

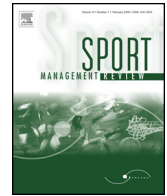


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Full length article

# Sport team emotion: Conceptualization, scale development and validation

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify key emotions associated with professional sport team brands and to develop a valid, reliable scale to measure the recall of these emotions. A pool of 30 potential emotions was drawn through a content analysis, a qualitative study ( $n=67$ ), frequency analysis ( $n=560$ ), and categorization process. The identified emotions were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis ( $n=260$ ) and confirmatory factor analysis ( $n=286$ ). The emotion recall scale consists of 24 emotions representing 7 dimensions: connectedness, elation, competitiveness, surprise, anger, unhappiness, and worry. The authors offer evidence of internal consistency of the scale and convergent, discriminant, and criterion validity evidence. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Building strong team brands has been an essential goal for contemporary sport management (Shank & Lyberger, 2015). In searching for ways to achieve this goal, sport management researchers have paid close attention to consumers' cognitive side by examining how brands (sport teams) exist in consumer memory on the basis of their links to brand associations (e.g., Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, & Exler, 2008; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006). Following an associative network memory model of brand associations (Anderson, 1983; Keller, 1993), these researchers have primarily focused on brand associations, particularly brand attributes, as major drivers to create strong brands. Although the cognitive research provides valuable contributions to understanding a sport team brand, it uncovers only one side of the sport team brand and does not provide an adequate account of how our emotions are structured and how they, while experiencing the brand, affect our consumption behavior (Robinson & Clore, 2002).

Cognitive theorists in consumer behavior view consumers as vigorous processors of information in connection with choices among alternatives. However, consumers often do not engage in extensive decision-making (Hoyer, 1984), and consumers minimize cognitive efforts even for high involvement consumption decisions, including first-time buying, luxury products, or risky purchases (Olshavsky & Granbois, 1979). Pascal's prescient claim that "the heart has its reasons which reason does not understand" (Pascal, 1643/1966, p. 113) has echoed in the realm of cognition research, and researchers have offered empirical evidence for emotion being a useful and essential constituent of cognition and behavior (Forgas, 2008;

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Zajonc, 1980). According to recent research in neuroscience, social cognitive and emotional processes share overlapping neural structure that have co-evolved to cope with stimuli of high significance (Damasio, 2010; Forgas, 2003). The neuroscience approach to emotions suggests that emotion and cognition not only interact, but that the primacy of emotion over cognition happens more frequently in various decision-making situations (Damasio, 1994; Hill, 2010; LeDoux, 1996). According to LeDoux (1996), the amygdala as the emotional center of the human brain serves as a core mechanism that enables the primacy of emotional processing (low road: thalamus to the amygdala) over cognitive processing (high road: thalamus to the cortex to the amygdala); the high road adjusts the initial behavior generated by the low road. Consequently, emotions play a large role in guiding human behavior.

Consumption behaviors are no different. With the emergence of emotionomics, today's more sophisticated consumers not only pursue services and products that are of the highest quality, but also demand and anticipate experiencing positive and personally meaningful emotions in their consumption (Hill, 2010). Furthermore, consumers tend to utilize an emotion-driven shortcut to simplify their decision-making (Zaltman, 2003).

Considering the experiential and hedonic nature of sport consumption, it is not surprising that sport teams attempt to facilitate positive emotional experiences. Indeed, emotion-laden experiences are an essential part of sport events (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Despite the critical role of emotion in consumer behaviors and the widespread emphasis on emotion in sport management practice, the affective nature of sport team brands remains largely unexplored.

Previous researchers focusing on emotions have attempted to understand how sport consumers feel during or after watching sporting events (e.g., Kerr, Wilson, Nakamura, & Sudo, 2005; Sloan, 1979; Wann, Dolan, McGeorge, & Allison, 1994) and focus on the effect of the outcome of the game on our emotions. They suggested that sport consumers' emotions are fundamentally dependent on game outcomes. Yet, consuming sport teams as brands is more than merely watching sporting events and enjoying their performance; rather, it involves meanings that sport consumers attach to their teams beyond sport consumption in a stadium or via TV, and positive brand emotions are at the heart of such brand meanings (Batey, 2008). Sport consumers may develop emotions about their teams based on all aspects of sport teams that they experience, not just on-field performance. In this regard, emotions associated with sport team performance do not seem to fully reflect sport fans' emotions in terms of meaning associated with their teams.

Furthermore, a number of branding researchers have recognized the importance of customer experiences, including sensory, emotional, and cognitive components of the experience (e.g., Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). Indeed, to consume a brand is to consume meanings associated with the brand, and these meanings are created and enhanced by experiences with the brand over time (Batey, 2008; Gordon, 2002). As brand experiences can be thought to be a function of multiple components (Brakus et al., 2009), sport team brand experiences seem to be comprised of more than that experienced through the cognitive brand attributes. For example, fans often complain about a team's performance, the qualities of a star player, and the service in the stadium. Yet, they continue to attend games. In the face of such negative evaluations of the brand attributes, a purely cognitive model would determine repeat attendance as irrational. Clearly, there is more to the attendance experience than team success and the qualities of the star player and the stadium: there is also the emotional experience associated with sport teams. Consequently, a deeper understanding of the emotions associated with sport teams is required and several fundamental questions arise. What are the particular emotions associated with sport team brands? Specifically, how are they structured? What is their impact on sport consumer behavior?

In this regard, the purpose of this study is to provide a more complete understanding of how consumers recall their emotions when thinking of their favorite professional sport teams. The identification of the most important emotions that sport consumers recall about their team could allow for an alternative explanation of consumers' current attitudes towards the brand. Thus, the purpose of the research is to develop a valid, reliable scale of emotion recall associated with professional sport team brands.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Explaining consumer attitudes through brand equity

As sport team values, especially professional franchises, have steadily escalated, sport managers have begun to view their teams as brands (Ross et al., 2006). Most of the sport brand studies have followed the most notable two theories of brand equity—those proposed by Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993). Aaker (1991) conceptualized brand equity as a set of four categories of brand assets: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations. Keller (1993) presented a more cognitive psychology perspective for understanding brand equity based on an associative network memory model. Keller's (1993) framework is composed of brand awareness and brand associations, two of Aaker's (1991) four dimensions. Keller's (1993) cognitive perspective is useful in that it can show how a brand as a central node and other informational nodes as brand associations are linked in consumer memory. According to Keller (1993), brand associations can be categorized into three major categories: attributes, benefits, and attitudes.

In the realm of team sports, Gladden, Milne, and Sutton (1998) and Gladden and Milne (1999) conceptualized 12 antecedents of brand equity: success, head coach, star player, tradition, conference/schedule, product delivery, logo, stadium, local media coverage, geographic location, competitive forces, and team support/following. These antecedents affect brand equity of sport teams, and the brand equity results in related consequences, such as national media exposure, merchandise sales, individual donations, corporate support, atmosphere, and ticket sales.

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