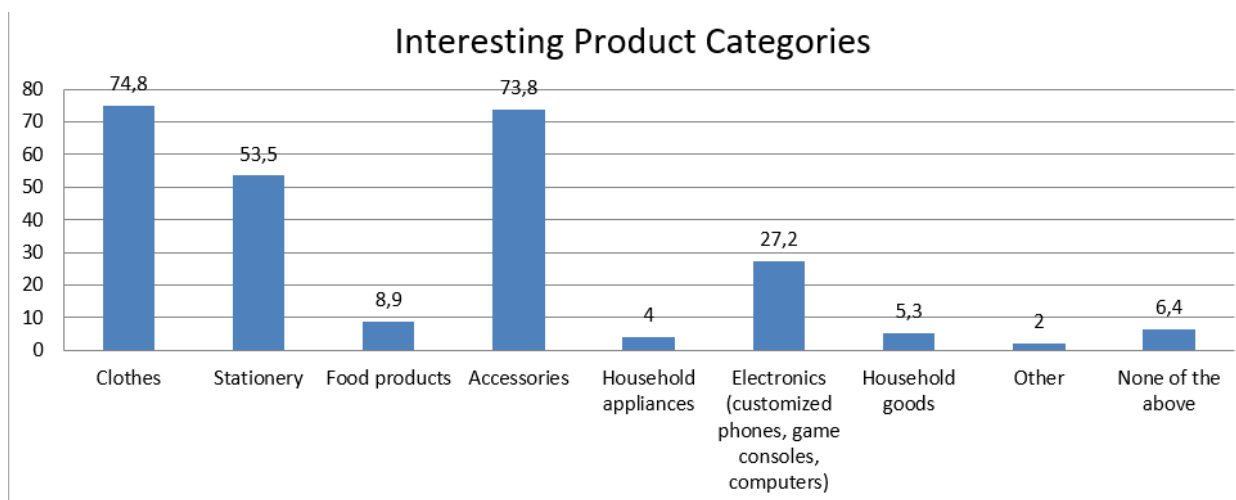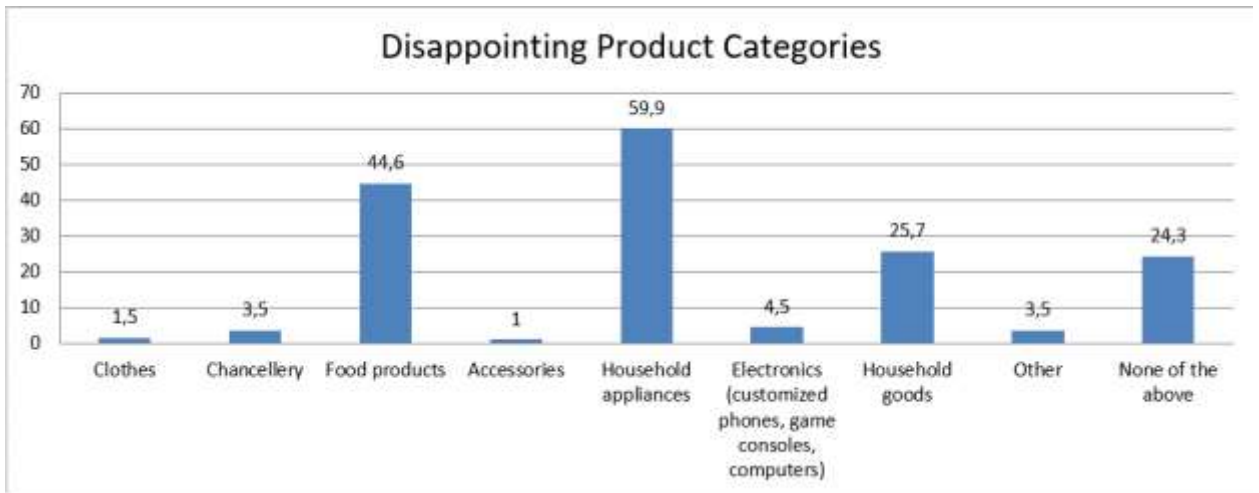

Fig. 17. Product Categories Interesting to Fans

Based on Fig. 17, it is evident that the three most appealing spheres to fans, where they would be pleased to see products released under their favorite club's brand, are as follows:

- Clothes (74,8%)
- Stationery (53,5%)
- Accessories (73,8%)

Fig. 18. Product Categories Disappointing Fans

Based on Fig. 18, we can observe that the categories in which fans do not want to see products released under the brand of their favorite football club, as it would disappoint them, are as follows:

- Food Products (44,6%)

- Household Appliances (59,9%)

- Household Goods (25,7%)

Based on our research, we can provide recommendations on how strategies may differ for different consumer groups identified through cluster analysis. Undoubtedly, the most convenient group through which brand loyalty can be easily enhanced is the "Ardent Fans." However, it is important to note that even in our survey, this cluster is the smallest in size, so focusing solely on it would be inadequate. It is necessary to consider all three groups of fans in order to formulate an effective brand loyalty and brand extension strategy. With this in mind, we have compiled a Marketing Mix Table that outlines key considerations for Product, Price, Promotion, and Place parameters for each of the identified fan groups.

Segments	**Ardent Fans**	**Fans with Diversified Interests**	**Only Football Focus Fans**
Product	Any product produced by the club	Joint collaborations with other brands	Only products directly related to football
Price	Ready to overpay in comparison with other products of the same category	Not ready to overpay	Ready to overpay only for football-related goods
Promotion	Promotion via club's social media Mobile Application	Advertising on television Cooperation with online e-commerce platforms	Advertising on television Fan zones and match events

	Organization of special events with the participation of the team or players Loyalty Bonus programs	Partnerships with retail stores Partnership with local bars and restaurants Participation in charity events	Organization of special events with the participation of the team or players Stadium tours
Place	Club Museum Stadium Online store	Fan shops in the city Online platforms Retail partners	Stadium Fan zone Fan shops in training centers

Table 34. Marketing Mix Table

Undoubtedly, the findings from Table 34 do not imply that these are the only options for each group or that they are the sole means of enhancing loyalty. Furthermore, as observed, certain recommendations may overlap for different groups. We have highlighted the key points that can be derived from our research.

When considering the Product element, within the framework of cluster analysis, we have identified that respondents from the "Ardent fans" category are interested in any merchandise released by their favorite football club, as they are invested in the team both on and off the field. The "Fans with Diversified Interests" segment exhibited the lowest brand loyalty due to football not being their sole or primary interest. Therefore, collaborations with other brands may appeal to them. Firstly, this increases the likelihood of them becoming aware of the product, and secondly, there is a chance that the brand partner is also somehow connected to the fans' interests. The "Only Football Focus Fans" segment indicated that their primary interest lies solely in the sporting aspect, thus they are likely to be interested only in products directly related to football (scarves, club-logo shirts, flags, etc.).

When considering the Price element, earlier in the research, we determined that the "Ardent Fans" segment is willing to pay a premium for any products associated with their beloved football club due to their high emotional attachment and self-concept connection. Fans from the "Fans with Diversified Interests" group are unlikely to pay more for products released by the football club compared to similar products in the market by other manufacturers. The "Only Football Focus Fans" segment is willing to pay a premium only if the product is football-related (as mentioned in the previous paragraph). Otherwise, they will not be willing to pay more.

Regarding the Promotion category, it is worth noting that the options we provided for the "Ardent Fans" segment are based on the fact that these fans are most familiar with all the communication channels of the football club. They follow the club's social media accounts, have

the mobile application downloaded, and will always be informed about various events involving the team players. It also makes sense to create loyalty reward programs specifically for them, as they are the most likely to purchase products released by the football club. Therefore, implementing different loyalty programs, such as cumulative bonuses, can contribute to further increasing sales. For the "Fans with Diversified Interests" segment, the principle is to promote products through various channels to increase the likelihood of reaching them. Therefore, we identified prominent channels such as television, online e-commerce platforms, physical stores, bars, and restaurants. Additionally, engaging such fans can be achieved through mass promotions and campaigns. As for the "Only Football Focus Fans" segment, it's straightforward: everything related to football should be emphasized. This includes television advertisements since fans in this category enjoy watching football matches, various stadium events as they attend matches, and player-related activities since it directly relates to the game itself.

Based on our insights from the Promotion aspect, it logically leads us to consider the element of Place. For "Ardent Fans," virtually any place would work: the club's museum, the stadium, and the club's online store, which these fans are aware of as they follow the team on social media. For "Fans with Diversified Interests," it should be accessible locations such as city center stores (since they may not necessarily visit the stadium), online platforms, and retail stores where various products, not just those from the football club, are available. As for "Only Football Focus Fans," it encompasses everything related to the game: the stadium, fan zones, as well as stores near training centers where fans can engage in football activities themselves.

3.3. Limitations of the research

In this section, we will discuss some limitations of the research. Firstly, there are certain socio-demographic limitations. We have a limited number of respondents above the age of 40, among whom there are also football fans. This is due to the difficulty of conducting an online survey for this particular group of respondents. Despite the majority of fans falling within the age categories up to 35 years, it is important to consider this limitation.

Additionally, there is a geographical limitation. Firstly, this study focuses only on Russian football clubs, and if the research model is to be applied to other countries, the specific characteristics of each country and its fans need to be taken into account. Furthermore, most of our respondents are either from St. Petersburg or Moscow. This is because the relevant football clubs included in our survey are based in these cities, and therefore, most fans reside there as well.

However, it is important to consider this limitation, as there are also fans of the surveyed clubs residing in other regions.

To sum up, it is worth mentioning these limitations. However, they do not hinder the conducted analysis as there is always room for improvement. In future research, these limitations could be addressed to further study brand loyalty formation in the sports industry in a broader context.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on exploring the features of brand loyalty formation in the sports sphere, using Russian football clubs as a case study. The research accomplished its goal and objectives. The main goal was to develop an empirical model for successful brand loyalty formation in the sports sphere. In addition, the objectives that were dedicated to conducting a literature review, benchmarking, constructing and testing the model, segmenting the participants through cluster analysis, and providing recommendations to Russian football clubs, were also achieved. The data for the study was collected through an online survey.

In the first chapter of our research, we explored the evolution and understanding of the term "brand loyalty", analyzing various perspectives and concepts. Throughout this chapter, we emphasized the vital role of brand loyalty in facilitating successful brand extensions. Additionally, we examined the specific characteristics of brand loyalty in the sports industry. These investigations allowed us to identify the components comprising our research model for brand loyalty formation. Through expert assessments, including insights from Denis Lapshin, a leading specialist in the PR department of FC Zenit, and thorough analysis of relevant scientific papers, we identified location features, semantic association between a new product category and a brand, brand association transfer, and self-concept connection as the factors in our research model. We also selected willingness to pay more and emotional attachment to a brand as moderators. Ultimately, the logical outcome of our constructed model is brand loyalty itself, which, fueled by consumers' willingness to recommend the brand to others, creates favorable conditions for sports organizations to enter new product category markets. Based on the developed model, we formulated hypotheses that reflect the relationships among the components of the model.

In the second chapter, we provided a detailed overview of our research methodology, including an assessment of its strengths and drawbacks. We extensively discussed the online survey and its specific aspects, such as the selection process for participants, the questionnaire design principles, and the methods used to distribute the survey and collect responses. Furthermore, we presented the key findings derived from the various research methods employed. Our benchmarking analysis highlighted the importance of considering the unique context and characteristics of individual football clubs. Notably, all the hypotheses we formulated received support from the results of the linear regression analysis, confirming the robustness of our research model and the significance of all the factors included. Additionally, through the cluster analysis, we categorized the survey respondents into distinct segments, which we named "Ardent Fans," "Fans with Diversified Interests," and "Only Football Focus Fans."

In the third chapter of our research, we reflected on the theoretical contribution of our study and concluded that it could serve as a solid foundation for future research on the examined topic. Primarily, this is attributed to the success of our validated research model, which can be further developed and refined by researchers, for instance, through the testing of new factors. Additionally, in this chapter, we formulated practical implications for Russian football clubs. Firstly, we emphasized how the experiences of foreign clubs can be utilized. After that we highlighted which product categories would be of interest to loyal fans in the case of brand extension, as well as those that they would consider unacceptable. Moreover, we provided recommendations for each fan segment based on the 4P concept (marketing mix). Lastly, there are some limitations of our work, such as the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents and geographical constraints. Therefore, future research should address these limitations to enhance the validity of the findings obtained.

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APPENDIX 1. QUESTIONNAIRE (TRANSLATED)

Hello! Thank you for participating in the survey, the purpose of which is to study various models of the attitude of football fans to goods produced by sports organizations. Completing the questionnaire will take quite a bit of time. The survey is anonymous, all data is confidential, and will not be used for any purposes other than research. Thanks!

1. Are you interested in football?
• Yes
• No
• I find it difficult to answer

2. Which Russian football team do you sympathize with (or specify your option)?
• Zenit
• Spartak
• CSKA
• Dynamo
• Lokomotiv
• Rostov
• Krasnodar
• Ural
• Another option: _____

3. How often do you watch the matches of your favorite football team?
• I try to watch all the matches
• Approximately 2-3 times a month
• Only important games with principled opponents (1-2 times in 2 months)
• I practically don't watch (2-3 times in six months)

4. Do you often see the attributes of your favorite football team in the place where you live (city/district)?
• Yes
• Yes rather than no
• I find it difficult to answer
• More likely no than yes
• No

5. Evaluate the following statement: "If I find myself in a city where a principled opponent of my favorite football team is playing, and I publicly wear the attributes of my favorite team, then this may lead to misunderstanding or conflict"
• I completely agree
• Agree
• I don't have a definite opinion
• Disagree
• Totally disagree

6. Evaluate the following statement: "When buying products that have the logo of my favorite team, I would prefer that this product be in any way connected with football"
• Yes
• Yes rather than no
• I find it difficult to answer
• More likely no than yes
• No

7. Would you like to use products produced by your favorite football club that have nothing to do with football?
• Yes
• Yes rather than no
• I find it difficult to answer
• Probably not
• No

8. When buying a non-football-related product produced by your favorite football team, do you associate it with your team?
• Yes
• Yes rather than no
• I find it difficult to answer
• More likely no than yes
• No

9. Specify which category of products produced in cooperation with your favorite football club, would you be willing to use?
• Clothing
• Office
• Food products
• Accessories (key chains, phone cases, etc.)
• Household appliances
• Electronics (customized phones, game consoles, computers)
• Household goods
• There is no such product category
• Another option: _____

10. Which product categories, in your opinion, are unacceptable for a football club, and would you be upset if your favorite football club produced goods in this industry?
• Clothing
• Office
• Food products
• Accessories (key chains, phone cases, etc.)
• Household appliances
• Electronics (customized phones, game consoles, computers)
• Household goods

• There is no such product category

• Another option: _____

11. If, when meeting a person, he mentions that he is a fan of the same football team, will you feel that something unites you?

• Yes

• Yes rather than no

• I find it difficult to answer

• More likely no than yes

• No

12. When meeting other people (informally) Will you say in the story about yourself: "I am a fan of the football team"?

• Yes

• Yes rather than no

• I find it difficult to answer

• More likely no than yes

• No

13. Evaluate the following statement: "When my favorite football team wins, it can significantly improve my day"

• Totally agree

• Agree

• I don't have a definite opinion

• Disagree

• Totally disagree

14. Evaluate the following statement: "When my favorite football team loses, it can spoil my mood for a while"

• Totally agree

• Agree

• I don't have a definite opinion

• Disagree

• Totally disagree

15. Do you agree with the statement that your favorite football team occupies a significant place in your life?

• Totally agree

• Agree

• I don't have a definite opinion

• Disagree

• Totally disagree

16. If in the store you see a product released under the auspices of your favorite football club, and the same products from other manufacturers, will you choose the products of your favorite sports brand, all other things being equal (price, quality, etc.)?

• Yes

• Yes rather than no

• I find it difficult to answer

• Probably not

• No

17. If in the store you see a product produced under the auspices of your favorite football club, and the same products from other manufacturers, will you choose the products of your favorite sports brand, provided that the commercial products produced under the auspices of your favorite team are more expensive, but at the same time it is somehow related to football (for example, refers to the nickname of the team, etc.)?

• Yes

• Yes rather than no

• I find it difficult to answer

• Probably not

• No

18. How much are you willing to pay more for a product produced under the auspices of your favorite football club, compared to the same products from other manufacturers?

• Not ready to pay more

•   1-10%

•   10-20%

•   20-30%

•   30-40%

•   40-50%

•   50% or more

19. Can you say that the brand of your favorite football team has a good reputation (in terms of the production of goods, not in the sports component)?

• Yes

• Yes rather than no

• I find it difficult to answer

• Probably not

• No

20. Are you ready to recommend the products of your favorite sports brand (including those not related to football) to friends?

• Yes

• Yes rather than no

• I find it difficult to answer

• Probably not

• No

21. On a 10-point scale, estimate the probability that you will advise the products of your favorite sports brand to your surroundings.

Point	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Answer										

22. Please indicate your age group
- Less than 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55 and more

23. Please indicate your gender
- Male
- Woman

24. Please indicate the level of your education
- Incomplete / full / vocational secondary
- Incomplete higher education
- Higher education

25. Please indicate in which city you live (or have lived most of your life).
- Moscow
- Saint Petersburg
- Novosibirsk
- Yekaterinburg
- Kazan
- Nizhny Novgorod
- Chelyabinsk
- Krasnoyarsk
- Samara
- Ufa
- Rostov-on-Don
- Another option: _____

26. Please indicate your marital status
- I am legally married
- I am legally married, but we live separately with my spouse
- I am in an unregistered marriage
- divorced
- was not married
- widow (widower)
- other _____

27. Please indicate your professional status:
• student
• company employee
• freelancer
• private entrepreneur
• unemployed
• retired
• Another option: _____

28. In what field do you work?
• Not working
• Industry
• Trade
• Service sector
• IT
• Public Administration
• Creativity
• Healthcare
• Science and Education
• Other: _____

29. How would you characterize your income level?
• Money is barely enough only for the most inexpensive: food, clothes, hygiene
• There is enough money for the necessary food and necessary clothes
• There is enough money for food and clothing, but large purchases have to be planned in advance
• There is enough money for large purchases, but the purchase of a good car or apartment requires savings or a loan
• I can afford any purchases without having to plan in advance and accumulate the necessary amount

30. How often do you exercise?
• Every day
• Three times a week
• Once a week
• Several times a month
• Less frequently

31. Can you say about yourself that you lead a healthy lifestyle?
• Yes
• Yes rather than no
• I find it difficult to answer
• Probably not
• No

APPENDIX 2. CLUSTER DISTRIBUTION BY SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PARAMETERS

Quantity

		Age							Total
		18 or less	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 and more	Total
Ward Method	1	0	13	18	0	0	0	0	31
	2	2	32	18	8	1	0	1	62
	3	1	59	39	4	3	1	0	107
Total		3	104	75	12	4	1	1	200

Fig. 19. Cluster Distribution by Age

Quantity

		Sex		Total
		Men	Women	Total
Ward Method	1	29	2	31
	2	34	28	62
	3	55	52	107
Total		118	82	200

Fig. 20. Cluster Distribution by Sex

Quantity

		Education			Total
		Incomplete / complete / vocational secondary	Incomplete tertiary	Tertiary	Total
Ward Method	1	0	1	30	31
	2	3	9	50	62
	3	2	27	78	107
Total		5	37	158	200

Fig. 21. Cluster Distribution by Education

Quantity

		Marital status						Total
		Legally married	Legally married but live separately	Unregistered marriage	Divorced	Single	Widow (widower)	
Ward Method	1	0	0	1	0	30	0	31
	2	12	0	7	4	38	1	62
	3	16	3	18	0	70	0	107
Total		28	3	26	4	138	1	200

Fig. 22. Cluster Distribution by Marital Status

Quantity

		Amount of children				Total
		None	1	2	3 and more	
Ward Method	1	31	0	0	0	31
	2	55	3	3	1	62
	3	98	3	5	1	107
Total		184	6	8	2	200

Fig. 23. Cluster Distribution by Amount of Children

Quantity

		Professional status					Total
		Student	Employee in the company	Freelancer	Entrepreneur	Unemployed	
Ward Method	1	11	19	0	1	0	31
	2	22	30	5	5	0	62
	3	39	47	14	5	2	107
Total		72	96	19	11	2	200

Fig. 24. Cluster Distribution by Professional Status

Quantity

		Income level					
		Lower class	Lower-middle class	Middle class	Upper-middle class	Upper class	Total
Ward Method	1	0	0	27	4	0	31
	2	6	7	32	16	1	62
	3	3	8	68	26	2	107
Total		9	15	127	46	3	200

Fig. 25. Cluster Distribution by Income Level

Quantity

		Attitude to sports					
		Every day	Three times a week	Once a week	Several times a month	Less often	Total
Ward Method	1	0	16	13	0	2	31
	2	9	21	13	5	14	62
	3	10	34	32	21	10	107
Total		19	71	58	26	26	200

Fig. 26. Cluster Distribution by Attitude to Sports Activities

Quantity

		Healthy lifestyle					
		Yes	Rather yes than no	Hard to say	Rather no than yes	No	Total
Ward Method	1	5	23	1	2	0	31
	2	16	19	7	15	5	62
	3	17	43	16	26	5	107
Total		38	85	24	43	10	200

Fig. 27. Cluster Distribution by Healthy Lifestyle