Social Atmospheres: How interaction ritual chains create effervescent experiences of place

Abstract

Atmospheres are experiences of place involving transformations of consumers’ behaviors and emotions. Existing marketing research reveals how atmospheric stimuli, service performances, and ritual place-making enhance place experiences and create value for firms. Yet it remains unclear how shared experiences of atmosphere emerge and intensify among groups of people during collective live events. Accordingly, this paper uses sociological interaction ritual theory to conceptualize ‘social atmospheres’: rapidly changing qualities of place created when a shared focus aligns consumers’ emotions and behavior, resulting in lively expressions of collective effervescence. With data from an ethnography of an English Premier League football stadium, we identify a four-stage process of creating atmospheres in interaction ritual chains, and we go beyond conventional retail and servicescape design by demonstrating that social atmospheres are mobile and co-created between firms and consumers before, during and after a main event. We also reveal how interaction rituals can be disrupted, and offer insight as to how firms can balance key tensions in creating social atmospheres, which can enhance customer experiences, customer loyalty, and communal place attachments.

Keywords: Place, Atmospheres, Rituals, Emotions, Events, Sport
Atmospheres are experiences of place involving transformations of consumers’ behaviors and emotions. When marketers get atmospheres right, firms benefit from enhanced customer experiences, loyalty, and place attachment (Borghini et al. 2020). Given the value of atmospheres it is fitting that research explains how firms can create atmospheric effects using collages of material objects (Baker et al. 2002; Kotler 1974; Spence et al. 2014). These stimulate consumers’ senses, emotions, and behaviors in retail sites (Biswas et al. 2019; Madzharov et al. 2015; Lee et al. 2018; Spangenberg et al. 1996). Likewise, in themed stores, material stimuli create spectacular places that prime play and pleasure (Borghini et al. 2009; Sherry et al. 2001).

Marketing research also explains that experiences of place are socially constructed during interactions between staff and customers (Arnould and Price 1993). Staff can enhance customer experiences of place by educating consumers about meanings of locations, and by performing cultural scripts to elicit emotional responses (Arnould and Price 1993; Diamond et al. 2009; Peñaloza 1998; Sherry et al. 2001). When service performances are enacted alongside atmospheric stimuli provided by material design, firms can transform places into ‘a separate and self-contained world’ (Kozinets et al. 2004, p. 662). For example, Dion and Borraz (2017) show how opulent design and staff performances create the intimidating atmosphere of luxury stores.

Prior research has explained how firms can generate atmospheric effects through material and social constructions of place. Yet in contexts as diverse as nightclubs, festivals, and themed stores, consumers share atmospheric experiences in groups (Arnould and Price 1993; Goulding et al. 2009; Kozinets 2002; Sherry et al. 2001). Despite acknowledging the value of ‘boundary open’ feelings of togetherness among consumers (Arnould and Price 1993), marketing research is yet to explain specifically how group experiences of atmospheres are created; hence our primary research question asks, what are the social processes that create atmospheres?
Clues as to how these atmospheric interactions are created can be gathered from studies that show consumers co-creating place experiences (Arnould and Price 1993; Schau et al 2009). At historical re-enactments, festivals like Burning Man, and brandfests, cohorts of consumers act out consumption rituals (Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets 2002; McAlexander et al. 2002). Over time, repetitions of these ritual processes can imprint spaces with a convivial ‘spirit of place’, an identity that guides consumers’ interpretations, emotions and behaviors (Bradford and Sherry 2015; Higgins and Hamilton 2019). Once instilled these socially constructed qualities can endure, creating lasting place attachments (Borghini et al. 2020; Seamon 2018).

In contrast to these enduring qualities constructed over time, however, social experiences of atmospheres can emerge and dissipate more rapidly (Coffin and Chatzadakis 2021; Hill et al. 2014). In places such as stadiums, nightclubs, religious sites and street parades, for example, atmospheres often intensify and climax in pleasurable outbursts of shared emotion and behavior (Goulding et al. 2009; Holt 1995; Kozinets 2002). As a valued aspect of collective live events, it is important to understand more about how ritual interactions create these shared intensifications of emotion and behavior that consumers value during atmospheric experiences of place.

This is especially the case given that consumer groups are often heterogeneous in nature (McAlexander et al. 2002; Thomas et al. 2013), and misaligned values and behaviors can inhibit rituals, potentially spoiling atmospheres (Higgins and Hamilton 2019; Seregina and Weijo 2016). Indeed, prior studies recognize the necessity for managers to balance divergent expectations and behaviors in places co-created by multiple actors including firms and consumers (Bradford and Sherry 2015; Kozinets et al. 2004). In order to enable firms to benefit from creating social atmospheres, and avoid failures of atmosphere, therefore, we ask two further research questions: how do atmospheres fail, and how can the social dimensions of atmosphere be managed?
To investigate how social atmospheres are created, how they fail, and how they can be managed, we next explain our theoretical lens and research procedures. We then present our findings that reveal a four-stage process of creating ‘social atmospheres’ in interaction ritual chains, and how social atmospheres can fail. Our discussion explains how these findings extend theories of material atmospherics, servicescapes and ritual place-making by showing that social atmospheres are co-created by firms and consumers in multiple sites before, during and after a main event. We extend interaction ritual theory by explaining how atmospheres can be mobile, and how learning enables social atmospheres. Finally, we offer advice for managers on how to create social atmospheres that enhance customer experiences, customer loyalty and place attachment.

**Interaction Ritual Chains**

To understand the social processes by which atmospheres are created, and how atmospheres can be managed, Randall Collins’ (2004) theory of interaction ritual chains enables us to explain how shared emotions and behavior are created during collective live events. Interaction ritual chains are a ‘mechanism of change’ (Collins 2004, p. 43) that aligns attention, behaviors and emotions among group members. Interaction rituals begin when a symbolic object or action gathers a shared focus of attention, transforming individuals into ritual participants, and transforming the atmosphere as a result. For example, when a conductor taps her baton on the music stand, the sounds of conversations and musicians warming-up are replaced with an anticipatory silence.

If a group shares a common focus, then behaviors and emotions tend to align among ritual participants due to physiological predispositions to imitate others (Hill et al. 2014). To describe these alignments of behaviors and emotions, Collins (2004) provides the concept of ‘entrainment’: the stimulation of common emotional responses is labelled emotional
entrainment; the stimulation of common movements and vocalizations are labelled behavioral entrainment. Consider the coordinated actions among a crowd at a tennis match as they follow the ball back and forth for example, and how shared excitement intensifies the atmosphere.

Collins (2004) also enables us to explain how atmospheres climax. When crowds of entrained people generate expressions of their shared emotions, such as common vocalizations, gestures and movements, Collins explains that ritual participants become aware that they are “doing the same thing” and “thinking the same thing” (2004, p. 33). During these instances, interaction rituals reach fever pitch. Here, Collins follows sociologist Émile Durkheim (1995, p. 424) who coined the term ‘collective effervescence’ to describe moments during rituals when participants “become hyper excited, the passions more intense, the sensations more powerful”.

Social atmospheres encompass shared focus, entrainment and collective effervescence, but it is particularly the latter that produces ‘emotional energy’, a pleasurable feeling of group membership that motivates participants to repeat rituals (Collins 2004). Importantly, the symbols that groups use during expressions of collective effervescence become representative of these pleasures. Collins suggests symbols used in interaction rituals can act like ‘batteries’, storing emotional energy. As such, these charged symbols remind people of prior experiences, and can be used as focal points to start future interaction rituals, linking rituals together in ‘chains’.

Notwithstanding the enabling aspects of Collins’ theory, it is not clear how group dynamics impact focus, entrainment and collective effervescence (Fine 2005). Although entrainment is stimulated by physiological mirroring, for instance, further investigation of how communities moderate alignments of behavior and emotion is warranted in light of our interest in community heterogeneity. This is particularly so in instances where consumers seek different emotional experiences at the same event (Cronin and Cocker 2019; Higgins and Hamilton 2019).
Furthermore, Collins’ (2004) analyses discrete interaction rituals that are enacted in particular places. Yet consumer research shows place experiences can be anticipated by preparatory activities (Bradford and Sherry 2015; Goulding et al. 2009), and that consumers move from place to place during consumption experiences (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019). Illustrating both possibilities, Bradford and Sherry (2018, p. 213) explain how preparations enacted by groups outside a stadium leave people “primed” and “psyched” for the game to follow. Despite these observations it is not clear how group activities in one place might impact atmospheres in another. It is with these foregoing questions in mind that we now describe our context for this investigation.

**Research Context: Anfield Stadium**

To understand how social interactions influence atmospheres and how these can be managed, we focused on the context of English Premier League (EPL) football stadiums. EPL stadiums are an ideal context to investigate atmospheres since these sites are associated with active and passionate supporters who co-create the visual, sonic, and emotional qualities of these places. The EPL acknowledges that consumers ‘create an atmosphere that sets us apart from other leagues and competitions’ (Premier League 2020). Moreover, industry leaders agree that these atmospheres generate commercial value for the EPL (Ebner 2013; Millward 2011).

In keeping with interpretive marketing research studies of place (Diamond et al. 2009; Kozinets et al. 2004; Sherry et al. 2001), we focused on an exemplar case: Anfield, home of Liverpool Football Club (LFC), one of the wealthiest football clubs globally, and part of the Boston-based Fenway Sports Group. Anfield is considered one of the EPL’s ‘most atmospheric stadiums’ (Handler 2014; Pearce 2019). Inside Anfield is the ‘The Kop’ stand; this is where the ritual singing common in English football originated in the early 1960s, when fans began to sing
the popular music hit, You’ll Never Walk Alone. Ever since, the Kop has remained a bastion of impassioned vocal support (Kelly 2007), and this song has become the official club anthem.

Notwithstanding Anfield’s reputation as an atmospheric place, EPL atmospheres are not always lively. Particularly in recent years, some consider that atmospheres have become flat and lifeless (MacInnes 2016). Moreover, EPL stadia represent contexts that require a variety of interventions to manage atmospheres. In the 1980s, two stadium disasters involving Liverpool supporters highlighted the risks of highly emotional crowd contexts: Hillsborough, where overcrowding led to 96 deaths; and Heysel, where crowd disorder led to 39 fatalities. These events motivated safety alterations at all EPL stadia ensuring that supporters remain seated, and subject to security supervision (King 2002). These aspects of our context provide opportunities to understand more about how atmospheres fail, and how firms attempt to manage atmospheres.

**Methods and Data Analysis**

We investigated how Anfield’s atmosphere is created during fieldwork spanning seven years. Our battery of ethnographic techniques encompassed participant observation, interviews, as well as archival and online data collection (Arnould and Price 1993; Sherry et al. 2001; Kozinets 2020). The data we collected captures supporters’ experiences and interactions within Anfield, as well as in the spaces surrounding Anfield before and after matches (Thomas et al. 2020). Our data set is summarized in Web Appendix 1 and comprises 212 pages of single-spaced fieldnotes; 60 in-depth interviews and 4 audiencing interviews, generating 410 pages of single-spaced text; 610 newspaper articles, 53 photographs, and 17.5 hours of video recordings.

*Participant observation.* To build a ‘thick description’ of atmospheric experiences at Anfield, participant observation (Geertz 1973; Husemann and Eckhardt 2019) occurred before and after matches during two consecutive EPL seasons, from November 2012 to August 2013,
and from November 2013 to August 2014. In November 2012, the first author rented an
apartment close to Anfield, and access to participants was facilitated by a local supporter who
acted as a gatekeeper. This access enabled observations in supporters’ homes, during social
gatherings, on public transport to games, in pubs, and on the streets outside Anfield. In 2013 and
2014, the first author continued these procedures and attended 24 LFC matches: 18 at Anfield,
and 6 at other EPL stadiums. Access to Anfield enabled the description of micro-interactions
between individuals, as well as crowd-level expressions (Goffman 1967). To record these first-
hand experiences of atmospheres, digitized fieldnotes were compiled from observations,
photographs of supporters’ visual displays, and video footage recorded by the first author.

In-depth interviews. Access gained during the 2012-13 season enabled 60 in-depth
Interviews sought insight into supporters’ life-histories, meanings they associate with Anfield, and their experiences of atmospheres. EPL
stadia provide an ideal instance of collective events characterized by consumer heterogeneity. To
reflect this, we purposively sampled devoted supporters with local ties to LFC, as well as casual
supporters and tourists. Table 1 shows our sample which represents a typical Anfield crowd by
age, gender, and commitment level. To enhance insight into the creation and management of
atmosphere we also sampled police, stadium architects, crowd safety experts, journalists and
sports-marketing consultants. Interviews began with grand-tour questions (McCracken 1988)
about experiences of atmospheres at Anfield, as well as supporters’ pre- and post-match
activities. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 3 hours; all were recorded and transcribed.

Audiencing interviews. Embodied practices and multisensory experiences of place
can be difficult for respondents to recall or describe (Hill et al. 2014). Accordingly, we used
‘audiencing’ video elicitation techniques to explore how atmosphere is created in Anfield,
supporters’ multisensory experiences of atmosphere, and to interpret the role of material aspects of place during these experiences (Merchant 2011). Four such interviews took place. Participants were shown video footage recorded by author 1 of a recent match at which they were present. This procedure lasted between 1-2 hours. These interviews were recorded and transcribed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant type</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Interview type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supporters</td>
<td>Amanda (F)</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>Depth Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>June (F)</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Devoted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mark (M)</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Devoted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tom (F)</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Martin (M)</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tim (M)</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tommy (M)</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Devoted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adam (M)</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Devoted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>David (M)</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brian (M)</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Devoted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anne (F)</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Devoted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graham (M)</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Devoted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chris (M)</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Devoted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adam (M)</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Devoted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seh (M)</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bill (M)</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Tourist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paul (M)</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gary (F)</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Devoted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thomas (M)</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anthony (M)</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Devoted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Michaela (F)</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Devoted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>James (M)</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Devoted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barry (M)</td>
<td>Teens</td>
<td>Devoted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keith (M)</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Devoted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anne (F)</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Devoted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Joel (M)</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Devoted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jon (M)</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peter (M)</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tony (M)</td>
<td>70s</td>
<td>Devoted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mick (M)</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Devoted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peter (M)</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steve (M)</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clive (M)</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Archival and online data. Data collection included newspaper coverage as a means to understand wider media representations of atmosphere, supporter behavior, and commercial/social/political issues related to EPL football stadia. Using the Lexis-Nexis archive (Dolbec and Fischer 2015), we collated documents referring to ‘atmosphere’ in EPL contexts between September 2012 and August 2019 in national newspapers as well as a popular local newspaper, The Liverpool Echo. Finally, we monitored official LFC web platforms, as well as social media where LFC supporters post content related to the club (Kozinets 2020).
Data analysis. Open coding began with authors independently identifying common patterns and sequential moments among interview cases, fieldnotes, and photographs (Spiggle 1994). These procedures guided our analysis towards a focus on understanding the social processes that create effervescent atmospheres, as well as what causes atmospheres to fail. As research progressed, our analysis identified place-based and processual occurrences, key actor, places and material objects, effects on consumers’ emotions and behaviors, as well as aggregate social effects within crowds. Our data set enabled us to identify interconnected ritual stages before, during, and after supporters’ visits to Anfield. Moreover, given that consumers return to Anfield and surrounding places week after week, these repetitions enabled us to identify a cyclical process of creating social atmospheres. Interpretations were triangulated across methods and authors, and member-checks were used to solve coding disputes (Thompson et al. 1989). The final stages of analysis involved tacking between emergent themes, and existing knowledge of atmospheres and experiential place-making to refine and extend theory (Burawoy 1998). Final coding is shown in Web Appendix 3.

Findings

Our findings are organised to explain the process of creating social atmospheres through an interaction ritual chain that comprises four interlinked stages. Figure 1 illustrates how this process begins with preparations in private places; moves to activation in a service ecosystem; climaxes in an event space; and concludes with recovery in the service ecosystem after an event. Linking these stages are symbolic resources that enable consumers to transfer social atmospheres from one place to another, gathering focus, entrainment and collective effervescence amongst increasingly large crowds on the way. Having unpacked this process, we explain how atmospheres can fail when shared focus is distracted, or entrained groups are disaggregated.
Figure 1 - Creating Social Atmosphere in the Interaction Ritual Chain.

**Preparation for Atmosphere**

Atmospheric preparations are consumer-led activities prior to events in which symbolic resources and behavioural expectations are created to enable atmospheres. These preparations begin in relatively private places such as homes, and involve families and friendship groups, as well as entrepreneurial consumers. We reveal three modes of preparation: learning about cultural expectations to participate; making symbolic resources; and rehearsing entrained behaviors.

*Learning to participate.* Learning to participate refers to experienced consumers teaching newer consumers to contribute to atmospheres. A sense of seriousness helps to motivate participation in interaction rituals (Goffman 1967), and Dan’s first visit to Anfield as a boy was prefaced by “a serious chat with my Dad, where he explained how special Anfield is”. Team affiliations among sports consumers are often inherited through families, where emotional and behavioral expectations are modelled. For example, Anthony, describes how he taught son about what going to Anfield means and the practices that supporters share there:

I think the most important thing is teaching the younger ones what it means to be a Red.

You have to let them know that football is a shared experience, and you go to the match for
the craic, the camaraderie and emotion. When I took our youngest, both me and my Dad told him about the Kop and what it’s like to be in the Kop, what it means... Sam had grown up singing the songs Michaela and I would sing around the house when he was really little, so when we thought he was old enough to come with us, he could join in.

Preparations teach consumers about the spirit of place (Sherry et al. 2001), and the spirit of place at Anfield identifies expectation to participate in fun, friendship and shared emotions, all of which encompass a moral responsibility to enact the rituals and traditions that identify and unite the LFC community (Muñiz and O’Guinn 2001; Schau et al. 2009).

![Figure 2 – Commemorative flags symbolizing Hillsborough and league victories.](image)

Making symbolic resources. Making symbolic resources involves the preparation of visual and aural symbols that represent consumer identity during interaction rituals. Dedicated supporter Chris and his friends create flags with motifs and slogans that represent the club: “We meet up on Wednesday nights and plan for the next match, or start thinking about bigger, more
complicated designs for a particular occasion”. Chris explains that these objects are meaningful for supporters: “some of them are dead historical and were made for a particular moment in time, something like Hillsborough”. Figure 2 shows Chris’ flags with visual motifs recalling Hillsborough, as well as major cup victories: so valued are these resources that when they finally wear out after years of use and repairs, they are carefully replaced with a new version.

In addition to these visual symbols, supporters prepare aural symbols in the form of songs and chants. Dan explains that “music and football culture are closely entwined” and in 2012 he organized ‘Boss’, an open mic night “for everyone to come together, to sing… and build camaraderie.” These events are opportunities for supporters to generate new songs. Dan explains that “songs that are created in the moment in events such as these… spill into the ground, one moment you’re playing around with your mates and then next weekend there’s thousands of people singing it… you feel dead proud, knowing that that’s something you’ve created”. LFC advertises these events, showing that firms can co-produce symbolic resources by partnering with ‘passionate entrepreneurs’ like Dan (Guercini and Cova 2018).

Rehearsing entrained behaviors. Rehearsing entrained behavior occurs before an event and involves individual consumers getting ready to participate in social atmospheres. Much like a sports team warms up before a game, supporters rehearse before matches. James explains that “you’ve got to get in the mood beforehand.” Nev describes how he prepares himself for games by “whistling and humming songs as I’m getting ready. My son likes to put on some YouTube videos, or some of those emotional montages that the television companies like to produce”. Online resources enable consumers to rehearse aural symbols at home, long before events begin. Both official LFC web-media and supporter-run websites provide videos of excited crowds that inspire rehearsal. Given that many supporters do not have family ties through which
behavioral expectations are prepared, another passionate entrepreneur Andy, explains that he founded the website ‘The Anfield Wrap’ to “help fans across the world to learn how not only to experience and take in the atmosphere, but to contribute”. To facilitate this outcome, Andy uses footage from inside the stadium that “captures the spectacle we supporters put on, the sights and sounds that we produce”. Through these preparation activities, individual supporters familiarize themselves with songs and behaviors, such that the next stage of the ritual chain is made ready.

**Activating the Atmosphere**

We define atmospheric activation as the creation of social atmospheres among smaller groups prior to a main event. This section first explains how groups of consumers activate shared focus and entrainment in a service ecosystem outside a main event space. Secondly, we explain that the social atmosphere intensifies when entrained groups gather into a larger crowd as they move towards an event. Finally, we highlight how entry into an event space can activate memories of prior atmospheric experiences through firm-generated objects.

*Activating Focus and Entrainment.* Activating focus and entrainment transforms individual consumers into small groups that begin to create a social atmosphere. This occurs in the many hotels and pubs around Anfield stadium, a service ecosystem where supporters gather several hours before games (Houghton 2019). LFC devotee Gary’s favourite pub is The Sandon, known as the birthplace of LFC in 1892. Gary returns here week after week to enjoy the same experience: “it’s always a good time in the Sandon…You know the same faces will be there”. Studies of servicescapes note how consumers enjoy a collage of visual and sonic stimuli, which encourage sociality in small groups, much like the separate areas of ESPNZone (Sherry et al. 2001). In contrast, The Sandon is a bland, austere space. Yet as supporters arrive the Sandon’s
managers allow them to pin their homemade flags to the walls. This act of ‘place-marking’ transforms space into place, and initiates dialogue among consumers (Visconti et al. 2010).

The staff at the Sandon also help supporters to move tables and chairs in order to clear a stage for the next moment in the interaction ritual. Collins (2004, p. 119) explains that certain individuals embody “symbolic resources” that enable them to entrain the behaviors of those around them. Gary fulfils this role: as the Sandon reaches capacity, he moves to the centre of the room. Smaller groups of families and friends halt their conversations and share a focus. Field notes from January 18th, 2014 recall how Gary sings the first line of a song to the tune of Boney M’s Brown Girl in the Ring: “‘Poetry in motion’, to which everyone responds, ‘Tra-la-la-la-la!’”

Poetry in motion / Tra-la-la-la-la!
[repeat three times]
We’re the best football team in the land / Yes we are!
We are Liverpool / Tra-la-la-la-la!
[repeat three times]
We’re the best football team in the land! / Yes we are!

The call and response style enables supporters to begin entraining their behavior, breathing and gestures, and physiological research suggests that even heartbeats can align among people who sing together (Müller and Lindenberger 2011). By sharing a focus and initiating behavioral entrainment, supporters start to build a social atmosphere hours before the game. Like other pre-game rituals (Bradford and Sherry 2015), these activities leave supporters like Gary pumped up with ‘emotional energy’ (Collins 2004): “It’s the best pub to get you up for the game, it’s noisy and no other pub can prepare you better to stand and sing your heart out on the Kop.”

*Intensification through collective mobility.* As events draw near, consumers leave the service ecosystem and enter public spaces where social atmospheres intensify as crowds move towards an event space. An hour before the game begins, supporters leave pubs and join what
some call ‘the pilgrimage’, a procession through the streets towards Anfield. Stuart describes this as a “sea of people who descend at the same time on the most cherished symbol of the club”.

Sports and music venues are often likened to religious sites (Bradford and Sherry 2015; Sherry et al. 2001). Mark explains “there is nothing like being part of a crowd heading to the ground. Even though you don’t know those around you, you feel like you’re part of a gang, a religious group”.

Much like the shells carried by pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019), supporters’ flags act as a mobile focus, helping to gather people together along the way. Outbursts of laughter and singing light up the street like brushfires as groups of LFC supporters are united in the streets that lead towards the stadium.

Social atmospheres intensify when smaller groups are united into larger crowds. Like other appropriations of public space (Bradford and Sherry 2015), thousands of supporters gather outside Anfield stadium to take part in what they call the “Welcoming Committee” which greets the LFC team bus as it arrives. Chris explains that this greeting was organized by ‘Spion Kop 1906’ a group of devoted supporters that wanted “to do something outside the stadium to get people up for the match”. Because of the presence of the team on board, and its proximity to the crowd, the bus is treated as a sacred object (Belk et al. 1989). As such, the bus provides another shared focus that gathers groups into an increasingly dense, entrained crowd. As the bus moves through this crowd, the streets are filled with pyrotechnic flares, smoke bombs, and flags.

The crowd grows… police remind people to not block the road. People climb on walls, encroach in people’s gardens, mount scaffolding, and get on each other’s shoulders. They sing, chant, fly banners and set off red smoke bombs. When the Liverpool bus arrives, it’s impossible to see where the crowd starts or ends. As the bus creeps up Anfield Road at a
snail’s pace, more smoke bombs are set off, beer is thrown, and the crowd surrounds the vehicle, hitting it in support. (Fieldnotes, 10 February 2014)

Figure 3 – Mobile symbols at the ‘Welcoming Committee’

Figure 3 shows the chaotic scene of revelry that supporters create. The visual display of red and white flags and smoke is accompanied by the smell of beer and diesel fumes, the feeling of bodies pressing together, and the sounds of chanting, singing, and fists striking the bus. Members of this crowd become entrained to the excitement: the release of one flare or smoke bomb hastens the next; as one person chants, hundreds of others join in, producing outbursts of collective effervescence (Durkheim 1995). This social atmosphere transforms the streets outside the stadium. As one tourist recalled, “the atmosphere before the game was crazy. I loved it.”

Activating prior emotional experiences. Entering event spaces can activate strong feelings among consumers due to objects that stimulate memories and emotions (Higgins and Hamilton 2019; Sherry et al. 2001). At Anfield, thousands of supporters file through the wrought iron ‘Paisley Gates’ the iconic threshold of the stadium; they encounter statues of legendary
players; and the memorial shrine that commemorates the supporters killed at Hillsborough. Here many supporters stop to light a candle, or stand in silent prayer. All of these objects symbolize memories of prior social atmospheres, and for Michaela these memories make Anfield special:

> It could have been any one of us, it could have been our sons and daughters [and] the reason why so many people were adamant that we shouldn’t build a new stadium is because of what happened at Anfield after Hillsborough, that mass out-pouring of grief and the mourning that occurred here.

As much as place attachments can be associated with excitement, as with the Welcoming Committee, so too can they be associated with collective experiences of suffering and pain (Higgins and Hamilton 2019). In either case, Durkheim (1995, p. 220) explains that experiences of collective effervescence can instil a place with “exceptionally intense forces”. For supporters like Michaela, memories of prior social atmospheres at Anfield enhance the attachment she feels towards this place (Borghini et al. 2020; Debenedetti et al. 2014). In other words, the material objects within event spaces can activate memories of prior social atmospheres, and this motivates consumers’ loyalty to return to the sites where these experiences occurred.

**Atmospheric Climax**

Ritual climaxes mark the culmination of collective live events when lively social atmospheres are shared among large groups. First, we show how firms deliberately orchestrate a ‘formal climax’ by triggering focus, entrainment and collective effervescence to unite crowds. Following a formal climax, we reveal that ‘natural climaxes’ can follow, where social atmospheres are created by consumers responding spontaneously to events without leadership or control by firms.
Formal Climax. A formal climax is a deliberately orchestrated moment of focus, entrainment and collective effervescence that unites large groups. While other supporters are enjoying the Welcoming Committee or paying their respects at the Hillsborough Memorial, groups of devoted supporters expertly knot their home-made flags to poles and stanchions. As with similar activities in The Sandon, this placemarking (Visconti et al. 2010) transforms the blank canvas of Anfield’s interior into a place that boosts Steve’s feelings of identity as an LFC supporter: “when you walk in and see them flying, you feel together... you’re there with your own people”. At this stage, fifty thousand people chat among themselves, waiting for the club anthem ‘You’ll Never Walk Alone’. Having marked the beginning of games for more than 50 years, this song is Anfield’s most iconic ‘soundmark’ (Schafer 1993) and its singing is a ‘formal ritual’, a “recognized apparatus of ceremonial procedures” (Collins 2014, p. 50). This ceremony gathers focus and initiates entrainment among supporters who stand, and begin to sing in unison:

Many close their eyes. Some have their arms wrapped around one another. Others extend their arms, as if they are at church... Meanwhile, a gargantuan banner is passed over our heads, from left to right across the Kop, covering thousands of supporters. (Fieldnotes, 7 December 2013)

Even when the music stops, the crowd continues singing, entrained to one rhythm. At the same time as consumers are co-creating Anfield’s soundscape, an enormous banner dubbed ‘the surfer’ is passed above supporters’ heads from one side of the Kop to the other. The movement seems to symbolize the transformation of individuals into a unified crowd (see Figure 4). In one audiencing interview, devoted supporter Nev reflected on this multisensory experience as one of visceral connection to other supporters:
It sends a tingle down your neck, and makes your hair stand on end… It feels like you have some deep connection with those around you and they might be strangers you know. We’re doing this together like, I’m expressing myself to you, and you are open to me. Where else can you get that connection?

![Figure 4 – The formal ritual of ‘The Surfer’ passing over supporters.](image)

Nev witnesses how this formal ritual breaks down the self-other divide, enabling empathic experiences of shared emotions even amongst strangers (Goulding et al. 2009; Higgins and Hamilton 2019). Collins (2004) explains that collective effervescence is facilitated when groups recognize that they are sharing emotions and behaviors. Firms play an important role in enabling these instances by providing event spaces that facilitate sensory experiences of others. Joe, a stadium architect, explains that the physical qualities of Anfield enable atmospheres because supporters can see and hear one another, “It’s tight, compact, you feel hemmed in together, and the sight lines allow everyone to see what is happening on the pitch and to respond together. It doesn’t take too long for sound to travel”. As well as being pleasurable, this ‘heightened intersubjectivity’ (Collins 2004, p. 35) among supporters becomes vital as the game begins.
Natural Climax. Natural climaxes are pleasurable outpourings of shared emotion in which crowds of entrained consumers generate social atmospheres spontaneously, without leadership or orchestration from firms. As much as sport is a form of play (Bradford and Sherry 2015), English football has also been described as an “audience-oriented conflict”, where opposing supporters mimic intergroup violence (Collins 2016, p. 202). As such, most supporters do not wish to passively observe this conflict. Rather, they become a chorus that comments on the drama taking place on the field. During an audiencing interview, Jay described how this connection between the game and supporters produces an ‘incredible atmosphere’:

Some games you’re on your feet for the whole ninety minutes, and you can come out of the stadium and your head is banging, your mouth dry. It’s really draining afterwards you know… That Chelsea game, everyone was involved, an incredible atmosphere, whistling non-stop, roaring and celebrating every challenge instantly.

Dan explains how he feels compelled to participate: “if there’s someone giving it their all, you can’t just let them do it by themselves. You want to get stuck in”. It is noteworthy, that the chorus chimes in without leadership. Thousands whistle and boo when the opposition are in possession of the ball; they chant rhythmically to propel their team forward, or to humiliate their opponents. Collins (2004) uses the term ‘natural rituals’ to describe events which entrained participants improvise according to emerging conditions. Fittingly, Joel describes the experience of being entrained with others as a ‘natural’ reaction: “You’re on the same wave-length. It’s natural, you know, like I know what the others around me are feeling and thinking.”

Photojournalist Stuart notes how entrained crowds appear to share emotions: “everyone has the same look on their faces, that sort of clear connection of everyone being on the same
page, it’s like magic”. For Collins (2004), it is when crowds become aware of their common experiences that exaggerated changes in a social atmosphere are likely to occur, such as when collective tension and anxiety transform into collective effervescence following a goal:

A Liverpool midfielder misplaces a pass, giving the ball to the opposition. The ground is starting to feel tense. Supporters sense that their team is vulnerable, they are rubbing their faces and biting their nails as they watch players fumble easy passes... The team appear equally nervous, as each of their mistakes are met with an exasperated moan from the crowd. [Then] Liverpool score and the crowd erupts. The noise deafens. Arms and fists flail around as supporters rush to celebrate with each other. Bodies compress: supporters fall on top of one another. I am hauled into the row in front. Supporters scramble down the stairs that lead to the pitch. It is temporary chaos. (Fieldnotes 28 January 2014)

Collective effervescence is a pleasurable experience for supporters like James who considers that crowds where “everyone is on the same page are a different animal. At the end of the 90 minutes, your head is banging, and your throat is raw. You know you’ve been in that crowd situation, an electric atmosphere”. James’ account of atmosphere as ‘electric’ recalls Durkheim’s (1995, p. 217) description of collective effervescence in crowds, where “a sort of electricity is generated from their closeness and quickly launches them to an extraordinary height of exaltation”.

**Atmospheric Recovery**

In the stage of atmospheric recovery, shared emotions and memories of atmosphere are stored in resources that make them available for future use. We first show how objects used within the stadium are charged-up with emotions and memories, and how these objects will be recirculated
by consumers in future interaction rituals. We then show how firms circulate representations of social atmospheres in social media which help to kindle desires to repeat interaction rituals.

*Emotionally charged objects.* Collins (2004) explains that objects associated with experiences of collective effervescence become charged-up like batteries, storing the emotional energy of an event. The large flags produced by Chris and his friends embody these feelings for example, and are lovingly kept at the club for this reason. However, if LFC win, supporters emerge from Anfield twirling red and white scarves above their heads and singing joyously. For tourist Ben, club merchandise helps him to participate in a social atmosphere, “Every club I’ve been to watch, I’ve bought something... to demonstrate that you want to fit in, and to contribute, to participate.” Beyond fitting in however, the symbolic resources that fans use in the stadium become charged up, and become objects that inspire them to return. For example, Peter explains that through repeated use, his red and white scarf has become a “lucky charm. I’ve had it for decades, it’s dead old, it’s tatty. I don’t bring it with me to the match every game, only the special, important ones, where the team really needs to win. It’s become a bit of a joke, when I turn up at Anfield and those around me are like ‘oh we’re going to win this afternoon are we?’”

*Remembering atmosphere.* Remembering atmosphere involves the use of digital merchandise, to recall experiences, and store emotional energy in ways that inspire future interaction rituals. Once the game is over, supporters filter away from the stadium, and the crowd dissipates into smaller groups. Although some groups move on to Liverpool’s bustling bar and nightclub scene, Dan explains that many supporters return to the same service-ecosystem venues that they had frequented with family and friends before the game: “We used to go straight to into town, but now we wait for the traffic to die down, meet my Dad and his mates in the [pub], you know, we have a quiet drink and reflect on the match”.
As part of these reflections, many seek out match highlights on their mobile phones. LFC’s marketing team and websites like the Anfield Wrap share video footage of the crowd on social media. Jenny likes how this content “focuses on us, the fans, fan culture, the passion and the singing. They posted one before the Sunderland match... footage of fans celebrating wildly at Cardiff the previous week.” Video media reminds supporters of the emotional energy felt during an experience of social atmosphere (Collins 2016). In this way atmospheric recovery links to the preparation stage of the next event, inspiring customer loyalty by encouraging repetitions of the ritual chain. Indeed, digital merchandise motivates Jenny to repeat the ritual chain next week: “I sort of build it up in my head, sing things in my head, watch videos of the crowd, and just get into the mood”. James too explains that the songs sung in the stadium and recirculated in social media “are stuck in your head, rattling around in there”.

**How Do Atmospheres Fail?**

Social atmospheres are created through interaction ritual chains in which shared focus, and entrainment make possible expressions of collective effervescence. Social atmospheres can fail, however, when shared focus is distracted, or when entrained groups of consumers are disaggregated. We find that these instances can be caused by consumers as well as by firms, particularly during the climax stage of interaction ritual chains.

**Distracting Shared Focus**

A shared focus prefigures entrainment and collective effervescence (Collins 2004), it follows that social atmospheres are inhibited when shared focus is distracted. We reveal three means by which shared focus is distracted: first, when consumers have not prepared to focus; second, when
firms remove symbolic objects from place; and third, when firms unwittingly distract from consumer-led atmospheres with spectacular atmospheric stimuli.

*Unprepared consumers.* Unprepared consumers enter an event space without having learned the behavioral expectations to participate, or about symbols and objects that require shared focus. In such cases, consumers are unable to participate in creating social atmospheres. Anthony calls attention to the heterogeneous nature of EPL consumers, noting “how different supporters are, their mentalities, their mannerisms.” Group heterogeneity can lead to misalignments of meanings and practices (Higgins and Hamilton 2019; Thomas et al. 2013), and though devoted supporters have often been prepared to contribute to social atmospheres from a young age, Brian complains that some casual supporters and tourists enter the stadium:

completely alien to the culture that has been nurtured in the Kop and in Anfield over decades… it leaves a bitter taste for everyone when that culture and feeling is dying in front of your eyes, especially if we take that social experience of togetherness as one of those things that keeps you returning to the match. You get more people now playing on their phones, not paying any attention to what’s happening. Some even are on their phones during You’ll Never Walk Alone... They’re just totally disconnected.

If consumers do not encounter the preparation stage of an interaction ritual chain, then they may not have learned about expected behaviors or what symbols require focus. By expressing “too casual an attitude toward the focus of attention” (Belk et al. 1989, p. 11), consumers can appear irreverent during the formal rituals intended to unite crowds. Brian explains that if tourists fail to join a collective focus, this detracts from the atmosphere and the cultural experience of shared emotions that motivates supporters to repeat interaction rituals, and maintain loyalty to Anfield.
Removal of symbolic objects. Social atmospheres can be disrupted when firms physically alter event spaces (Maclaran and Brown 2005), particularly by removing the symbolic and emotionally charged objects that serve as a shared focus during interaction rituals. When the EPL’s popularity surged in the 1990s, many clubs renovated old stadiums or built new ones. Although improving safety and revenue, alterations often removed material features of place associated with prior experiences of atmospheres. Amanda complains that these “cultural aspects of the stadium need to be respected. Clubs and architects need to understand and respect the community and the club. Arsenal’s move to the ‘Emirates Stadium’ - a corporate name already - was undermined even more because they delayed moving Highbury’s Clock into the stadium. It made it feel soulless.” Recalling Michaela’s place attachments detailed above, we interpret the removal of these material points of shared focus as inhibiting those memories that help to motivate place attachments and associated desires to repeat social atmospheres.

The removal of symbolic objects also occurs in respect of the mobile symbols that supporters use to gather shared focus among larger groups when activating social atmospheres. For reasons of cost, EPL clubs often outsource security staff, yet Chris explained that these staff can disrupt the visual display supporters create during formal rituals before the game: “They just don't get it, the flags and banners on the Kop. Most people understand that it's all part and parcel of what we do, our culture, but some stewards don’t”. Staff that remove these mobile symbols can undermine consumers’ place-marking activities that enable feelings of shared identity.

Spectacular stimuli. Spectacular stimuli are material features of an event space that distract from consumer-led social atmospheres, thereby inhibiting shared focus. As with many experiential places, Anfield’s managers provide entertainment and ‘wow factor’ (Sherry et al. 2001) with atmospheric stimuli including lights, music, and pyrotechnics. Yet Mark complains
that this attempt to “pump in the atmosphere just feels wrong”. Bradford and Sherry (2018) warn that spectacular environments can reduce consumer participation. In line with this view, Andy explains that spectacular stimuli distract from the shared focus created by supporters themselves: “You're a consumer. You passively just take it in, keep yourself to yourself. There's no opportunity for having a sing, cracking a joke, actually creating part of the atmosphere, there's none of that. It feels artificial.” In contrast to literature that explains how firms can use spectacular stimuli to enhance place experiences (Borghini et al. 2020; Sherry et al. 2001), Andy warns that these well-intentioned atmospheric interventions change supporters’ roles and divert attention from the placemarking and soundmarking activities consumers co-create in the stadium. Flags and songs, for example, are symbols of group identity which enable shared focus among supporters, and are central to the sensory experience of Anfield. Yet if firm-produced atmospheric stimuli distract from these resources, then place atmospheres can feel artificial.

**Disaggregating Entrained Crowds**

Social atmospheres are intensified through emotional and behavioral entrainment that gathers among larger groups. Disaggregation refers to the opposite of this process, where entrained crowds are separated into smaller groups or individual consumers; this can inhibit atmosphere and cause disappointment for some consumers. In this section, we describe how disaggregation is caused by individualizing consumers; unactivated consumers; and crowd pacification.

*Individualizing consumers.* Individualizing consumers refers to unintended outcomes of event spaces that disaggregate entrained crowds, leading to more passive, individualized experiences at events. We have explained that groups of consumers activate entrained behaviors and emotions in the service ecosystem around the stadium before moving to Anfield, transferring a social atmosphere with them. Yet when supporters reach the stadium, these entrained groups
can be split up. Particularly because of the way that tickets are allocated, Tony complains that although many supporters have activated an atmosphere before a game, on entering the stadium they are broken up such that “you no longer get consistent pockets of support, about 150 or 200 people who you could rely on to get the atmosphere going in different bits of the ground.” When groups that have activated an atmosphere before an event are fragmented as they enter the event space, the social atmosphere is inhibited. Rather than enjoying the experience of being within an entrained crowd that has previously activated a social atmosphere, Gareth describes how this situation results in an individualized experience of shame:

Me and my mates may be together before the match thinking we’ll get the atmosphere going, but because of how tickets are allocated and sold, we may be spread all over Anfield… You’ve got to be brave to start the chanting when nobody you know is with you. There’s nothing more embarrassing than raising your voice and you’re a lone voice in a crowd of 100 people, it’s dead shameful, head in your hands sort of stuff.

Unactivated consumers. Unactivated consumers describes an aspect of consumer heterogeneity in which not all consumers are ready to align their emotions and behavior in a crowd. For example, many tourists enter Anfield without activating entrained behaviors before a game such that they are not ready to sing and chant with others. Indeed, Gareth’s response above indicates that in addition to being separated from those he has activated a social atmosphere with before the game, once in the stadium he may be seated with people who are content to watch the game passively. In such cases, the social atmosphere can feel flat. In response, devoted consumers within the stadium such as members of Spion Kop 1906 may try to rectify the situation by activating passive consumers ‘on the job’, inviting them to join in with easy chants:
[Spion Kop] start a chant so simple, so rhythmic that even those not versed in Liverpool’s hymn sheet could join in. The row behind me put more passion into it this time. It’s an open invitation for the rest of the ground to join in. People sat close by cooperate, but take a while to adjust to the welcoming slower pace of the chant. The passion peters out. One supporter has had enough. “Are youse gonna give us a hand or what? Why are youse here?!” he shouts at the crowd. Some people in front turn around and roll their eyes, but the majority pretend not to hear him. (Fieldnotes, 18 January 2014).

As these fieldnotes show, however, attempts to activate entrained behavior can fail. Reflecting on instances where supporters are not able to get ‘on the same page’, Michaela explains that “arguments have broken out in the crowd before”. This can sour an atmosphere for Barry who complains that sitting among unentrained groups of supporters “puts me in a foul mood, and I spend the match complaining. I’d rather watch it with my mates in the pub.” Groups can harbor tensions when expectations and emotions are not aligned (Higgins and Hamilton 2019; Thomas et al. 2013), leading audiences to dissipate (Parmentier and Fischer 2015). This problem motivates Barry’s ‘place detachment’ (Borghini et al. 2020); where he used to loyally attend games at Anfield, he now prefers to watch LFC games on television in the pub with friends.

C**rowd pacification.** Crowd pacification refers to deliberate attempts to inhibit entrained behaviors and emotions. Following the accident at Hillsborough, EPL stadiums were modified to improve crowd safety. Where crowds once stood packed together in terraces, new regulations demanded they be seated and supervised by stadium staff and police (King 2002). Despite boasting some of the lowest incidents of crowd disorder in Europe, however, many supporters like Jon complain that these security interventions inhibit the creation of social atmospheres:
Let me show you. We’re sitting down now… I’ve got my hands in my lap, my shoulders and chest are all tight, and I’m stuck facing in one direction. How am I meant to express myself to others here? What can I do? I can clap, yes. Perhaps shout too, but it won’t be loud as I’ve not got space to have a good old bellow. Without being aware of it, seats change your relationship to the match and others around you. You feel unconnected. Now, standing up [Jon gets up out of his seat]. Look at the difference now. I can move my arms. I can turn around. I can chat to the people behind me. I can take deep breaths and sing! You just feel completely different. You feel connected, able to respond to events on the pitch...

Jon explains that being seated can limit entrained behaviors such as singing and gesturing. Moreover, because seats direct attention towards the field rather than to other members of the crowd, the possibility for crowds to recognize their shared emotions and behaviors is also limited. This hinders the possibility for the natural rituals that lead to collective effervescence (Collins 2004). Moreover, when supporters ignore these strictures, such as in our description of celebrations following a goal, they risk being ejected by security guards. This problem has motivated some supporters to campaign to restore standing areas within EPL stadiums. Others, however, admit that they have stopped attending EPL games, preferring lower league matches where standing is still permitted and where social atmospheres meet their expectations.

**Discussion**

Social atmospheres are shared experiences of place involving transformations in consumers’ emotions and behavior. Our study explains the processes by which these transformations are co-created during a four-stage interaction ritual chain that spans a number of interconnected places. We now discuss three theoretical contributions of these findings, before recommending how
firms can manage social atmospheres in ways that enhance place experiences, customer loyalty, and communal place attachments. Finally, we conclude our paper by considering boundary conditions, transferability of our findings to other contexts, and opportunities for future research.

**Theoretical Contributions**

Our study makes three theoretical contributions. By explaining the process of creating social atmospheres, we contribute to marketing research in retail atmospherics and servicecapes. By explaining how consumer heterogeneity affects interaction ritual chains, we contribute to theory of interaction ritual chains. By explaining how social atmospheres are created in a variety of places, we contribute to research on ritual place-making, and interaction ritual chain theory.

*The Process of Atmosphere.* Studies of retail environments show how firms create atmospheric experiences of place using multisensory stimuli (Baker et al. 2002; Spence et al. 2014), and that collages of these cues enhance place experiences by providing spectacles that prime playful behaviours (Kozinets et al. 2004; Sherry et al. 2001). When service staff and consumers enact mythic and ideological meanings, experiences of place are further enhanced (Arnould and Price 1993; Borghini et al. 2009; Diamond et al. 2009; Dion and Borraz 2017). In particular, ritual events imprint places with lasting identities (Bradford and Sherry 2015; Higgins and Hamilton 2019). These social constructions of place are described as occurring in ‘long and slow processes’ (Borghini et al. 2020), and engender enduring qualities of place (Seamon 2018).

Our work extends literature on ritual place-making by theorizing more rapidly changing qualities of place created during collective live events in which emotions and behaviors intensify and climax within groups (Arnould and Price 1993; Goulding et al. 2009; Kozinets 2002; Holt 1995). We conceptualize ‘social atmospheres’ as a means to explain the process by which individuals are aggregated into crowds by shared focus, and how shared emotions and
behaviours can intensify in pleasurable outbursts of collective effervescence. This pleasurable aspect of interaction rituals enhances place experiences, and motivates loyalty as desires to repeat social atmosphere. In addition to how communal meanings and practices can drive loyalty (McAlexander et al. 2002; Schau et al. 2009), we show that social atmospheres also drive loyalty since emotional experiences can help to strengthen place attachments (Borghini et al. 2020).

Moreover, although social atmospheres are conceptually distinct from a spirit of place (Bradford and Sherry 2015), we find that locations with an established spirit of place offer ideal sites for interaction rituals. Our findings indicate that learning about the spirit of place facilitates participation in the co-creation of a social atmosphere. Furthermore, social atmospheres themselves help to reconstruct a spirit of place: Durkheim (1995, p. 220) explains that repeated experiences of collective effervescence instil a place with “exceptionally intense forces”. In short, in addition to the domesticity of ‘hestial’ places (Bradford and Sherry 2015; Sherry et al. 2001), our study contributes an understanding of how an energetic spirit of place can be constructed through the creation of excitable social atmospheres.

*Heterogeneity and Interaction Rituals.* Consumer heterogeneity is a common feature of communal consumption events (Thomas et al. 2013). Because heterogeneous expectations, motivations and resource use can lead audiences to dissipate (Higgins and Hamilton 2019; Parmentier and Fisher 2015), this common dimension of group dynamics is an important consideration in understanding how interaction ritual chains create atmospheres. Despite this, Collins’ (2004) tends to gloss over heterogeneity among interaction ritual participants (Fine 2005). For this reason, our study extends Collins (2004; 2014) interaction ritual theory by considering interaction ritual chains as social interactions involving heterogeneous groups of participants that include both consumers and managerial stakeholders.
More specifically, we challenge the notion that entrainment is an automatic result of people being together in a place. Collins (2004 p. xix) considers that under these conditions a natural physiological mirroring enables ‘emotions in one individual’s body to become stimulated in the other person’s body’. Sociology has long discussed crowds as social configurations where individuals appear to think and act as one (LeBon 1896; Canetti 1981), and prior consumer research describes these effects as ‘affective contagion’ where emotions spread via affective cues such as facial expressions, gestures, and touch (Hill et al. 2014; Higgins and Hamilton 2019). Yet our findings indicate that when devoted long-time consumers mix with first-time tourists who are unwilling or unable to participate in entrained behavior, social atmospheres can suffer.

As a corrective to Collins’ (2004) view of entrainment occurring automatically through physiological mirroring, we explain that this aspect of interaction rituals also depends on participants becoming ‘prepared’ and ‘activated’. In other words, shared emotions and behaviors are not entirely ‘natural’, rather these effects depend on consumers learning emotional scripts, as well as procedures and rules (Higgins and Hamilton 2019; Schau et al. 2009). Beyond the kinds of procedures and rules elaborated in prior work, however, learning to participate in entrained behaviors encompasses opportunities to learn coordinated behaviours such as singing. In short, our work extends Collins (2004) by explaining that rather like a rudimentary knowledge of dance-steps enables people to move among others on a dancefloor, acquired abilities to synchronize group behavior can facilitate social atmospheres.

Extended Atmospheres. Thirdly, our study clarifies how consumer interactions in one place can impact atmospheres in another. Atmospheric effects are commonly associated with bounded retail, and servicescape locations (Baker et al. 2002; Kotler 1974; Spence et al. 2014; Sherry et al 2001). Collins (2004) too analyses interaction rituals occurring in discrete contexts.
In contrast to a view of places as bounded ‘containers’, however, studies show that consumers prepare for place experiences in different locations, and move from place to place as events progress (Bradford and Sherry 2015; Husemann and Eckhardt 2019). By tracing interaction rituals across multiple sites, we explain that the intense social atmospheres consumers enjoy at events do not begin spontaneously. Rather, at concerts, sports fixtures, carnivals and festivals, atmospheres are often activated prior to, and outside the places where these events occur.

This contribution aligns with theorizations of place as connected to other places (Coffin and Chatzidakis 2021). Specifically, we view social atmospheres as implicating paths that lead towards and away from places (Cresswell 2004). In terms of pathways that lead towards, social atmospheres are activated before the climax of a ‘main event’ among smaller gatherings of consumers, much like the tailgating events described by Bradford and Sherry (2015). In terms of the paths that lead away from place, we find that a stage of recovery sees consumers calming and breaking back into smaller groups who frequent a wider service ecosystem (Akaka and Vargo 2015) close to an event place, where they plan for repetitions of the social atmosphere.

Finally, with respect to the possibility for atmospheres in one place to move into another place, an important contribution of our study is to explain how different stages and contexts of the interaction ritual chain are linked. Our findings show that symbolic resources such as flags and songs are a constant presence throughout the interaction ritual chain. A unique implication of our study is that these symbolic resources can become mobile, and the transfer of these mobile resources from place to place connects the stages of an interaction ritual chain. Prepared in private places, before being transferred through the service ecosystem, and into an event space, visual and aural symbols provide a mobile focus that helps to gather larger crowds, and thereby facilitates the intensification of a social atmosphere as an interaction ritual chain progresses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage in the interaction ritual chain</th>
<th>Group size</th>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Firm's managerial roles</th>
<th>Roles of non-firm actors</th>
<th>Instances in prior research on collective live events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparations - consumer-led activities before events that provide resources to later enable atmospheres.</td>
<td>Intimate</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Educate consumers through marketing communications that stress behavioural expectations.</td>
<td>Family and friendship groups set behavioural expectations.</td>
<td>Festivals promote unique ethos through marketing communications (Kozinets 2002; Flinn and Frew 2014). Nightclubbers prepare costumes for the event (Goulding et al. 2009). TEDx events training (Fidelman 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activation - creation of social atmosphere through focus and entrainment among small groups of consumers before a main event.</td>
<td>Small-scale</td>
<td>Eco-system</td>
<td>Provide consumers with a visitors’ guide that mythologizes local landmarks and places.</td>
<td>Businesses in service ecosystem help to welcome and encourage consumers to activate.</td>
<td>Tailgating activities before American football games (Bradford and Sherry 2018). Pre-party events (Goulding et al. 2009). Pre-Mardi Gras parades (De Jong 2015).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How to Manage Interaction Ritual Chains

Managers play important roles in facilitating ritual interactions (McAlexander et al. 2002; Otnes et al. 2012), and to help firms to benefit from social atmospheres, this section identifies and illustrates how a variety of managerial stakeholders - from small businesses to managers of large event spaces - can facilitate each stage of the interaction ritual chain (see Table 2 for a summary). Our insights go beyond existing managerial advice by illustrating best practice at different stages of the interaction ritual chain before, during and after a main event. Finally, we explain how tensions in the creation of social atmospheres can be managed.

Enabling preparations. Preparations facilitate social atmospheres by teaching consumers about behavioral and emotional expectations before an event. Our findings illuminate opportunities for firms to facilitate preparations. Firms can play important roles in educating consumers about cultural meanings and behavioral expectations using media communications and social networks (Schau et al. 2009), and by partnering with ‘passionate entrepreneurs’, consumers who translate their knowledge of a community into offerings that support shared passions (Guercini and Cova 2018). For example, TED events are characterized by a highly charged elitist atmosphere. To create this experience, the TED organization provides guidelines to enthusiasts who arrange local TEDx events (Fidelman 2012). These guidelines prepare speakers on how to ‘TED’, covering topics such as creating material, and rehearsing speakers’ body language to elicit focus from the audience. These preparations also encourage consumers to become enthused and entrained when they attend, all of which benefits the TED brand by enhancing consumer experiences.

Enabling activation. Activations facilitate atmosphere by providing opportunities for smaller groups to ‘warm-up’ before a main event. To enable activation, we recommend firms
create partnerships with businesses who operate in the broader ecosystem around a main event site, since these are places where consumers often get together before an event, as is the case with the bikers who meet before Sydney’s Gay and Lesbian Mardi-Gras (de Jong 2015). Riding in formation creates a shared focus and entrained behavior in small groups (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Thereafter, bikers gather with others into larger unified crowds as they travel towards the carnival. Oftentimes these periods of mobility are as important as the event itself, and for this reason we recommend managers facilitate consumer ‘pilgrimages’ to events by providing information about potential activities, venues, and points of interest along the way. For example, at both Rio’s Carnival and Mardi-Gras in New Orleans, consumers are guided towards the many events and activities on offer before the main parade. However, given that emotions and behaviors intensify among crowds in public spaces, event managers will benefit from dialogue with public authorities as well as police and security services.

Enabling climax. Ritual climaxes provide pleasurable moments of boundary-open communication with others (Arnould and Price 1993; Collins 2004). This can enhance customer experiences and drive loyalty, as consumers seek to repeat rituals to re-experience collective effervescence. To facilitate climaxes, managers can first orchestrate formal rituals that focus and entrain smaller groups of consumers into larger audiences and crowds. Consider megachurches such as the enormously successful Hillsong. Much like musicians at concerts and festivals can unite huge crowds by having them clap and sing together, charismatic preachers begin events with formalized activities intended to focus and entrain a congregations’ behaviors and emotions (Collins 2004; Wagner 2019). Firms have important roles to play in providing spaces that facilitate these aspects of interaction rituals. For instance, megachurches benefit from architectural designs that facilitate consumers’ awareness of their aligned emotions and
behaviors. By enabling recognition of entrainment among a congregation, megachurches also facilitate natural rituals in which groups begin to express themselves more spontaneously. Preachers encourage worshippers to vocalize, or stand with hands raised, for example. When congregations can see, touch, and hear one another during these moments (Wagner 2019), their shared actions are likely to climax in experiences of collective effervescence.

*Enabling recovery.* The recovery stage is when shared emotions and memories of atmosphere are stored in the symbolic resources that consumers have carried through interaction ritual chains. We have shown how merchandise associated with experiences of collective effervescence can store feelings of emotional energy. Such objects are used by consumers in the preparation and activation stages of future events, and can therefore be useful drivers of loyalty. Additionally, we recommend firms create digital merchandise. By circulating footage of crowds enjoying a ritual climax, firms facilitate conversations between consumers about their shared emotional experiences. For example, music events such as Glastonbury and Coachella distribute media that focus on consumers as much as musicians to advertise climactic moments where an atmosphere becomes ‘electric’ (Flinn and Frew 2014). By showcasing crowds enjoying shared focus, entrainment and collective effervescence, digital merchandise can enhance loyalty by inspiring consumers’ desires to repeat interaction rituals. Moreover, digital merchandise connects the recovery stage of one event to the preparation stages of future events by educating consumers about expectations such as dress and emotional conduct (Anderton 2019; Haider 2019).

Despite opportunities for firms to facilitate interaction ritual chains, we recognize that social atmospheres can fail. Next, therefore, we provide recommendations to avoid failures by navigating three common tensions identified in our analysis.
Spectacle versus shared focus. Creating social atmospheres requires different management techniques compared with those used to manage environments intended to offer spectacular experiences, such as ESPNZone (Kozinets et al. 2004; Sherry et al. 2001), American Girl Place (Diamond et al. 2009), or Disney World (Houston and Meamber 2011). Studies of these places note how managers assemble dazzling arrays of objects and ‘zoned’ activities that provide myriad points of focus for smaller groups of consumers (Peñaloza 1998). In contrast, managers that wish to enable social atmospheres should minimize distractions from a common focus of attention necessary to initiate entrainment and collective effervescence. For this reason, pumping in spectacular stimuli such as upbeat music, lights and fireworks (Bradford and Sherry 2018) can harm social atmospheres by distracting the attention of crowds. To facilitate shared focus in crowds, we recommend firms use symbols that have previously been ‘charged’ with emotions and group significance during prior interaction rituals (Collins 2004). For instance, the Boston Red Sox have played Neil Diamond’s ‘Sweet Caroline’ during games for twenty years, providing a focus to prime a giant sing-along and a pleasurable social atmosphere (Slane 2017). Managers should beware that meaningless symbols are less likely to create shared focus. For example, when the Sydney Swans football club tried to activate similar conviviality using ‘Sweet Caroline’, consumers complained the song “has nothing to do with the club” (Griffiths 2017).

Insiders versus outsiders. Previous research notes how heterogeneity among consumers can cause group tensions, particularly when ‘newcomers’ mix face-to-face with established ‘insiders’ (Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Thomas et al. 2013). When music festivals grow in popularity, for example, a common complaint is that newcomers detract from the atmosphere (Anderton 2019). We have witnessed this tension between brand devotees and casual consumers, some of whom fail to join in with a shared focus and entrainment, leading to
failures in social atmosphere. Managers can play a key role in solving this problem. A common strategy is to provide access to differentiated areas of the event space so as to separate consumer segments according to their expectations and behaviours, such as when season-ticket holders are seated together. On one hand, this possibility can help to preserve groups of prepared and activated consumers who want to create social atmospheres. On the other hand, by separating devoted insiders from outsiders, these interventions may exacerbate differences (Thomas et al. 2013). Reinforcing differences in expectations and willingness to contribute to social atmospheres may prevent more experienced consumers from helping neophytes to join in (Schau et al. 2009). Brandfests offer a useful precedent here: when newer consumers mix with seasoned consumers both groups benefit, as outsiders are able to learn and feel welcomed, while insiders often ‘relish the recognition and status’ afforded them (McAlexander et al. 2002, p. 42).

Effervescence versus control. At collective live events, managers must inevitably assess myriad risks and implement safety precautions (Mowen et al. 2002). How can the possibility to create collective effervescence be balanced against the necessity to manage risks and disorder? First, educate security and service staff to understand consumers’ interaction ritual chains. Firms can avoid disrupting the entrainment and collective effervescence that contribute to social atmosphere by making staff aware of the places where consumers may have been before they arrive at an event, or the kinds of group behavior that they may have developed on the way there. Equally, service and security staff should be aware that collective effervescence may involve unusual behavior and unpredictable outbursts of emotion. For example, security at music festivals can misinterpret collective effervescence in a ‘mosh-pit’ for violent disorder, yet for consumers, this behavior is expected and enjoyed, and in most cases is not violent (Sinclair and Dolan 2015). These outcomes can benefit managers of security companies willing to build
specialized knowledge of interaction rituals. Having witnessed ritual events time and again, security and service staff can assume roles of trusted facilitators, whose experience enables them to allow consumers to produce social atmospheres, and to intervene only when necessary.

**Conclusion**

Our study explains the processes by which social atmospheres are created during interaction ritual chains intended to create the kinds of lively social atmosphere that typify many collective live events. Our analysis is transferable to other contexts that share characteristics encompassed in the following boundary conditions. First, our study is applicable to events at which the collective effervescence emerges as moments of positive affect. Future research can examine how interaction rituals produce atmospheres of grief, serenity or outrage, which may vary to the process we have described.

Second, our study is applicable to social atmospheres in both small contexts such as pubs and bars as well as larger, more organized live events like sports and music events, religious ceremonies, festivals and carnivals. A benefit of our theorization is to recognize how smaller businesses (pubs, cafes) are interconnected to larger organizations (football clubs), or places (stadiums). We note how smaller businesses that become aware of their place in an interaction ritual chain can facilitate activation and recovery activities; future research can examine how other kinds of small businesses in the ecosystem can benefit from their roles in these chains. Future research can also examine mobile social atmospheres with wider ecosystems, such as large, extended city-based events like the Edinburgh Fringe Festival or the Olympics.

Thirdly, our theory is especially relevant to recurring events, as the cyclical nature of interaction ritual chains means that the recovery stage feeds into the preparation stage. Related to this, our analysis suggests that social atmospheres depend on the presence of consumer groups
who have become used to contributing to atmosphere through repeated participation in interaction ritual chains. Thus, our insights are less relevant for one-off live events which are never repeated. Future research can investigate how social atmospheres can be developed at first time or one-off events, which may differ from the process we have outlined.

Finally, our insights are most relevant in face-to-face contexts in which communal interactions occur. Our theory has less relevance in more individualized retail experiences for which the findings of conventional atmospherics research remain relevant. However, as a result of face-to-face interactions being limited during 2020 and beyond, the role of technology in facilitating social interactions is changing. For Collins (2004, pg. 63), face-to-face contact is critical for interaction rituals, and for this reason he claims that interaction rituals cannot occur in digital environments. Nevertheless, virtual reality technologies may enable access to digitally mediated social atmospheres as a way to enhance experiential places such as museums, historical and educational sites, or allow consumers to experience collective live events remotely. These possibilities present exciting opportunities for future research and practice not least because people need connections with others, and suffer when emotional connections in gatherings large and small cannot be made. Marketing has important roles to play in facilitating connections and social systems, and we hope that this study inspires managerial practice that enables social atmospheres to flourish.


Ebner, Sarah (2013), “History and time are key to power of football, says Premier League chief,” *The Times* (July 2), https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/history-and-time-are-key-to-power-of-football-says-premier-league-chief-3d3zf5kb35m


## Web Appendix 1 – Sources of data and use in analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Use in the analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Primary Data**                                 | - Describe sensory and emotional experiences of atmosphere.  
- Describe multi stake-holder actions in enabling/inhibiting atmosphere.  
- Detect material and behavioural factors enabling/inhibiting atmospheres.  
- Describe heterogenous consumer behavior.  
- Identify connections between events before, during and after matches, as well as inside and outside the stadium. |
| Participant observation fieldnotes recorded pre, during and post-match at Anfield and other EPL stadia, as well as in homes, transport and service spaces. Fieldnotes include written, photo, and video records. |                                                                                                                                                     |
| Depth and ‘audiencing’ interviews with heterogeneous supporters, police, stadium architects, crowd safety experts, sports marketing consultants, and journalists. | - Describe supporter’s experiences of atmosphere.  
- Investigate how various actors create and manage atmosphere.  
- Investigate the role of managers and consumers in creating atmosphere before, during and after matches.  
- Investigate how stadium design impacts atmosphere. |
| Web/Broadcast media, marketing communications and social media: LFC official social accounts and website, plus fan-generated blog posts, podcasts, and participation in radio broadcasts. | - Describe how supporters talk about atmosphere.  
- Trace the images and videos of supporters and stadiums shared on social media, and how consumers use this media.  
- Trace how representations of supporters and stadium atmospheres are shared in social media, and how these are used. |
| **Secondary Data**                               | - Examine how atmosphere is described and represented in mainstream media.  
- Trace and explain changes in the redesign and redevelopment of football stadia. |
| Historical and archival, including academic histories of the EPL; EPL and LFC financial reports. | - Assess the changing role of atmosphere in football stadia.  
- Awareness of the origins and development of football stadia.  
- Trace the financial state and social image of football from the late-20th century to date. |
Web Appendix 2 - Additional data examples for each stage of Interaction Ritual Chain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Preparation | • Casual supporter James notes that “you’ve got to get in the mood beforehand ... all the culture and lore around Anfield really helps you get a feel for the place”, explaining why he watches recorded footage of the Anfield crowd before a match.  
• Casual supporter Seb describes how “the club produces some really good content showcasing the fans, the culture, Anfield’s atmosphere, the history, all the things that fill you full of pride and spirit before going to the match.”  
• Devotee Barry explains the pleasure he receives from attending LFC-promoted BOSS nights, “getting people together like Dan has done has done a lot for the culture of the club. It’s what makes the supporters special, that we get together outside of match day and we come up with the songs that the crowd sing in Anfield.”  
• Devotee Michaela describes her pre-match routine, “midweek we both post on forums with people we know from the match, and there’s a lot of good posters on there who know about the club and city. There are some good writers, like proper historians, and they can tell you a lot about the culture of the club” |
| Activation | • Casual supporter Amanda describes how she takes in the atmosphere outside Anfield pre-match, “We like to go to the stadium hours before kick-off and we’ll take photos of the statues, hang about a bit and watch that atmosphere build as people start to arrive. ... Watching all these people descend on the stadium, the sounds, the smells, that’s all part of the experience, the special Anfield experience.”  
• Visitor Ben describes how “we used the internet and web forums to work out which pub is best to soak up the pre-match atmosphere. Anfield is great because of all the places you can go beforehand, all in walking distance of the stadium, all good, social, fun places.”  
• Devotee Chris describes the “pre-match routine can be a better craic than the match itself sometimes. You’re with your mates, with like-minded people, there’s an atmosphere in the pre-match house [another pub around Anfield]. That bit of the Saturday is a dead important part of the day”  
• Devotee Dan, “there’s I think twelve pubs around Anfield. But each of them are heaving before kick-off, with people out on the street, a real sort of proper football atmosphere. Anfield pre-match is a good craic.” |
| Climax | • Visitor Sebastian describes how “Experiencing You’ll Never Walk Alone was magical, really magical. Where else can you hear fifty thousand people singing together, even thinking about it now gives me goosebumps. ... You feel really connected with everyone.”  
• Visitor Jenny recalls “The atmosphere is always special. Singing You’ll Never Walk Alone never gets boring, it’s always special, always a memorable experience.”  
• Devotee Brian describes how “what keeps me going back are those experiences of being sucked into the drama and the emotions that come from being there, experiencing the same thing with other people. Watching the match at home does not compare, it’s an individualised, consumer experience. Anfield provides that connection, that bonding, that almost spiritual experience weekly, the flags, the singing, the celebrations, it can be magic.”  
• Journalist Rory explains “clubs know that atmosphere is about rituals, particular songs, particular visual displays, quirks that they made part and parcel of the stadium experience. Anfield has You’ll Never Walk Alone, but other stadiums have their particular quirks and rituals too. ... Anfield is one of those places that can leave you feeling exhilarated and exhausted after ninety minutes.” |
| Recovery | • Casual supporter Amanda talks through all of her cherished pieces of merchandise, “I’ve got a couple of pin badges that are very special, which were bought after the Chelsea game in 2005, which was I lucky to be at. These are ... special, I’ll give them to my grandkids eventually.”  
• Devotee Mark details all of the merchandise he has bought following peak experiences of Anfield’s atmosphere, “I’ve got a couple of scarves, all bought following mad games, this was when mobile phones didn’t exist and there wasn’t recordings available. ... They allow you to remember and say ‘I was there on that night.’”  
• Devotee Dan emphasises how LFC’s marketing team play an important role in, “anticipating and creating the atmosphere in Anfield. They took too long in my opinion to use the crowd in their communications. Now, the content is really good, it can really help you get a feel for the place and what makes Anfield special.”  
• Sports marketing consultant George explains how “clubs can no longer be content with having a good, functional website. It’s about understanding the total journey and experiences supporters go on, and sort of narrating it...and using it create anticipation and excitement for the match.” |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| • Local supporters tell stories about the history & meaning of Anfield to younger supporters in homes. | Learning to participate | Preparation  
Occurs outside stadium before events in order to ready expectations, behaviours and resources to create atmosphere. |
| • Devoted supporters come together to create flags and songs in homes and community spaces. | Making symbolic resources |  |
| • Local supporters and tourists anticipate atmosphere by watching club and supporter-generated media. | Rehearsing entwined behaviors |  |
| • Local supporters transform service venues into using flags and songs, to begin creating an atmosphere. | Activating focus and entwainment | Activation  
Social atmospheres begin before and outside events with the initiation of group focus and entwainment. |
| • Supporters walk to Anfield in public spaces, joining with others and intensifying atmosphere. | Intensification & collective mobility |  |
| • Tourists spend taking photographs of statues and visit Hillsborough memorial. | Activate prior emotion experiences |  |
| • Local supporters transform interior of Anfield with flags and banners.  
• Crowd sing “You’ll Never Walk Alone”, a shared emotional and embodied experience. |  | Climax  
Orchestrated & spontaneous moments of pleasurable shared emotion and behavior in large groups. |
| • Supporters describe the connections between them that allow them to initiate chants and celebrations.  
• Architects describe the importance of spaces that enable consumers to see and hear each other. | |  |
| • Supporters note how merchandise becomes a cherished possession. Loyal supporters develop ‘lucky’ possessions over time. | Formal climax | Recovery  
Storing ‘emotional energy’ in objects and recirculation of representations of atmospheres. |
| • Supporters watch recorded footage of the game produced by the club and supporter groups.  
• Supporters describe how these highlights are used to prepare for the next game. | Natural climax |  |
| • Supporters not participating in singing can lead to ‘flat’ atmosphere | Emotionally charged objects | Distracting shared focus  
Inhibits the shared attention within groups that enables entrainment and collective effervescence. |
| • Clubs remove objects from the stadium that prime shared feelings and memories among supporters.  
• Security staff prevent flags and banners being flown or songs being sung. | Remembering atmosphere |  |
| • Supporters complain about the club’s attempt to ‘manufacture’ atmosphere with pre-match entertainment.  
• Supporters complain that pre-match entertainment the crowd more passive. | | Individualizing consumers  
Inhibits the coordinated emotion and behavior that produces social atmosphere. |
| • Firm ticketing practices mean supporters are split from friends and family, reducing enjoyment and flattening atmosphere. | Unprepared consumers |  |
| • Supporters note how different supporter behaviours can ruin the atmosphere, and create tension. | Removal of symbolic objects |  |
| • Supporters complain that all seater stadiums and the policing of standing weakens the atmosphere. | Spectacular stimuli |  |
| | Activation heterogeneity |  |
| | Crowd pacification |  |