

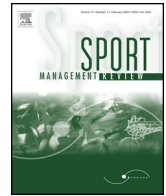


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# Sport team personality: It's not all about winning!

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### ABSTRACT

As there is still no commonly accepted scale to measure the brand personality of sport teams, the purpose of this study was to develop and validate the Sport Team Personality Scale (STPS) in a professional sport context. The authors conducted a series of studies in the United States and United Kingdom with fans of the English Premier League, Major League Baseball, the National Basketball Association, the National Football League, and the National Hockey League. The STPS contains 18 items that load onto six factors: success, talent, entertainment, dedication, admiration, and care. The authors compared this new scale with existing sport team personality scales and used it to explore team identification and perceptual similarities and differences among teams. Results indicate that teams map along performance (i.e., success and talent) and character (i.e., admiration and care) factors and that the character factor is a more important source of team identification than the performance factor. Taken together, these results illustrate how the STPS can help sport managers position and differentiate teams within a league to improve marketing outcomes.

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## 1. Introduction

Past research has linked brand personality, “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347), to several positive consumer and firm outcomes. For example, brand personality enhances consumer attitudes, preferences, purchase intentions, satisfaction, and loyalty (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Mengxia, 2007)—all of which are vital to the success of sport organizations. Consumers seek out brands with certain personalities because of the symbolic benefits these brands provide (Aaker, 1997; Keller, 1993). Ultimately, consumers' identification with these brands can lead to long-term consumer-brand relationships. Brand personality is especially relevant to professional sport teams, because sport teams offer several symbolic benefits and fans often identify strongly with their favorite teams. Consequently, sport team personality is an important contributor to marketing outcomes such as team identification and subsequent brand loyalty (Karjaluo, Munnukka, & Salmi, 2016).

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Despite the importance of brand personality and its relevance to sport teams, efforts to develop scales that measure sport team personality are limited. This lack of research is surprising, given that fans often attribute a variety of personality characteristics to professional sport teams. For example, the New York Yankees' mission to win the World Series emphasizes performance-related attributes such as "talented" or "successful." On the other hand, FC Barcelona's slogan of "més que un club" ("more than a club") highlights character-related attributes such as "caring" or "community-oriented."

While past research has demonstrated that general brand personality scales cannot capture the sport-specific elements that characterize sport team personality (Ross, 2008), existing sport team personality scales present conceptual or methodological limitations. From a conceptual standpoint, existing scales offer little consensus on the most important dimensions of sport team personality. For example, the number of factors in each scale varies widely—as does the conceptual meaning of each factor, which is not always clear. As a result, questions arise regarding which factors most adequately capture sport team personality, as well as how sport team personality can be used to examine other managerially relevant concepts. As things stand, it seems impractical to relate as many as six factors to other constructs of interest. From a methodological standpoint, several authors have acknowledged that existing scales do not yet "provide a sufficiently sound instrument" to measure sport team personality (Braunstein & Ross, 2010, p. 13). For example, existing scales report fairly high correlations between factors, which could be due to common method bias. Thus, researchers may have to control for common method bias, which often contaminates responses in personality and values research (e.g., Schwartz et al., 2012). Taken together, these challenges highlight the need for a new sport team personality scale, a comparative evaluation of a potential new sport team personality scale with existing scales, and an investigation of the relationship between sport team personality and other managerially relevant concepts such as team identification in a professional sport context.

To this end, we report a series of studies whose findings contribute to sport management theory and practice in the following ways. First, we develop and validate the Sport Team Personality Scale (STPS). The scale contains 18 items that load onto six factors (success, talent, entertainment, dedication, admiration, and care) and demonstrates adequate psychometric properties across a number of professional sport leagues—including the English Premier League (EPL), Major League Baseball (MLB), the National Basketball Association (NBA), the National Football League (NFL), and the National Hockey League (NHL). Second, we compare the STPS to existing scales and show that the new scale captures the most important dimensions of sport team personality. Third, to illustrate how sport managers can use the STPS, we investigate its relationship with team identification and examine the perceptual similarities and differences between teams within a league. Results indicate that teams map onto performance (i.e., success and talent) and character (i.e., admiration and care) factors and that the character factor is a more important source of team identification than the performance factor.

In the following sections, we define the concept of brand personality and review existing brand personality scales, including previous attempts to measure sport team personality. Then, we develop and validate the proposed STPS, compare the STPS to existing scales that measure sport team personality, and examine the relationship between the STPS and other managerially relevant concepts to illustrate how this new scale can help managers position and differentiate teams within sport leagues to improve marketing outcomes. Finally, we discuss theoretical and managerial implications as well as limitations and directions for future research.

## 2. Conceptual framework

### 2.1. Brand personality

Brand personality refers to "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). The concept of brand personality is especially relevant to marketers because it can lead to a variety of desirable consumer and firm outcomes—including enhanced attitudes, preferences, purchase intentions, satisfaction, and loyalty to the brand and/or firm (Brakus et al., 2009; Mengxia, 2007)—thanks to its symbolic, self-expressive function (Aaker, 1997; Keller, 1993). In general, consumers are attracted to, prefer, and choose brands that allow them to express themselves (Belk, 1988; Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993; Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1982). Thus, brand personality is a valuable tool that can help differentiate brands and improve marketing outcomes. However, the ability to manage brand personality to achieve these effects depends on the existence of a reliable, valid, and generalizable measurement scale.

### 2.2. Measuring brand personality

Most empirical brand personality research stems from Aaker's (1997) introduction of a theoretical framework of brand personality and corresponding Brand Personality Scale (BPS). To develop the BPS, Aaker tested 114 personality characteristics across 37 brands using a large, nationally representative sample of U.S. consumers. This process resulted in 42 items that load onto five factors: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. While Aaker described the BPS as reliable, valid, and generalizable, subsequent researchers criticized the BPS for including items that do not reflect human personality traits, neglecting within-brand variance by aggregating consumer-level data and using the brand as the unit of analysis, and failing to replicate across different contexts and cultures (e.g., Aaker, Benet-Martínez, & Garolera, 2001; Austin,

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