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### The Tourism Branding Influence on Country Brand Strategy: The Case Study of United Kingdom Foot bal

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#### Abstract

The current age is the most prosperous for English football having a distinct culture from the UK and having a well-known and complicated league structure. In addition to being profitable, this success has assisted the economy in overcoming recent financial challenges. The influence of football teams on destination branding is still a worry despite their capacity to create income and support the faltering economy, and further study is required. Given that cities strive to have distinctive brand identities and use various branding techniques, this research investigates the function of football teams in destination branding. They are focusing on the influence of football clubs through cross-case studies and in-depth interviews in the UK. These cases of Welsh Premier League clubs and the main cities were analyzed to determine the impact of football clubs as the brand signals. Four in-depth interviews were conducted in London and Birmingham, big cities, to explore the influence of a famous fan club on the town. Upon analyzing the cases and interviews, only a few factors were identified as crucial to a successful partnership between football clubs and destinations. Therefore, it is recommended that further research be done in different cities using various research methods to examine this relationship. This additional research could assist numerous cities in developing their branding strategies around football clubs. The paper proposes that integrating modern technology is the immediate solution, which should be accompanied by an understanding the context of its application and specific effects on Asian culture and Western society. In the future, technology and business methodology should be developed with the active involvement of customers, corporations that interact with the community, institutions, and stakeholders, and the new perspective of football clubs. The paper further maintains that adopting modern technology and trends is the primary solution and latest trend for addressing the effects on Asian culture and Western society. Specifically, technology and business methodology should be developed with the active involvement of customers. These corporations interact with customers, stakeholders, communities, institutions, and an understanding of the context of their application.

**Keywords:** UK club, Brand League clubs, UK fan club, destination branding

#### 1. Introduction

Europe has been experiencing a slump in its economic performance. However, the European football business's 8% annual growth rate has helped significantly stabilize the economy (Kennedy and Kennedy, 2012). The five major leagues that now rule professional club football in Europe are England, Germany, Spain, Italy, and France (Kennedy and Kennedy, 2012). According to a recent study, the market for football in Europe increased to €19.4 billion, with the main

five leagues holding a 48% market share (Deloitte, 2013). The English Premier League continued to be the leading club tournament in terms of income (Deloitte, 2013). One of the most important aspects of English football's commercial success is the fact that it is watched and appreciated in many different nations. This research delves into how football clubs contribute to destination branding. For a place to stand out, it needs to have a unique and recognizable identity that consumers can easily identify (Morgan et al., 2002). Football clubs use various branding techniques to create this unique



identity. Fyall (2011) emphasizes the importance of collaboration and partnership with other market players to create a comprehensive destination brand experience (Morgan et al., 2011). This research focuses on how football clubs affect the branding of a destination, including its image, identity, personality, and partnerships. Some authors refer to destinations as a combination of network brands. While destination branding in English club football has not been widely researched, this study shows that it is a rapidly growing field with great potential for the future, as noted by Morgan et al. (2011). The study provides an overview of English club football, destination branding, and research objectives, along with a literature review and methodology. The data analysis includes case study research and interview analysis. The findings and discussions are presented, followed by implications, limitations, and suggestions for future studies.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Brand Destination Evolution

The development of a distinctive character and personality for locations throughout the world has become increasingly important thanks to destination branding (Blain et al., 2005). There is fierce rivalry amongst similar places as a result of the global travel and tourism industry's ongoing growth (Euromonitor, 2013). Every location uses branding strategies to set itself apart from others due to the rising competition by aiming to give its visitors a unique experience (Morgan et al., 2002). These strategies include building brand identity, brand image, brand association, brand awareness, brand collaborations, etc. to improve the possibility of developing a unique brand experience (Morgan et al., 2002). Regardless of its size, scope, or location, every destination offers a diverse range of services, including lodging, attractions, amusement, transportation, sports, and more (Morgan et al., 2016). Destinations struggle to differentiate themselves when the competition heats up and are easily replaceable (Morgan et al., 2011). This has prompted a lot of researchers to try to solve this issue permanently. Alan Fyall (2011), who refers to this issue as the "challenge of partnership" and focuses on the concept of cooperation with other market actors, has made one of the most significant contributions in this area (Morgan et al., 2011). Collaboration and partnership are not new concepts; King (2002) refers to them as part of the "network economy" (King, 2002, p105). In order to give customers a faultless experience, he adds that Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) should work with industry partners (King, 2002). Fyall (2011) has developed this concept. The idea of destination partnerships is still not very common, though. Operating in partnerships is challenging due to a few flaws and critiques. These critiques include the inability to cooperate and the lack of confidence between partners as a result of an unsuitable political structure (Fyall and Garrod, 2005). As a result, there are many different perspectives on destination partnerships, which makes it challenging for a destination to work with other players to accomplish a shared purpose.

### 2.2 Brand image

A significant development in the development of branding is the idea of "Brand image." It was also known as the "Consumer Revolution" after the Second World War because of the enormous consumer demand that led to a rush of goods and an outpouring of purchases (Bastos and Levy, 2012). Due to the fierce rivalry among brands caused by this high demand, brand differentiation became necessary. In their essay "The Product and the Brand," published in 1955, Gardner and Levy provided fresh brand research (Bastos and Levy, 2012).

When every brand was attempting to assert its supremacy, Gardner and Levy (1955) highlighted significant questions about how consumers perceived various brands. For instance, they note in their study that all detergent manufacturers were making the same claim, such as "No detergent under the sun gets clothes whiter and brighter," "Washes more kinds of clothes whiter and brighter," "Beats the sun for getting clothes whiter and brighter," etc. (Gardner and Levy, 1955, p. 34). There was a severe lack of difference, and to properly address this issue, Gardner and Levy urged "a greater awareness of the social and psychological nature of products" (Gardner and Levy, 1955, p. 34). According to the survey, there was a public perception of products and brands. The study recognized that brands and products had a public image. A brand name was more than a label employed to differentiate among the manufacturers of a product; it was a complex symbol that represented a variety of ideas and attributes (Gardner and Levy, 1955). This study focused on not just creating a brand image, but also understanding how consumers perceive that image. According to Bastos and Levy (2012), the research emphasizes that building a strong brand image is a long-term investment and that positive or negative experiences play a role in its creation. Gardner and Levy's (1955) research, featured in the Harvard Business Review, was groundbreaking and garnered significant attention in the business world.

### 2.3 Destination Branding Frameworks

Hankinson (2004) created a framework that relates to destination branding. This framework is based on the idea of brand networks, where branding performs four main functions: communication, perception, value enhancement, and relationships. The framework presents destinations as "relational brand networks," with a core brand and four categories of brand relationships: consumer, primary service, brand infrastructure, and media. These studies have shown the importance of football to the local and national economy. Clubs like Manchester United F.C, Manchester City F.C, and Liverpool F.C have a large following within Great Britain and globally. This exposure through football gives cities essential visibility and establishes them as a brand in the global market. Hankinson (2004) created a framework that relates to destination branding. This framework is based on the idea of brand networks, where branding performs four main functions: communication, perception, value enhancement, and relationships. The framework presents destinations as "relational brand networks," with a core brand and four

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### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Strategy

Kotler and Keller (2009) explain that research projects can take different approaches to achieve their goals. Some researchers use experimental methods to identify problems and propose solutions. Others prefer a descriptive approach to analyze problems and offer suggestions based on their findings. Lastly, some researchers opt for an explanatory approach to provide an explanation of a problem, rather than just describing it (Kotler and Keller, 2009). This study uses an exploratory research strategy to investigate the role of football clubs in branding a destination. Exploratory research aims to gain new insights and ideas about a topic. Since this particular topic has not been extensively studied, an experimental research method was chosen to conduct this study.

#### 3.2 Case Study Research

Case study research is an in-depth examination of an issue that is examined using one or more instances inside a predetermined framework (Yin, 2003). In this context, a phenomenon is referred to as a case if it is witnessed once or often (Gerring, 2006). Researchers select a variety of instances that involve a person, a group of people, a community, a business, a profession, or any other relevant subject (Gillham, 2003). The purpose of case study research is to investigate a particular case and gather various types of evidence to ultimately discover a practical solution to the problem at hand (Gillham, 2003). Despite being considered a lesser method in social science research in the past (Yin, 2003; Tight, 2010), case study research has now become a crucial approach. Two notable contributors to case study research literature are Stake (1995, 2005) and Yin (2003, 2004). They have expressed their unique perspectives on the subject. According to Stake (1995, 2005), a case study is a method for examining the intricacies of a single case. He has also highlighted five essential aspects of a case study, namely context, triangulation, activities, experimental knowledge, and issue choice (Tight, 2010). In studying cases, the stake has categorized them into three types: instrumental, intrinsic, and multiple or collective. According to Tight (2010), case studies have been criticized for lacking precision, but Yin (2003, 2004) argues that it is still one of the best research methods for answering 'how' and 'why' questions. Furthermore, Yin (2003, 2004) has identified four fundamental case study designs: single, multiple, holistic, and embedded. Further, Yin (2003) also emphasizes the important steps in empirical research. This study examines the relationship between football clubs and destination branding, using the case of two Welsh Premier League Clubs, Swansea City F.C and Cardiff City F.C. The research topic is relatively new, and case study research is well-suited for exploring new areas where there is

limited existing literature (Yin, 2003). The main reason for utilizing case study research in this dissertation is to drive motivation. To conduct this specific case study, information was gathered by examining various sources such as documents, records, news, and relevant literature.

#### 3.3 Interview

One of the methods for gathering data most frequently employed in research technique is the interview (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009). According to Matthews and Ross (2010), an interview is a strategy for gathering data through dialogue between two or more persons. Interviews might take place in-person, on the phone, or online. Interviews are a fantastic way for a researcher to speak directly with the individuals who are affected, giving them access to crucial data, viewpoints, and emotions (Matthews and Ross, 2010). Unstructured interviews were used in this study to collect data. With participants based in Lincoln City, four unstructured interviews were performed. These interview subjects were picked based on their notoriety and significance to the city. Originally, the plan was to conduct five semi-structured interviews to examine the connection between Lincoln City and its football club. Semi-structured interviews involve a set of open-ended questions that are predetermined (Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). However, it was challenging to create similar questions for each interviewee due to their varying backgrounds. It was crucial to understand the interviewees' genuine opinions, and unstructured interviews provided a better opportunity to establish a connection and interact with them. The interviews were essentially prolonged discussions centered on the research topic, and they proved instrumental in unearthing the interviewees' underlying thoughts and viewpoints. To analyze the interviews, we used a method called thematic analysis. This involves identifying patterns (themes) in the collected data. We followed the recommended five-stage process by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, we transcribed all the interviews to become familiar with the data. Second, we studied the data in detail to identify interesting features or codes. Third, we sorted the different codes into themes. Fourth, we reviewed all the identified themes and arranged similar themes together. Finally, we defined and named the themes to present them in this research.

### 4. Data Analysis And Findings

#### 4.1 Data From The Case Study Analysis

Football's popularity has surged in recent years with the addition of two Welsh football clubs to the Barclays Premier League. Swansea City F.C and Cardiff City F.C were promoted to the league in 2011 and 2013, respectively. A brief overview of these two clubs is provided below.

##### 4.1.1 Swansea City F.C

Swansea City F.C and Cardiff City F.C's promotion to the Barclays Premier League in 2011 and 2013 respectively boosted football's popularity in Wales. Swansea City F.C was established in 1912 as 'Swansea Town' and changed its name in 1969. After a decline, a group of directors saved the club from financial troubles in 1985. In 2005, the team moved to

the 'Liberty Stadium', and under the guidance of Michel Laudrup, it was promoted to the Barclays Premier League in 2011 and won 'The Capital One Cup' in 2012-13.

#### 4.1.2 Cardiff City F.C

Football clubs have a significant impact on the Welsh economy. Swansea City F.C's promotion to the Premier League in 2011- 12 contributed £58 million to the economy through increased spending by away fans. The club's non-football activities have added £7 million to the economy and saved over 295 jobs. The economic benefits are expected to continue growing with the club's plans to expand its stadium. Welsh Minister of Business, Edwina Hart, has expressed her appreciation for the positive impact of Swansea City F.C on Wales' economy.

#### 4.2 Data From The Interview Analysis

Four unstructured interviews were conducted in Lincoln, with interviewees chosen based on their importance in different sectors of the city. Due to Lincoln's small size and high level of connectivity, it was important to protect the identity of each interviewee in the research. All ethical considerations have been followed to ensure the anonymity of the interviewees, with no names mentioned in the study. Instead, interviewees have been referred to as interviewees 1, 2, 3, and 4. The analysis also refrains from mentioning certain quotes which would reveal their identities. During the interviews, various individuals from different sectors of the city shared their thoughts on the performance of Lincoln City F.C and its significance to the community. The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved five distinct phases to identify four key themes. These themes primarily focused on the state of Lincoln City F.C and its relationship with the city. The interviewees expressed disappointment with the club's operations, and the identified themes were further discussed in detail.

#### 4.2.1 Club Performance

During the interviews, it was found that Lincoln City F.C. has been consistently performing poorly, which has resulted in the downfall of the club. It is crucial for the team to perform well on the field in order to attract more fans to the stadium. One of the main issues, as stated by 'Interviewee 1', is that the team has a reputation for underperforming and playing unappealing football, which discourages local fans from attending matches. The team has been underperforming for many seasons, as evidenced by their relegation from League 2 in 2010/11. As a result, they now play in the Conference, the fifth division, which does not attract local fans.

"Not enough people are coming to the ten thousand capacity stadium to watch Conference football! Cause not many people do that." (Interviewee 1)

The size of Lincoln's club is massive, but despite the board putting in their own money to increase attendance, playing against teams like Dartford and Braintree, who aren't big draws, means they struggle to bring in large numbers of fans. Interviewee 3 notes that they are lucky to even get 2000 people at games. This suggests that people in Lincoln have a hard time connecting with their football club. In terms of

branding, Lincoln City F.C lacks the necessary association with its fans, which is crucial for building brand value according to Aaker (1991). One major factor in the club's decline is its underperformance on the pitch.

#### 4.2.2 Club Management

Lincoln City F.C's recent decline has been attributed to poor performances, but interviews have revealed that the club's management is also responsible for the outcomes. Interviewee 3 emphasized this point.

"It's the infrastructure of how its run you see... Lincoln is run by a Mafia!" (Interviewee 3)

Lincoln City F.C has struggled to make progress due to frequent changes in management and a lack of success in attracting sponsors for investment. In an interview, the second interviewee cited issues with management as a contributing factor to the club's challenges.

"One of the problems is that... some of the investments that were made to achieve that were... not exactly... well they have been proven to be poor investment" (Interviewee 2)

The club's consistent management errors have caused distrust among fans, leading to a negative image for the brand. This has made it challenging to attract potential sponsors. During an interview, Interviewee 3 expressed concern about securing sponsors due to the brand's poor reputation.

"Well let's say I was younger and I wanted to invest in something and I got a lot of money to spare...I look around where was going to be the best return and ... I would see a lot lower hanging fruit than Lincoln in my opinion... If cities to invest in from the point of view of football club and bringing it a... making it a successful club" (Interviewee 3)

Despite efforts by management to save money, Lincoln City F.C. has consistently struggled with financial difficulties and suffers losses every season, according to Interviewee 4.

"We're running this football club as lean and mean as we possibly can almost and... we still lose money... because we just don't get enough people through the gates, we don't get enough sponsorship" (Interviewee 4)

The club is currently operating on a limited budget, and attendance revenue has not been sufficient to aid in its recovery. As a result, the club's brand value has significantly decreased.

#### 4.2.3 Brand Image

During the interviews, it was consistently pointed out that major players in the market, such as the University of Lincoln, Lincoln City Council, and Lincoln City F.C., do not collaborate enough. Specifically, Lincoln City F.C. appears to receive limited support from the other big players in Lincoln. The interviewees highlighted the University of Lincoln's growing brand when asked about collaboration between the University and Lincoln City F.C.

"I agree with the University that they...they don't support Lincoln City F.C at the moment...because for them they are

the bigger institution who are reaping rewards from investing elsewhere” (Interviewee 1)

“University is developing its own credibility... you know... it gone from... you know... in relatively short time... just under 20 years... it gone from a new university with no track record to one that’s got a track record” (Interviewee 2)

“The thing that stimulated Lincoln is University... you know... if you go back forty years ago we had nothing here and now off course we have the University bringing in over £200 million to GDP and its stimulated awful lot of businesses... over last 5-7 years we have seen a significant change in businesses not with the football club absolutely no way... but University” (Interviewee 3)

The University of Lincoln has been able to improve its brand image over the years, as evidenced by its rise in the league table rankings from 109th in the UK in 2008 to 52nd in 2014, according to the Complete University Guide. A positive brand identity is crucial to the success of any brand, and while the sender creates the brand identity, it is perceived by the receiver. Unfortunately, Lincoln City F.C has not been able to create a positive brand identity due to poor performance on the pitch and management decisions off the pitch, leading to a negative perception of the club. As a result, the University has limited involvement with the club, as it does not hold the same brand value as the University, which is continuously growing as a brand.

#### 4.2.4 Infrastructure

During the interviews, a theme emerged that focused on infrastructure. This theme pertained more to the city of Lincoln rather than the football club. Infrastructure is an essential component of destination branding, representing the existence, accessibility, and sufficiency of a city, both physically and socially (Hanna and Rowley, 2011 p466). Unfortunately, Lincoln lacks sports infrastructure, which is crucial for success, as Interviewee 2 pointed out by citing Cardiff and Swansea City as examples.

“In the case of Swansea City and Cardiff City being Premier League clubs... there’s also three large rugby clubs that are playing in sort of European rugby... Also, Cardiff and Swansea are home to Glamorgan County Cricket... So, there’s like... sports infrastructure there... that getting Swansea and Cardiff in the Premiership was the final straw in the jigsaw” (Interviewee 2)

At present, Lincoln City F.C. is the only professional sports team in Lincoln. However, the city lacks the necessary infrastructure to support a larger club that can participate in higher leagues. When questioned about the possibility of Premier League football in Lincoln City, Interviewee 2 responded:

“I don’t think the city would support a Premier League. I think it would be brilliant to have a Premiership club but I’m not sure a city of 90 thousand. Catchment area of about a 150 thousand where As I said a lot of people are being travelling

over to Nottingham and Leicester for like... top end football... I’m not sure Lincoln would sustain it” (Interviewee 2)

The city lacks the necessary physical infrastructure to support sports. Additionally, interviewees commented on the overall attitude of the city, comparing it to that of Wales and Lincoln. “The

Welsh people are very interested in their sports being brought on successful rugby and things like that. Lincoln people aren’t quite like that... they take an awful lot of stimulating” (Interviewee 3)

“Because it’s a natural part of the Welsh culture and people have recognised that... there’s been realization that it is a ... you know there is a sports economy. There is a national pride actually still have some more sense of belonging and identifying with their community which perhaps is missing from Lincoln” (Interviewee 2)

In Lincoln, there is a general lack of interest in sports and physical activities among the population. This presents a challenge when it comes to investing in sports infrastructure. The government encounters resistance from the public when attempting to promote and invest in sports.

### 4.3 Discussion

Destinations worldwide aim to establish a unique identity and personality, and branding has become a powerful tool to achieve this goal. There are various branding techniques that destinations use to create a distinctive brand, and this study focuses on football clubs as a branding tool for destinations. The research analyzes Welsh Premier League clubs and Lincoln City F.C and presents two distinct results. Football serves as an excellent platform for marketing a city on a global scale for Welsh Premier League clubs, while Lincoln City F.C provides a weak platform for destination branding. Several factors play a crucial role in successfully branding a destination through its football club, which are explained below.

The key factor in branding a city through its football club is the success of the team. This was demonstrated in a case study of Cardiff City and Swansea City, where their consistent top-tier performances have contributed to their strong brand as Welsh football clubs. In contrast, Lincoln City F.C has struggled to perform and has not achieved the same level of brand recognition. The purpose of stakeholder partnerships in destination branding is to expand the reach of the destination, and effective partnerships and stakeholder relations are essential for successful brand performance according to experts such as Morgan et al (2011) and Hanna and Rowley (2011). The concept of branding a city through its football club is dependent on the club's success. A prosperous football club is better equipped to promote a city as a destination.

One of the key factors that affects the relationship between football clubs and destination branding is the ability to reach a global audience. In today's world, every destination is striving to become known on a global scale in order to achieve a successful brand. Building brand awareness is crucial in

achieving this goal. By having a global platform, destinations have a great opportunity to create this awareness. The Welsh Premier League clubs serve as a good example of this, as they have a global presence through their affiliation with the Barclays Premier League. This league is currently broadcasted in over 211 countries and boasts a massive fan base of 1.46 billion people worldwide (according to the Premier League Official Website in 2013). The Welsh Government is utilizing the massive platform of Swansea City and Cardiff City to promote Wales. In contrast, Lincoln City F.C has a small fan base with an average attendance of 2300 in the 2013/14 season, failing to attract even local fans. This highlights the importance of a global platform for a successful partnership between football clubs and destination branding.

One crucial aspect to consider is financial stability, which is essential for both destinations and football clubs. In terms of Welsh Premier League clubs, Swansea City and Cardiff City are known for their financial stability. For instance, Swansea City F.C had a value of £64.8 million in 2012 according to Sporting Intelligence, while Cardiff City F.C is currently owned by Vincent Tan, who has a net worth of \$1.6 billion according to Forbes in 2014. These clubs can afford to invest in new players and build a successful team, which ultimately leads to a strong brand. Furthermore, the Welsh government has invested

£110,000 in Cardiff City and an undisclosed amount in Swansea City as reported by BBC in 2013, which highlights the financial stability in Welsh clubs and the government. In contrast, Lincoln City F.C lacks this financial capability. The Annual Report of 2013 revealed that budget cuts were implemented that year, specifically in the sports sector, to allocate funds to other areas of the local economy. This indicates that the local government has limited resources to invest in the football club. Therefore, financial stability is crucial in establishing the city's brand through its football club.

The fourth factor to consider is Infrastructure, which encompasses both tangible and intangible attributes of a destination's brand. Tangible infrastructure refers to all the physical components that make up a destination, while intangible infrastructure refers to the qualities that define a place (Hanna and Rowley, 2011, p. 466). The collaboration between football clubs and destination branding is reliant on a city's infrastructure. For example, Wales has a strong sports infrastructure, with renowned rugby and cricket teams in the cities of Swansea and Cardiff (Wales.com, 2013). The cities also have large stadiums and other tangible infrastructure to support sports. Additionally, the people of Wales are known for their sports-oriented attitudes, with a particular passion for football and rugby. This sports infrastructure makes branding cities through sports teams a natural choice.

Collaboration is a crucial aspect when it comes to destinations. A destination is made up of various components, including multiple suppliers and stakeholders who represent it in different ways (Morgan et al, 2011). Given the presence of multiple stakeholders and suppliers, it can be challenging for a

destination to work alone (Morgan et al, 2011). The most effective way to manage these complexities is by bringing all the suppliers and stakeholders together to work collaboratively (Morgan et al, 2011). There are collaborations between independent organizations in cities all over the world, both on a large and small scale.

## 5. Conclusion

The success of football clubs in promoting a destination is crucial. The Welsh Premier League clubs have demonstrated a positive correlation between football clubs and destination branding. These clubs play a pivotal role in creating brand awareness and promoting a positive image of Wales. However, Lincoln City F.C is not contributing to the promotion of Lincoln as a destination. Interviews revealed that the club has a poor brand image, indicating the importance of a successful football club in destination branding. This partnership is challenging to maintain long-term as football clubs experience ups and downs in their performance. A club can enjoy success in one season and face relegation in the next, making them unpredictable for long-term partnerships. The success of a football club is crucial for the longevity of a partnership with destination branding. Financial stability, infrastructure, a global platform, and collaborative efforts are all essential factors that contribute to a successful partnership between a football club and destination branding. Without these factors, promoting a destination through its football club can be challenging. The partnership's success ultimately depends on various factors, but a successful football club is undoubtedly the best platform for branding a destination. Such clubs attract fans globally, and their association creates brand awareness and strengthens the destination brand. Although the partnership between football clubs and destinations depends on multiple factors, there is undoubtedly a connection between them. The field of destination branding has become increasingly significant in recent years. Every destination seeks to establish a clear and unique brand identity. Football clubs, being important entities in their respective cities, can provide an excellent opportunity for destinations to create a distinctive brand image. According to Hanna and Rowley (2011), football clubs can play a vital role in helping cities build essential infrastructure and establish a strong brand. This can lead to the regeneration of the brand's infrastructure and the creation of a wider brand experience. Football clubs play an important role in creating a sense of belonging within a community. This is crucial for any place to thrive socially, culturally, and naturally (Campelo et al, 2013). The concept of sense of place explains how the physical and social environments are connected (Campelo et al, 2013). With their rich traditions and deep roots in local cultures, football clubs are an integral part of cities and quickly connect with residents, bringing diverse people together. In the field of destination branding, new techniques are constantly being sought after to help destinations stand out in a competitive market. Football clubs can be a valuable tool for cities to establish a distinctive image. Through research, it has been discovered that this partnership has the potential to create successful destination branding. Lincoln currently only

has one professional sports team, Lincoln City F.C. However, interviews reveal that the team is not performing well and plays in a less attractive division compared to others. The club consistently experiences financial losses and struggles to secure sponsorship deals. As a result, the club has limited brand value and a small fan base, making it challenging to use it as a platform to brand the city. Despite this, there are opportunities to improve this situation in the long term, according to the Strategic Place Brand Management Model by Hanna and Rowley (2011).

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