

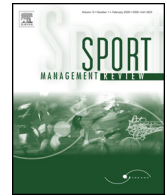


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Full Length Article

Examining the antecedents of sport team brand equity: A dual-identification perspective

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ABSTRACT

Although the practice of building brand equity in the context of professional sport teams is popular, the formation of sport team brand equity in the sport marketing literature is still relatively unknown and incompletely understood. In this study, the authors propose a dual-identification model to examine the formation of sport team brand equity in an Asia-based professional team sport setting. Baseball fans ($N = 548$) of the Chinese Professional Baseball League (CPBL) in Taiwan participated in the self-administered survey. A Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Model analysis revealed that marketplace characteristics (including group experience, salient experience, team history, and fan rituals) and brand-identified-related factors (including self-congruity and team brand prestige) were significantly related to identification with sport team and identification with sport team brand, respectively. In turn, both identification with sport team and identification with sport team brand were significant predictors of sport team brand equity. These findings highlight the importance of studying a dual-identification model in order to understand how sport team brand equity forms and suggest implications for sport team managers.

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1. Introduction

Sport – an important type of hedonic service industry (Hightower, Brady, & Baker, (2002)) – has become increasingly commercialized and lucrative (Sainam, Balasubramanian & Bayus, 2010) around the world. In the Western context, for instance, football teams attract many fans who attend matches as their major leisure activity (Biscaia et al., 2016; Theodorakis et al., 2013). With the flourishing of sport competitions (Sainam et al., 2010), the success of a sport team not only requires fan support but also branding as champions (Stokburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2014). To some extent, developing and managing brand equity is especially crucial for professional sport teams (Biscaia et al., 2016). Several European professional football teams have done a good job in regard to this strategy. For example, the English soccer club Manchester United was recently ranked the sport's number one brand with a value of US\$1.21 billion (Brand Finance, 2015).

Although the practice of building brand equity in the professional sport team context is not new, initial scholars in the sport marketing literature with regard to the creation of brand equity focus on providing an initial understanding of how a team's brand equity can be conceptually built (Gladden & Milne, 1999; Gladden et al., 1998; Ross, 2006) or can be measured (Bauer, Sauer, & Schmitt, 2005; Biscaia, Correia, Ross, Rosado, & Maroco, 2013; Biscaia et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2008; Ross,

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2006). Many researchers have depended on social identity–based identification (Boyle & Magnusson, 2007; Stokburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2014; Underwood, Bond, & Baer, 2001; Watkins, 2014; Wear et al., 2016) to investigate the effects of single, specific targets of identification on sport teams' brands or brand equity in a variety of sport contexts. However, these researchers have separately, rather than simultaneously, considered how different targets of identification contribute to sport team brand equity in the professional sport context. Given that sport fans can develop their identification with multiple targets (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001), they not only identify with the sport team itself (e.g., Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Katz & Heere, 2016) but also increasingly tend to perceive team brands as potential identification targets (Stokburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2014). Accordingly, it is important for sport team managers to know that these two targets of identification from unique sport fans can exist concurrently when creating sport team brand equity.

In addition, sport team brand equity researchers have focused on the Western sport market, both in Europe (Bauer et al., 2005; Biscaia et al., 2013; Biscaia et al., 2016; Stokburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2014) and the United States (Boyle & Magnusson, 2007; Gladden & Milne, 1999; Gladden et al., 1998; Ross et al., 2008; Ross, 2006; Watkins, 2014; Wear et al., 2016). The scant consideration of the Asian professional sport context provides an opportunity for greater understanding of the formation of sport team brand equity beyond the Western sport market. More specifically, unlike the majority of professional sport team brands in the Western market which carry the name of the city where they are located, like Manchester United and the New York Yankees, professional sport team brands in the Asia–Pacific region include the name of the companies that own them (Walsh, Hwang, Lim, & Pedersen, 2015). Examples are the Uni-President 7-Eleven Lions, the Samsung Lions, and the Yomiuri Giants in the Taiwan, Korea, and Japan professional baseball leagues, respectively. While lessons from the fans of successful sport teams indicate they have identified with their favorite team and team brand (Stokburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2014), it is possible that sport fans in this context are likely to distinguish between identification with the sport team itself (affective perspective) and the sport team's brand (cognitive perspective; Swanson & Kent, 2015). What has yet to be examined is the role of these two distinguished identifications in exerting independent and equivalent impacts that bridge the relevant antecedents on the formation of sport team brand equity especially in one of the Asia-based professional sport context.

In this study, we contribute to the extant sport marketing literature by integrating previous theoretical frameworks: the social identity–brand equity (SIBE) model (Underwood et al., 2001) and the customer–company brand identification theory (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003)—to provide further understanding of how identification with the sport team and identification with the sport team brand contribute to the formation of sport team brand equity. Specifically, our proposed dual-identification model addresses two routes to sport team brand equity: (a) how the sport marketplace characteristics via identification with the sport team lead to sport team brand equity; and (b) how brand identity-related factors strengthen identification with the sport team brand and lead to sport team brand equity as well.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses development

2.1. Brand equity in the team sport setting

According to Keller (1993, 2003), customer-based brand equity refers to the differential effect that brand knowledge (including brand awareness and brand image) has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand. This knowledge is useful for helping sport team managers understand how to influence their fans and the mental association toward their brands (Biscaia et al., 2016). In the sport setting, brand equity refers to the value that fans attach to their favorite team's name and symbol (Gladden & Milne, 1999). For sport teams, much of this value is inherent in the experiences related to certain activities, such as attending games and supporting the team (Watkins, 2014). In line with Watkins (2014), we define sport team brand equity as the value of the brand in the mind of the consumer.

Gladden et al. (1998) and Gladden and Milne (1999) proposed that sport team brand equity is commonly associated with a team, a university, and market-related factors, such as the acquisition of assets and the enhancement of customer relationships in either the college or professional sport setting. Several researchers have developed multidimensional scales to measure brand equity in relation to sport organizations in a variety of sport settings (Biscaia et al., 2013; Biscaia et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2008; Ross, 2006). For instance, based on Keller's (1993) customer-based brand equity model, Bauer et al. (2005) developed a consumer-based brand equity scale (BETS) in the professional team sport industry. Ross (2006) and Ross et al. (2008) developed, and Biscaia et al. (2013, 2016) refined, the spectator-based brand equity (SBBE) scale for both the professional and the collegiate sport contexts.

Moreover, scholars have examined the antecedents of sport team brand equity; in particular, a variety of social identity–based identifications have received much attention. Based on Underwood et al.'s (2001) SIBE framework, Boyle and Magnusson (2007) supported the idea that collegiate teams' history, group experience (i.e., salient and community group), and venue positively affect social identity, leading to team brand equity. Watkins (2014) further confirmed that group experience and venue positively influence identification and sport team brand equity in the professional team sport context. In their study, Stokburger-Sauer and Teichmann (2014) found that identification with the sport team brand benefits consumer response to professional football team brands. However, these findings shed little light on how single and specific targets of identification influence sport team brand equity. Whether different targets of identification simultaneously influence sport team brand equity is a question that remains incompletely answered.

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