

## EXPLAINING TEAM IDENTIFICATION: BASKING IN REFLECTED GLORY REVISITED

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### Abstract

#### Theoretical background

Studies involving team identification show that spectators high in team identification are more likely to be high in direct- and indirect sport consumption, pay more for tickets, spend more money on merchandise, and stay loyal to their favorite team in periods of poor performance. Obviously, team identification is important in terms of explaining spectator behavior, and possibly securing a stable source of income for the clubs. However, antecedents of team identification appear to be poorly understood (Dimmock & Gucciardi, 2008). In a recent study on Norwegian football spectators, Mehus and Osborn (2010), found that team identification is marginally influenced by social background, with motives of excitement turning out to be the strongest predictor of team identification. However, the study was not able to control for the effect of a team having a winning- or a losing record. According to Cialdini et al. (1976), spectators align themselves more closely with a winning team than a losing team, creating the effect of Basking in Reflected Glory – BIRGing. It was hypothesized that spectators following teams with a winning record would identify more strongly with their favorite team compared to spectators following a team with a losing record. The present study is considered a follow-up study from that of Mehus and Osborn (2010), including teams with both winning- and losing records.

### Methodology

The data comes from an email-survey of more than 12000 Norwegian football spectators. Fourteen of the 16 elite clubs provided us with email addresses to all their spectators who purchased tickets and season cards during the 2010 season. Questions concerning Team identification (Wann & Branscombe, 1993), motives for watching football (Mehus, 2005), importance of facilities and importance of the quality of the match were included. In this paper, only teams accumulating more than 500 respondents were included, totalling 9632 respondents from 10 teams.

### Discussion

All independent variables turned out to have significant impact on Team identification. Male spectators identify more strongly with their favorite team compared to female spectators. Age and education have a negative impact, indicating that young spectators with lower educational attainment identify strongly with their favorite team. Excitement motives turned out to be the strongest predictor of team identification, replicating findings from the study of Mehus and Osborn (2010). Clearly, placing on the table is important. However, the effect is opposite of what was hypothesized on the basis of BIRGing (Cialdini et al. 1976). Placing low on the table has a positive effect on Team identification. The importance of excitement motives could be part of the explanation, since fighting for survival in the lower part of the table is experienced to be more threatening to the identity and serve to activate Team identification in a stronger fashion. However, spectators saying that the quality of opponents and importance of the match matters, score lower on Team identification. The contradictory results suggest that creating Team identification is a complex matter, and strategies for facilitating Team identification are discussed.

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