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Developing an Understanding of Brand Associations in Team Sport: Empirical Evidence from Consumers of Professional Sport

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This study broadens the understanding of brand management in sport by creating the Team Association Model, a scale that identifies dimensions of brand associations, a major contributor to the creation of brand equity. Utilizing Keller's (1993) theoretical framework of consumer-based brand equity, a thorough review of the sport literature was conducted which identified 16 potential dimensions. These 16 dimensions are derived with reference to Keller's categorization of brand associations into ATTRIBUTE (success, head coach, star player, management, stadium, logo design, product delivery, and tradition), BENEFIT (identification, nostalgia, pride in place, escape, and peer group acceptance), and ATTITUDE (importance, knowledge, and affect). In order to evaluate the applicability of each potential dimension, a scale is developed, pre-tested, and tested on a national sample of sport consumers. Results of the confirmatory factor analysis of provided support for this paper's theoretical notion that 16 distinct constructs underlie brand associations in sports.

Sport managers are beginning to view their teams, leagues, and properties as "brands" to be managed. Examination of the popular coverage of the sport business reveals numerous instances of sport entities being treated as brands. For example, the Continental Basketball Association (minor league U.S. professional basketball), the Chicago Bears, and Southern Methodist University athletic department have all hired advertising agencies to assist them in revitalizing their respective brands (Leenders, 1998; Lombardo, 1998, 1999). The Manchester United football brand is so strong that it is able to open memorabilia stores in Asia (Stewart, 1999).

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While there is increased discussion of teams and sport entities as brands, questions arise. Is there an understanding of how strong brands are developed in sport? More specifically, do the executives of the Manchester United understand why they benefit from high levels of brand equity? Do the executives of the Chicago Bears and Continental Basketball Association understand how brand equity is developed so that they can evaluate the work provided by the advertising agencies? The purpose of this article is to help illuminate answers to such questions by identifying the types of brand associations in team sport. Based on a theoretical framework provided by Keller (1993) and a thorough review of the sport literature, a scale is developed, pre-tested, and tested on a national sample of sport consumers. This scale provides the first conceptualization and empirical examination of brand associations in team sport.

Consumer-Based Brand Equity

The added value a brand name or logo contributes to a product or service is commonly referred to as brand equity (Aaker, 1991). In line with this definition, professional sport teams are likely to possess brand equity by virtue of the added meaning sport consumers attach to the names and logos of their favorite teams (Gladden & Milne, 1999). However, research applying brand equity to sport has only just begun. Based on a conceptual framework provided by Aaker (1991), Gladden, Milne, and Sutton (1998) presented a conceptual framework for understanding brand equity in the Division I college sport setting. The framework posited antecedent conditions led to the development of brand equity (as defined by Aaker), which in turn resulted in marketplace outcomes. Gladden and Milne (1999) modified the framework to include the entire team sport setting and examined the hypothesized links between several antecedents (success, star players, coach, and competitive forces) and the realization of merchandise sales. However, this study, and the other empirical examination of brand equity in sport by Boone, Kochunny, and Wilkins (1995), relied exclusively on financial data to operationalize brand equity. While financial indicators derived from secondary data have been used to define and examine brand equity (Simon & Sullivan, 1992), some scholars (Aaker, 1991; Blackston, 1992; Keller, 1993) believe that because the consumer controls the creation of brand equity, it is important to study brand equity from the consumer's perspective. Further, Milne and McDonald (1999) suggest success in sport marketing requires understanding what factors influence team sport consumption.

As a result, this study draws on Keller's conceptualization of customer-based brand equity. According to Keller (1993), "customer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory" (p. 2). Keller's conceptualization has two components. First, the consumer must be aware of the brand. Second, the brand must have a positive and unique brand image in the consumer's mind. This image is the cumulative product of brand associations, which are the "other informational nodes linked to the brand in memory and contain the meaning of the brand for consumers" (p. 3).

Because the sport product is unique, it is important to adapt Keller's conceptualization of brand equity to the sport setting. Brooks (1994) defines the sport product as "any form of physical activity that pits one's talents against an opponents" (p. 88). In team sport, the product is the actual game itself between two teams. This team sport product can be consumed by people in-person in a stadium or arena, through the various forms of media available today (television, radio, and the Internet) and after it is staged as people read newspaper accounts and watch highlights of their favorite team's games. Given this context, there are unique elements to studying sport brands. First, the sport product is unpredictable (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2000). Unlike a mainstream product, such as soda, the performance of the brand varies from one day to the next and is ultimately difficult to control. In addition, consumption of the sport product is experiential and often emotional (Mullin et al., 2000). Consuming team sport events provides virtually no tangible benefits. Rather, the benefits associated with sport are much more intangible. For example, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) contend that the symbolic benefits derived through the consumption experience may be particularly acute with respect to leisure activities.

According to Aaker (1991), brand associations are anything in a consumer's memory linked to a specific brand. The team sport consumer forms a wide variety of brand associations based on the consumption experience. Further, people may react differently to the exact same event (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). Therefore, it is important to understand what benefits a consumer receives from consuming a sporting event (either on television, radio, or in person). The challenge of understanding the benefits is further confounded by the fact that a number of the benefits provided by the sport product are intangible (Mullin et al., 2000). By definition, brand associations capture experiential and emotional benefits that consumers receive through the consumption of sport. To date, no research has been conducted to examine the brand association component in the sport industry.

In this study, we rely on previous research on brand associations (Keller, 1993; Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986) to identify 16 types of brand associations that may exist in consumers' minds and use a survey instrument to create measures for the 16 dimensions. As such, we operationalize brand associations as those categories of product attributes, product benefits, and attitudes toward a product that may exist in consumers' minds and impact their evaluation of brands. This perspective differs from prior empirical research on brand associations, which operationalizes brand associations as networks of concepts and meanings related to brand names in consumers' minds (e.g., Henderson, Iacobucci, & Calder, 1998; Meyers-Levy, 1989). Specifically, these studies examine the set of associations (and their relationship to each other) that a brand name evokes. Thus, in this preliminary study of brand associations in team sport, we are seeking to identify categories of brand association that may exist. We are not studying the order in which the associations occur or how the associations are related to each other in consumers' minds.

The remainder of this paper is presented in three sections. First, theoretical grounding for the item construction is presented. Second, we discuss and present

the results of a three-step procedure used to modify and assess the scale's reliability and construct validity. Finally, a discussion is presented regarding the utility and potential applications of the scale to the team sport setting along with directions for future research.

Literature Review

Keller's (1993) framework for understanding customer-based brand equity provides the most complete conceptual understanding of brand associations to date. Consistent with this definition, we are attempting to utilize his framework to better understand the associations connected to team sport brands. In this effort, we are not only focusing on those people that attend games, but also those people that watch, listen, read, or follow team sport through the variety of available media. Keller (1993) classifies brand associations into three major categories based on their level of abstraction: attributes, benefits, and attitudes. Attributes are typically the features of a particular brand (Keller, 1998). For example, a sport consumer may decide to purchase a ticket package of five games because their hometown team signed a popular free agent. In this case, the player would represent an attribute of the team product. Benefits, the second form of brand associations, represent the meaning and value consumers attach to the product (Keller, 1993). A sport consumer may purchase a baseball hat possessing a particular team's logo as a means of signifying their identification with that team. The ability of the team to provide a basis for identification represents a benefit offered by a particular team. Finally, attitudes are the most abstract form of brand associations. Attitudes are defined in terms of the consumer's overall evaluation of the brand and often depend on the strength and favorability of the attributes and benefits provided by the brand (Keller, 1998). A sport consumer that memorizes the statistics of his favorite team's players on a daily basis would represent someone with a strong and favorable attitude toward that particular team. The remainder of this section utilizes Keller's (1993) framework as a basis for identifying the various components of brand associations in team sport. Given the definitions provided by Keller and other authors, potential constructs from the sport literature are identified for inclusion in the development of a scale to assess brand associations.

Attributes

Keller (1993) distinguishes between two types of attributes: product-related and non-product-related. Product-related attributes are seen as the components necessary for performing the function(s) expected by consumers. In the team sport setting, product-related attributes would represent those factors that contribute to the performance of the team. To this end, four product-related attributes were identified: success, star player, head coach, and management. First, success is probably the most important creator of brand associations and brand equity over time (Gladden et al., 1998). A wealth of research exists documenting the positive outcomes of success, most notably increased ticket sales (e.g., Branvold, Pan, &

Gabert, 1997; Porter & Scully, 1982). Second, the presence of a star player(s) on a team can contribute to the overall attractiveness of a given team (Schofield, 1983). Attendance increases have recently been attributed to star players in both U.S. professional baseball and basketball (Gotthelf, 1999; King, 1998, 1999). Particularly in the case of teams that are unsuccessful, marketing or promoting star players may help counteract negative brand associations developed through losing (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998). Gladden and Milne (1999) found a positive relationship between the head coach and team merchandise sales. Moreover, anecdotal evidence suggests that the head coach can have an impact on the creation of brand associations. Finally, the notion of a team's management having an impact on consumers' perceptions of a team is new. Garbarino and Johnson (1999) suggest consumer decision-making is guided by the trust a consumer feels toward a particular marketing organization. Similarly, Fournier (1998) conceptualizes a brand-partner quality dimension of the brand-consumer relationship that is partially dependent on trust. According to this rationale, if a sport consumer were given reason to not trust a particular sport organization or an organization's employees, the brand associations with that organization would be negative. In an era when World Championship teams trade or fail to re-sign key players, a new sense of distrust has been generated toward professional sport franchises.

In contrast, non-product-related attributes affect purchase or consumption but do not impact the overall performance of the product (Keller, 1993). In the team sport setting, there are four non-product-related attributes: logo design, stadium/arena, product delivery, and tradition. First, corporate marks, or logos, play an important part in generating brand associations (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1998). Biehal and Sheinin (1998) suggest corporations can strengthen the retrieval of associations with a particular brand through the use of a logo. In the team sport context, Schoenfeld (1998) claims the San Jose Sharks of the National Hockey League were the first team in sport to exist as a "marketing phenomenon" before playing a game (p. 49). The Sharks' success was largely due to the associations created with the Shark logo prior to the core product performing. Second, the facility in which teams play can contribute to the creation of brand associations, particularly for those attending the game. The quality of service offerings (restrooms, concession stands, layout, etc.; Wakefield, Blodgett, & Sloan, 1996; Wakefield & Sloan, 1995), aesthetic qualities of the stadium, such as the architecture (Wakefield et al., 1996), the sense of community provided by the stadium (Trujillo & Krizek, 1994), and the opening of new stadiums and arenas (Schofield, 1983) can all foster positive associations. Third, a desire to be entertained has been found to be a motivation for sport fandom (Wann, 1995). A sport team entertains (and develops brand associations) largely through the delivery of the product. This includes both the performance by the team (for both attendees and other consumers) and the ancillary activities occurring at the stadium (for attendees). For example, promotions impact the delivery of the sport product (Marcum & Greenstein, 1985) and, by consequence, brand associations.

Finally, the tradition associated with a team can be a strong source of brand association. Rhoads and Gerking (2000) defined tradition as a past history of bowl

appearances and NCAA men's basketball tournament appearances. However, this definition of tradition is limiting. Traditions can be created around factors other than game performance. For example, tradition in intercollegiate athletics can include traditions of ethical management and academic rigor (Gladden et al., 1998; Putler & Wolfe, 1999). Kolbe and James (2000) broadened the definition of tradition to include a style of play and a generic descriptor of "team history." Anecdotally, one of the strongest traditions associated with the Boston Red Sox is their lack of World Series titles throughout most of the twentieth century. While not positive, it is a tradition that binds consumers of the Red Sox together. Thus, any definition of tradition must be broadened beyond winning.

Benefits

In order to better understand how people attach meaning and value to the products they consume, Keller (1993) identified three categories of benefits. This categorization drew on the work of Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (1986), who identified three different types of needs that can be satisfied through product consumption: functional, symbolic, and experiential. The definitions of Park et al. (1986) were used as the basis for identifying benefits in professional team sport and are now discussed. Functional needs are "those that motivate the search for products that solve consumption-related problems" (p. 136). Consumers may purchase a certain cereal because it has less fat or more nutrition or certain toothpastes because they are proven to keep teeth whiter. Symbolic needs are those "that fulfill internally generated needs for self-enhancement, role position, group membership, or ego-identification" (p. 136). Consumers may purchase a luxury automobile because of what ownership of a luxury automobile conveys to others. Finally, experiential needs are "desires for products that provide sensory pleasure, variety, and/or cognitive stimulation" (p. 136). Consumers may drink a certain wine because of its unique and full-bodied taste or visit an amusement park because of the joy it provides to them and/or their children.

Based on these definitions, we identified five constructs that could be classified as benefits in the professional team sport industry: fan identification, peer group acceptance, escape, nostalgia, and pride in place. Identification with a team or organization is one of the more widely studied constructs in the literature (Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Sutton, McDonald, Milne, & Cimperman, 1997; Wann & Branscombe,1990). Cialdini et al. first offered the notion of basking in reflected glory, observing that individuals often publicize their association with successful sport teams. Here, we conceptualize fan identification as a component of the brand association framework. That is, identification with a particular team fulfills a sport consumer's need to affiliate with something successful or desirable and thus is one form of brand associations.

Peer group acceptance is another benefit that team sport provides. Wakefield (1995) demonstrated that if a sport consumer feels friends and family approve of his/her following a specific team, then all elements of the consumption experience will be viewed more favorably. Thus, it can be suggested that positive associations

with a particular team may be derived given a consumer's willingness to belong to a particular group.

People tend to use sport as an escape from their daily troubles or routines (Wann, 1995). In the marketing literature, the study of escape has focused on fantasy environments (e.g., Arnould & Price, 1993; Belk & Costa, 1998), whereby people participate in river-rafting trips or go on camping trips where the 19th Century traditions of the West are reenacted in an effort to escape the rigors of daily life. In sport, Smith (1988) contends following team sport can be used as a coping strategy through which people can find fulfillment and contentment. Thus, the escape that is provided by sport can be a source of brand associations.

Nostalgia refers to a "longing for the past, a yearning for yesterday, or a fondness for possessions and activities associated with the days of yore" (Holbrook, 1993, p. 245). Closely linked to this is Belk and Costa's (1998) notion of invented traditions, or behaviors that connect people with the past. It has been argued that sport teams provide such associations (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Trujillo & Krizek, 1994).

Pride in place, or people's affiliation with a hometown team due to its ability to represent that city, is the final benefit provided by sport teams. Trujillo and Krizek (1994) refer to the sport team as a "public trust" (p. 308). In their examination of the value dimensions of professional sport, Zhang, Pease, and Hui (1996) supported this notion, identifying a dimension called community solidarity. In the consumer's belief that the team provides a rallying point for the community, strong brand associations may be developed.

Examining these five constructs and their relationship to functional, symbolic, and experiential benefits, we suggest that fan identification and peer group acceptance would tend to be symbolic benefits, while escape, nostalgia, and pride in place would tend to be experiential benefits. Given professional team sport's largely intangible and perishable nature, we argue that the notion of functional benefits is not particularly applicable in identifying brand associations in this setting. However, we caution against a rigid view of the above classifications. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) suggest that the "experiential view" of consumption "regards consumption as a primarily subjective state of consciousness with a variety of symbolic meanings, hedonic responses, and esthetic criteria" (p. 132). Similarly, Holt (1995) contends "a given consumption object (e.g., a food, a sports activity, a television program, or an art object) is typically consumed in a variety of ways by different groups of consumers" (p. 1). Based on these assertions, we contend that it is possible that the constructs we identified may be symbolic, or experiential, depending on the consumer. This can be illustrated using the construct of fan identification. In one sense, identification allows the fan to vicariously feel like they have won when their team wins, thus enhancing the self-esteem of the fan (Branscombe & Wann, 1991). In this sense, fan identification would represent an experiential benefit. Alternatively, identification may occur so that the individual can feel like an active member of the group, thus satisfying a need to belong (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). In this sense, fan identification would represent

a symbolic benefit. Thus, while we offer an initial categorization of the benefits, we stress that such benefits can have different meanings to different people.

Attitudes

Although the attitude construct in consumer behavior literature has received considerable attention, its application to brand equity remains in an embryonic stage. Recent theorizing in social psychology and sport suggests attitudes possess distinct underlying properties (e.g., importance, knowledge, direct experience, valence) that contribute to their degree of formation (Bassili, 1996; Funk, Haugtvedt, & Howard, 2000; Krosnick, Boninger, Chuang, Berent, & Carnot, 1993). In the sport setting, Funk and Pastore (2000) demonstrated that loyalty toward a major league professional baseball team reflected nine distinct attitude properties. Krosnick and Petty (1995) conceptualize various attitude properties as falling into three categories: attitudinal aspects, cognitive structure, and subjective beliefs. Attitudinal aspects represent characteristics of an attitude existing on an evaluative continuum ranging from positive to negative (e.g., valence) and reflect affective reactions (Abelson, 1995). The cognitive structure dimension reflects the position of the attitude within a network of associative links (e.g., knowledge) that determines how an individual evaluates the attitude object from memory (Fazio, 1986). Subjective beliefs represent attitudinal characteristics (e.g., importance) associated with the subjective evaluation of an object based upon its perceived relevance (Krosnick, 1988).

Drawing upon this framework and Funk and Pastore's (2000) study, three attributes representing subjective beliefs, aspects, and cognitive structure were selected to further develop our understanding of the attitudinal component of brand association. In a subsequent study, Funk (2001) reported that importance, knowledge, and affective reactions were strongly predictive of commitment to a professional baseball team. Based upon this preliminary evidence, the methodology to assess these three properties was incorporated to develop attitudinal measures of brand association.

Attitude importance represents a person's perception of the psychological significance and value he or she attaches to a sports team. Previous measures of attitude importance have relied upon individual self-reports of how important an issue or object was to them personally (Krosnick, 1988). Attitude knowledge referred to the amount of attitude-relevant knowledge that accompanied an individual's attitude related to a sports team. The amount of attitude-relevant knowledge generally has been measured by asking participants to list everything they know and can remember about an object (Kallgren & Wood, 1986) and self-reports on how knowledgeable they feel about an object (Davidson, Yantis, Norwood, & Montano, 1985). Finally, affective reactions reflect an individual's feelings about a team. Affective reactions are also often utilized to operationalize valence of the attitude (e.g., Bassili, 1996). Affective reactions have been assessed through the use of affective indexes drawn from a series of semantic differential scales (Crites, Fabrigar, & Petty, 1994).

Methodology

Following a literature review that generated the hypothesized framework listed above, a four-step procedure was undertaken to examine and validate the dimensions. First, two focus groups with sport management graduate students were conducted to clarify the conceptual framework of team association. Second, survey items were generated for each of the 16 constructs and pilot tested for reliability and internal stability. Third, confirmatory factor analysis was utilized to test our hypothesized measurement model using the empirical data collected. Finally, structural equation modeling was utilized to examine Keller's conceptualization of brand association in team sport.

Focus Groups

The focus groups sought open-ended feedback from students about why they follow particular teams and why particular team brands were strong. Fifteen graduate students participated in the two focus groups; nine were male and six were female. The age of the focus group participants ranged from 22 to 30 years old. The purpose of the focus groups was to determine if the literature review had failed to identify any potential dimensions of brand association. Therefore, focus group participants were asked to talk about their relationships to their favorite sport brands. The authors analyzed the results of the focus groups and found no new dimensions in addition to the ones identified via the literature review. At the conclusion of both focus groups, participants were asked to review an initial set of 4 to 6 survey items that measured each of the 16 constructs for clarity and ease of understanding. Based upon this procedure, 74 items were randomly placed within a questionnaire and distributed in a pilot test.

Pilot Tests

The initial pilot test was conducted with a convenience sample of undergraduate students (N = 134). Respondents were asked to identify their favorite team and respond to a battery of items (representing the 16 hypothesized dimensions) about that team. Item-to-total correlations were employed to clarify the conceptual framework and examine the sub-scale structure of each construct (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavish, 1995). Three items representing each of the 16 constructs were selected based upon a conceptual interpretation and whether the three items loaded higher on their respective construct than all other constructs. This analysis revealed a stable sub-scale structure for scale items related to all but four of the constructs with internal consistency measures ranging from α =. 48 to α = .89. The constructs of Peer Group Acceptance (α = .48), Management (α = .57), Star Player (α = .61), and Nostalgia (α =. 67) were considered unstable due to their low alphas and items failing to load higher on their respective dimension.

The wording and content for items representing the unreliable constructs were reworked and a second pilot test was conducted on 33 undergraduates (N = 33) to test these four dimensions. The results from the second pilot test improved the inter-reliabilities for these four constructs and each item loaded higher on its

respective dimension than the other 15 constructs. Only the dimension of Star Player (α =. 63) received an alpha below the benchmark .70. Based upon these results of the two pilot tests, scale items for each construct were deemed reliable for the intended population (e.g., Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The final Team Association scale contained 50 items measuring 16 constructs of brand association. Each construct was measured using three survey items except identification and affect that each had four items. The scale items were randomly placed on a survey questionnaire along with a battery of demographic and behavioral measures.

National Mail Survey

A random sample of subscribers to a weekly national sports magazine was conducted. In order to enhance the response rate, three mailings were conducted. A pre-notification postcard was sent to 3,000 potential respondents informing them that they would soon receive a survey in the mail. A week later, the instrument was mailed. A week following the instrument mailing, a follow-up postcard was sent to all potential respondents encouraging them to complete the survey. Of the 3,000 survey instruments mailed, 23 were returned due to a change of address or incorrect address. Of the remaining 2,967 surveys, 929 valid responses were received for a 31.3% response rate. The sample was predominantly male (85.3%), between the ages of 25 and 44 (55.6%), married (55.2%), and had attended at least some college (72.9%). In the instrument, respondents were again asked to identify their favorite team and respond to a battery of items about that team. In all, respondents named 89 of the 118 teams (75.4%) from the four major North American professional sport leagues. Forty-eight percent of respondents named a football team, 36.7% a baseball team, 9.3% a basketball team, and 4.9% a hockey team.

Analysis

A confirmatory factor analysis was initially conducted using Jöreskog and Sörbom's (1999) Linear Structural Relations (LISREL) 8.0 to estimate the measurement model for the 50 scale items and 16 constructs. A covariance matrix from a randomly selected calibration sample ($N = 392$) was used as the input data (e.g., Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1995). The measurement model examined the relationships between the 50 observed variables and 16 first order latent variables: escape, nostalgia, pride in place, peer group acceptance, identification, product delivery, logo, stadium, success, head coach, management, tradition, star player, knowledge, importance and affect. The error terms for all observed variables were constrained to not correlate while the latent variables were left to freely correlate.

Once the measurement model was confirmed, the structural equation model for 16 constructs and three-second order latent variables ATTRIBUTE, BENEFIT, and ATTITUDE was estimated jointly with the measurement model. The Team Association Model "TAM" examined the relationships between ATTRIBUTE, a second order latent variable with eight first order indicators (product delivery, logo, stadium, success, head coach, management, tradition, and star player); BENEFIT,

a second order latent variable with five first order indicators (escape, nostalgia, pride in place, peer group acceptance, and identification); and ATTITUDE, a second order latent variable with three first order indicators (knowledge, importance, and affect). The latent variables in structural model were left to freely correlate.

Results

The means and standard deviations for the calibration sample are reported in Table 1. The means for each construct ranged from 1.93 for Peer Group Acceptance to 6.14 for Star Player. Standard deviations ranged from .98 to 1.93. The internal consistency measures for each construct ranged from $\alpha = .68$ to $\alpha = .94$ in line with the .70 benchmark (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). A correlation matrix was computed from the phi matrix of LISREL estimates and reported in Table 2. Inspection of this matrix suggests moderate correlations existed between the 16 constructs.

The results of the confirmatory factor analysis revealed the measurement model achieved a good fit for the calibration sample. The parameter estimates and the accompanying t-test of significance for the relationship between each scale item and its respective construct were significant at $p < .05$, in the direction dictated by theory and above $r = .57$. T-values for scale items are reported in Table 3 and ranged from 10.44 to 24.93. The individual item reliabilities for the latent

Table 1 Brand Association Construct Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach Alphas

Construct	M	SD	α
Star player	6.14	.98	.83
Product delivery	5.98	.95	.89
Nostalgia	5.88	1.03	.80
Tradition	5.88	1.20	.75
Logo design	5.83	1.02	.81
Affective reactions	5.75	1.01	.81
Success	5.74	1.16	.76
Knowledge	5.59	1.24	.89
Head coach	5.55	1.23	.82
Importance	5.41	1.19	.86
Pride in place	5.29	1.24	.89
Venue	5.14	1.46	.85
Management	5.05	1.57	.94
Fan identification	4.85	1.32	.79
Escape	4.63	1.63	.95
Peer group acceptance	1.93	1.06	.68

Note: Summated means are reported.

Table 2 Correlation Matrix From Standardized Phi Matrix

	ESC	NOS	PIP	PGA	ID	PD	LOG	STD	HC	TRD	MGT	SP	SUC	KNW	IMP	AFF
ESC	1															
NOS	.49	1														
PIP	.34	.50	1													
PGA	.00	–.14	–.02	1												
ID	.50	.53	.51	–.10	1											
PD	.35	.47	.61	–.23	.56	1										
LOG	.30	.49	.51	–.15	.56	.57	1									
STD	.20	.25	.49	–.08	.28	.37	.41	1								
HC	.19	.25	.40	–.04	.31	.48	.33	.17	1							
TRD	.20	.58	.42	–.05	.36	.38	.40	.19	.21	1						
MGT	.18	.23	.50	–.08	.26	.52	.30	.36	.62	.30	1					
SP	.25	.39	.42	–.22	.42	.67	.43	.28	.36	.31	.36	1				
SUC	.27	.32	.29	–.10	.45	.40	.30	.14	.24	.41	.31	.39	1			
KNW	.39	.50	.33	–.25	.62	.43	.32	.25	.25	.33	.25	.31	.36	1		
IMP	.55	.67	.55	–.23	.88	.61	.56	.28	.33	.44	.26	.45	.48	.74	1	
AFF	.22	.39	.54	–.13	.43	.69	.44	.38	.50	.34	.60	.46	.27	.35	.48	1

ESC = Escape; HC = Head Coach; NOS = Nostalgia; TRD = Tradition; PIP = Pride In Place; MGT = Management; PGA = Peer Group Acceptance; SP = Star Player; ID = Identification; SUC = Success; PD = Product Delivery; KNW = Knowledge; LOG = Team Logo; IMP = Importance; STD = Stadium/Arena; AFF = Affect.

factors are reported in Table 3 in the form of factor loadings and path coefficients. The factor loadings range from a single low of .42 to a high of .96. The average variance extracted by each latent factor ranged from .46 to .85 for a mean of .67, well above the .50 standard (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). These results indicate that on average the 16 predictors accounted for 67% of each scale item's variance and provided initial evidence for convergent validity (e.g., Kline, 1998).

Goodness-of-fit indices are reported in Table 4 and indicate that the data supported the hypothesized measurement model. The likelihood-ratio χ^2 value of 1,766.61 with 1,055 degrees of freedom was statically significant at $p < .01$. The χ^2 value divided by the degrees of freedom was 1.68 signifying a close fit and well below the 2:1 ratio recommendation (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). Since the chi-square measure has been found to be sensitive to sample size (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Bollen, 1989), the RMSEA was inspected to assess the goodness-of-fit for the model if it were estimated in the population, not just the sample drawn for the estimation.

The RMSEA value of .040 with an upper 90% confidence limit of .043 was below the acceptable range of .05 to .08 for a close fit of the data (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Hair et al., 1995). The expected cross validation index (ECVI) for the hypothesized measurement model (5.47) was below the ECVI for the saturated model (6.52), signifying a better fit, and represented a close approximation in the population. While the GFI value of .85 was below the recommended benchmark of .90, the model's specified parameters provided an adequate fit between the relative amount of variance explained by the sample's covariance and the reconstructed covariance matrix. The NNFI measure (e.g., Bentler & Bonett, 1980) used to compare the fit of the hypothesized model to a baseline or independence model was .93 above the accepted benchmark of .90. The IFI value of .94 indicated that the model achieved a close fit for the present data as well. Based upon these results, the measurement model was confirmed to provide a close fit for the data taken from the randomly selected calibration sample.

Structural Model

The hypothesized structural model was next estimated jointly with the measurement model. Standardized results are presented in Figure 1 and reveal the path coefficients from the Gamma matrix. Inspection of these coefficients revealed that identification (.84) was strongly predictive of benefits being derived from team association followed to a lesser degree by nostalgia (.68), pride in place (.64), and escape (.54). Peer group acceptance was observed to have a weak relationship with benefits (–.23), suggesting potential problems with the effectiveness of the model. When considering the attribute dimension, product delivery (.86) was strongly predictive of attributes associated with the team followed by star player (.69), logo design (.68), management (.58), head coach (.54), success (.52), tradition (.52), and stadium (.45). For the attitude dimension, importance (.97) and knowledge (.72) were strongly predictive of attitudinal formation followed by affect (.56).

Table 3 Individual Scale Item Reliabilities and T-Values for the Latent Factors

Item	Factor loadings	Path coefficients	T-Values
Success (SUC)			
I do not care whether my favorite team wins or loses	.42	.69	8.53
It is very important that my favorite team reaches the post-season	.87	1.15	20.04
It is important that my favorite team competes for league championships	.96	1.22	22.86
Star player (SP)			
My favorite team does not have any star players that I like to watch	.68	.83	14.82
I like to watch my favorite team's star players	.78	.86	17.62
My favorite team has star players that I like to watch	.93	.99	22.29
Head coach (HC)			
I like the manager/head coach of my favorite team	.85	1.26	20.06
My favorite team's manager/head coach is well known throughout the sport	.86	.86	12.34
The manager/head coach of my favorite team does a good job	.96	1.24	24.85
Management (MGT)			
The front office of my favorite team does its best to field a good team	.89	1.55	22.63
My favorite team's front office does a good job of running the team	.95	1.53	24.78
The front office of my favorite team makes wise player personnel decisions	.91	1.48	23.44
Logo design (LOG)			
I like the colors of my favorite team	.68	.85	14.43
I like the logo of my favorite team	.75	.88	16.16
My favorite team's uniforms are attractive	.86	1.01	19.31
Stadium (STD)			
The architecture of my favorite team's stadium is attractive	.83	1.45	18.49
My favorite team's stadium has "character"	.78	1.28	17.28
My favorite team's stadium enhances the enjoyment of attending games	.82	1.33	18.74

(*continued*)

Table 3 ***(continued)***

Product delivery (PD)			
My favorite team's games are exciting	.84	.92	20.07
My favorite team's games are entertaining	.89	.92	21.80
My favorite team's games are enjoyable	.82	.85	19.29
Tradition (TRD)			
My favorite team has a history of winning	.67	1.18	13.88
My favorite team has a rich history	.78	1.36	19.01
My favorite team has no history	.66	.65	13.37
Escape (ESC)			
Watching, reading, and talking about my favorite team provides a temporary escape from life's problems	.87	1.47	21.51
Watching, reading, and talking about my favorite team helps me forget my day-to-day problems	.94	1.66	24.68
Watching, reading, and talking about my favorite team takes me away from life's hassles	.95	1.64	24.93
Fan identification (ID)			
It is important that my friends see me as a fan of my favorite team	.68	1.24	14.69
My friends and family recognize me as a fan of my favorite team	.74	.99	16.25
When someone praises my favorite team, it feels like a compliment	.83	1.28	19.05
When I talk about the team, I usually say "We" rather than "They".	.62	1.21	12.81
Peer group acceptance (PGA)			
I began following my favorite team because of my friends	.55	.89	10.44
It is important to follow the same team as my friends	.69	.88	11.59
I follow my favorite team because my friends like the same team	.86	.87	14.16
Nostalgia (NOS)			
Thinking of my favorite team brings back good memories	.74	.86	16.01
I have fond memories of following my favorite team	.87	1.00	19.86
I have fond memories of following my favorite team with friends and/or family members	.67	.90	13.97
Pride in place (PIP)			
My favorite team helps its citizens be proud of where they live	.80	.92	18.51
My favorite team helps elevate the image of its community	.88	.92	20.89

My favorite team brings prestige to the community	.87	.85	21.32
Importance (IMP)			
I consider my favorite team to be personally important	.78	1.13	18.13
Being a fan of my favorite team is important to me	.87	1.11	20.85
Compared to how I feel about other professional teams, my favorite team is very important to me	.84	1.07	20.15
Knowledge (KNW)			
I posses a great deal of knowledge about my favorite team	.85	1.06	20.23
If I were to list everything I knew about my favorite team, the list would be quite long	.87	1.20	20.87
Compared to other sport teams, I consider myself an expert about m y favorite team	.84	1.23	19.89
Affect (AFF)			
Foolish . . . . . Wise	.73	.98	15.88
Good . . . . . Bad	.80	.98	18.79
Worthless . . . . . Beneficial	.71	.81	15.02
Strong . . . . . Weak	.81	.96	18.35

Notes:
1) Factor Loadings represent the standardized path coefficients for manifest indicators from the Lambda matrix.
2) Path Coefficients are the unstandardized path coefficients for each parameter from the Lambda matrix.

Table 4 Goodness of Fit Indices for Confirmatory and Structural Equations Models

Goodness-of-fit measure	Confirmatory: measurement model	TAM: structural model	MAM: structural model
Chi square	1,766.61	2,320.79	2,058.04
Degrees of freedom	1,055	1,156	1,145
χ^2/df	1.68	2.01	1.80
RMSEA	.040	.053	.045
GFI	.85	.80	.83
NNFI	.93	.90	.92
CFI	.94	.91	.93

TAM = Team Association Model; MAM = Model Hypothesized and Tested after Modification Procedure; Calibration Sample for all Models (N = 392).

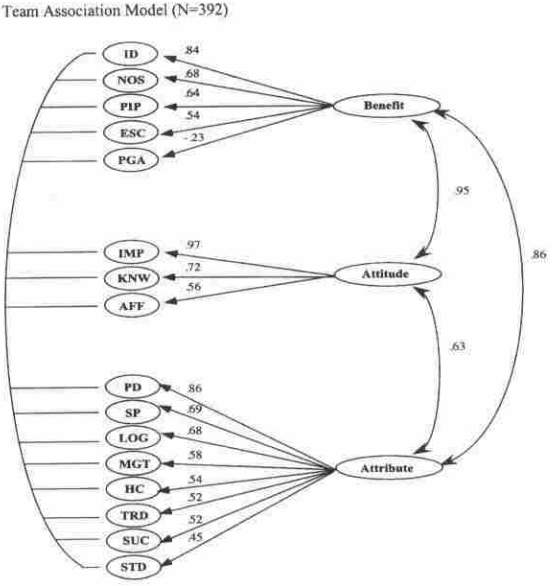

Figure 1 — Team Association Model (N = 392).

Goodness of fit statistics for the structural equation model are presented in Table 4 and indicate the TAM achieved an adequate fit for the data. The χ^2 value of 2,320.79 divided by 1,156 degrees of freedom was 2.01. The RMSEA was .053 and had an upper 90% confidence limit of .056. The GFI value of .80 indicated that the model's specified parameters provided a marginally acceptable fit. The NNFI measure was .90 and the IFI value was .91, indicating the hypothesized model provided a close fit. However, the ECVI for the model (6.83) was higher than the ECVI for the saturated model (6.52). Taken together, estimates for the TAM model signified that the model achieved an adequate fit for the present data, but a better fitting model may potentially exist. In an attempt to clarify the TAM framework and provide direction for future research, modification indexes were next examined.

Model Modifications

Inspection of modification indexes indicated that the fit of the TAM could be improved by specifying numerous paths in the measurement model. However, in the absence of strong theoretical rationale, these modifications to the measurement

model were not incorporated (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1999). Although the measurement model was observed to fit the data, further refinement and subsequent testing of the scale items should aid researchers as they move forward in examining team association in sport.

Modification indexes also suggested the fit of the structural model (TAM) could be improved by placing various paths not previously specified. For example, paths could be specified from ATTRBIUTE to four first order latent constructs of pride in place, identification, importance, and affect. Paths were also suggested from BENEFIT to four first order latent constructs of success, management, importance, and affect. Finally, paths from the ATTITUDE dimension to seven first order latent construct of escape, pride in place, identification, logo design, success, tradition, and management were indicated.

Theoretically, only modification suggestions to the structural model related to the ATTITUDE dimension, importance and affect were considered appropriate. The attitude dimension could operate as a latent psychological tendency or disposition expressing an evaluation that mediates the significance of escape, pride in place, identification, logo design, success, tradition, and management (e.g., Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Fiske & Taylor, 1992). In terms of importance and affect, these attitudinal properties may represent a subjective evaluation that reflects the psychological importance placed in an individual's feelings ascribed to benefits or attributes associated with an athletic team (e.g., Funk et al., 2000). In line with this theorizing, a subsequent analysis incorporating these modifications to the structural model was conducted.

The proposed TAM model was modified to represent a Mediational Association Model (MAM) including paths from latent factors BENEFIT and ATTRIBUTE to both importance and affect latent factors (see Figure 2). Paths from ATTITUDE were specified to latent factors escape, pride in place, identification, logo design, success, tradition, and management. As expected, results indicated that the MAM model fit the data better (e.g., $\chi^2 = 2{,}058.04$, df = 1145, RMSEA = .045, GFI = .83, NNFI = .92, and IFI = .93, ECVI = 5.87). When comparing the two models, the modified TAM represented a better fit for the data, was more representative of the population, and is expected to be most stable in repeated samples (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). See Table 4 for comparisons. The standardized coefficient values for each new specified path indicated that identification (.50) was predictive of ATTITUDE followed by success (.34), logo design (.25), tradition (.24), escape (.23), and management (– .36). The original paths specified between first and second order latent variables in the TAM also changed: identification (.38), logo design (.46), tradition (.31), escape (.33), and management (.93). The path coefficients observed for pride in place with BENEFIT (3.79) and with ATTITUDE (–3.18) from the modification procedure were uncommon and indicate possible problems with the starting values related to pride in place manifest items. In terms of the new paths specified to affect and importance, the attitude property affect was predictive of ATTRIBUTE (.93) and to a lesser degree to BENEFIT (–.28). In contrast, the property importance was more predictive of BENEFIT (.44) than ATTRIBUTE (–.09).

Model Stability

Jöreskog and Sörbom's (1999) single sample cross validation procedure was utilized to further test the fit and stability of the TAM and the modified model MAM generated from the modification indices. A covariance matrix of an equal sample of randomly select subjects (n = 392) not used in the original calibration sample was used as input data. The measurement and structural model for both the TAM and MAM were assessed and compared. Inspection of parameter estimates, factor loadings, and path coefficients (both standardized and unstandardized) in both models were highly similar to those in the calibration sample. The goodness of fit statistics calculated from the validation sample were almost identical to those presented in Table 4 and indicated that the MAM achieved the best fit for the data. Taken together, this evidence suggests that while the Team Association Model fits the data statistically and provides a substantive meaningful interpretation for every parameter, the MAM provides a better fit for the data, is more stable, and may provide a clearer framework to study team association.

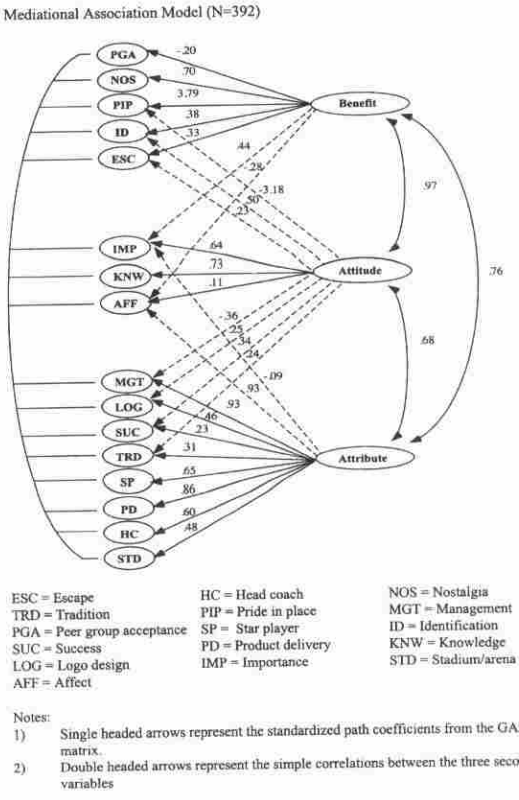

Figure 2 — Mediational Association Model (N = 392).

Discussion

Given the importance ascribed to developing better methodologies and understanding of consumer-based brand equity (Keller, 1993), the present study provides the first examination of brand associations in the team sport setting. Utilizing Keller's framework as a starting point, a rigorous scale development process was employed, which included a thorough review of the sport literature, focus groups, two pilot tests, and a national mail survey. Further, in utilizing a national random sample of sport consumers, the results are generalizable beyond those that simply attend games. The remainder of this section discusses the three important contributions of this study and offers directions for future research.

Measurement Model

This study provides a psychometrically sound scale (the Team Association Model) that identifies 16 brand association dimensions in the team sport setting. Confirmatory factor analysis provided a straightforward method to establish the Team Association Model's construct validity by assessing the statistical efficiency of multiple relationships simultaneously, as well as a transition from exploratory to confirmatory factor analysis (Hair et al., 1995). The specified measurement model fits the data statistically and provides a substantive meaningful interpretation for every parameter (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996).

The hypothesized measurement model achieved a close fit for the data collected, and its 50 items provide a potentially parsimonious scale useful for application by sport managers in examining 16 different variables in their operation. Fifteen of the 16 dimensions were at least somewhat important (mean of greater than 4 on a 1 to 7 scale) to survey respondents. Peer group acceptance was the only dimension that respondents did not rate as important. However, this may be due to the fact that people were responding to items about their favorite team. The importance of approval from peers may be more important when a casual relationship with a team brand exists.

The Team Association Model also provides support for two dimensions not mentioned in the sport literature. First, the Team Association model provides the first evidence that consumer perceptions of management may be a component that is important to sport consumers. Consistent with Garbarino and Johnson (1999) and Fournier (1998), this research provides support for the importance of building trust between the team sport brand and the sport consumer. In an era where World Championship teams trade or fail to re-sign key players, sport managers must recognize the importance of building positive perceptions of not only the team, but also the front office of the team. Secondly, support was provided for Gladden and Milne's (1999) contention that the visual identity (logo) of a team is important in the creation of brand equity. Results highlight the importance of a team's uniform and related insignia in establishing a visual link or cue for brand associations.

The 16-dimension scale also reveals that sport fulfills higher order needs of social expression and personal fulfillment. This is consistent with the popular notion (e.g., Mullin, Hardy & Sutton, 2000) that sport marketers must focus on providing

the best possible experience for their consumers. As Wolf (1999) suggests, such a focus will become increasingly important as the number of experience-based entertainment offerings increases. Future research should draw on the works of Holbrook (1993) and Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) to further examine the benefits derived through the experience of consuming sport. Further, this also suggests the importance of developing relationships with consumers in an effort to understand what symbolic and experiential needs are being satisfied.

However, the Team Association Model should be seen as a starting point in understanding brand association in the sport setting. Future researchers may want to incorporate weighted scores to calculate the latent variables since the path coefficients within factors were quite dissimilar. While the scale development process was thorough and grounded in both the marketing and sport literature, other dimensions that contribute to the creation of brand associations potentially exist. For example, the prominence of team owners (e.g., Jerry Jones of the Dallas Cowboys, Jerry Colangelo of several Phoenix-based franchises) may serve to create both positive and negative unique brand associations in consumers' minds. Future research should strive to uncover such additional dimensions.

Structural Model

The second contribution of this research is providing some empirical support for Keller's (1993) conceptualization of brand associations as being comprised of attributes, benefits, and attitudes. While the structural model only achieved an adequate fit, these initial findings suggest future research based on this conceptualization is warranted. In this vein, this represents the first empirical support for the application of a branding model in the sport setting. Thus, this preliminary evidence is meaningful and is discussed.

Several dimensions were particularly predictive of their respective second order latent variables. Product delivery (R^2 = .75) was strongly predictive of the attribute dimension of brand association. As defined by the items, product delivery relates to a team's ability to entertain its consumers. Therefore, given the importance of an entertaining experience, sport marketers should examine their unique environments to determine what contributes to an entertaining experience. With respect to attendance, it may refer to promotions, amenities, and style of play. Given past research (Gotthelf, 1999; King, 1999; Schofield, 1983) and prevalent marketing strategies (e.g., the National Basketball Association promoting its star players), it is not surprising that star player (R^2=.47) was predictive of attributes.

Fan identification (R^2=.71) was particularly predictive of the benefit dimension of brand association. These findings support prior research reporting that fan identification fulfills a sport consumer's need to affiliate with something successful or desirable (Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Sutton et al., 1997). Furthermore, benefits of nostalgia (R^2=.47) and pride in place (R^2 =.41) suggest that sport satisfies higher order needs of social expression and personal fulfillment rather than lower order needs for safety and security. Therefore, sport managers should strive to foster identification between as many consumers and their team as possible. Future research efforts could incorporate the works of Sutton et al. (1997), Mahony,

Madrigal, and Howard (2000), and Kolbe and James (2000) to better understand this construct and its significance as a brand association. Further, sport managers need to recognize the importance of nostalgia as a brand association. For example, a team could target consumers 35 and older with a nostalgic message about a championship season 20 years prior. Future research efforts should seek to uncover the sources of nostalgia in the sport setting. In this endeavor, the qualitative methods employed by Belk and Costa (1998) may be a useful starting point.

Importance (R^2=.94) and knowledge (R^2=.51) were strongly predictive of the attitude dimension of brand association. The strong predictive ability of importance may suggest that attitude importance could be used as a moderator index for a sport consumer's evaluative process, determining when and how unique team associations are activated. For example, the importance a fan places on a team's star player could have a temporal effect on one's association with the team. If the player is traded or hurt, then the level of importance may decrease or be transferred to another team, player, or sport. The role of importance may also help begin to explain why multiple paths were specified by the modification indices. Future research efforts should further explore this hypothesis. The importance of the attitude combined with greater team related knowledge might help explain why certain attributes are evaluated as more desirable.

Mediational Model

In this study, we attempted to identify types of brand association that may exist in consumers' minds. Keller's (1993) conceptualization of customer-based brand equity provided a logical framework for this effort. The data confirmed 16 distinct elements thought to influence the creation and maintenance of brand associations in the sport setting. However, the present work should be viewed as an initial step by providing measurement tools useful for guiding further investigations into the complexity of brand association in sport. As evidenced by the marginal fit of the structural model and the resulting modification indices, more complex relationships may exist between attributes, benefits, and attitudes. Specifically, analysis of the modification indices revealed the Mediational Association Model improved the fit of the structural model and thus would be expected to be most stable in repeated samples (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). Based upon this evidence, further research should incorporate current measures into studies designed to map out associations in team sport to increase our understanding of the structural relations among these dimensions. For example, while the present study treated attributes, benefits, and attitudes as congeneric, future work could investigate both moderating and mediating effects at both first and second order levels.

Directions for Future Research

In addition to the variety of research directions offered above, several others exist. The multivariate approach of examining multiple constructs simultaneously and their relation to attributes, benefits, and attitudes provides initial evidence supporting the existence of 16 types of brand associations in professional team sport. While theoretically second order attribute, benefit, and attitude variables

should represent a third order brand association construct, the complexity of testing a model was not supported by the present data. Subsequent refinement of the TAM scale and further testing of the model using a specific team to empirically support this structure may be needed to support such a framework.

As mentioned earlier, this study operationalized brand associations as those categories of product attributes, product benefits, and attitudes toward a product that may exist in consumer's minds and impact their evaluation of brands. In this sense, we did not examine the networks of concepts and meanings evoked by a brand name, as has been done in prior brand association research (e.g., Henderson et al., 1998; Meyers-Levy, 1989). We suggest that the dimensions identified based on attributes, benefits, and attitudes may constitute categories of brand associations that are derived from the networks of concepts and meanings evoked by a brand name. For example, a sport consumer may think of an old player playing in an old stadium associated with a particular sport brand. In this case, the player and stadium, while no longer in existence could represent a network of meanings that constituted the nostalgia dimension identified by this research. In order to explore whether such connections exist, we suggest future research should be conducted to understand evoked association sets of sport team brands using such techniques as free association and the repertory grid as per Henderson et al. (1998). The use of such techniques may also serve to provide a better understanding of the complex relationships specified by the MAM.

An examination of the relationship between the 16-brand association dimensions and brand loyalty is needed. This study has provided a psychometrically sound scale useful in examining the relationship between brand association and a variety of brand loyalty measures. These measures should be both attitudinal and behavioral, as both carry importance in the examination of brand loyalty (Funk & Pastore, 2000; Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978). Furthermore, in the case where the sport consumer lives a great distance from his/her favorite team, the sport consumer's ability to consume the products of that team is limited. Thus, in addition to behavioral measures such as attendance and watching on television, attitudinal measures, such as scaled items to measure the strength of a consumer's loyalty, are needed.

This study has examined one segment of the sport consumer base, that of the highly interested fan. The respondents in this study identified their favorite team and then answered a battery of questions. Future research endeavors should explore responses to the items when a team is pre-selected such that both favorable and unfavorable associations toward a team can be solicited. That way different levels of association with the team could be examined (e.g., highly identified versus no identification). This would provide a broader examination and validation of the Team Association Model.

The use of subscribers to a national sport magazine limits the generalizability of these results to very active sport fans throughout the United States. Future research should strive to examine the Team Association Model in the context of people that only casually follow sport. This may reveal differences in the importance of the attribute, benefit, and attitude dimensions. For example, while peer group acceptance was not predictive of benefits in this study, logic and prior research

would suggest that such an influence could be more important in creating brand associations for the casual sport consumer. The variability associated with these types of responses would provide a means to differentiate among various attributes, benefits and attitudes along a team association continuum. Such a study would also provide a greater gender balance, as more women tend to be casual followers of sport. Future research could possibly utilize the Team Association Model to examine differences in the formation of brand associations between men and women.

In addition, the generalizability of this study beyond the professional team sport setting should be examined. A replication in the U.S. collegiate sport environment is certainly warranted. For, it could be suggested that the importance of different dimensions (tradition, head coach) might be quite different between the college and professional team sport settings. In addition, it is important to study the applicability of the 16-dimension model to team sport in Europe, Australia, and Asia. Finally, given the prevalence of Olympic sport globally, it would be interesting to study the applicability of this model to Olympic sport. In this setting, it could be suggested that nostalgia and pride in place would be particularly important.

Conclusion

Overall, this study produced four results. First, it generated a theoretical understanding of the types brand associations that may exist in team sport. Second, this study provided empirical support for the theoretical notion that consumer based association in team sport possesses distinct features. Third, this study provided modest support for Keller's (1993) conceptualization of brand association as consisting of three independent dimensions—benefits, attributes, and attitudes. Finally, this study provided future research directions that will allow the further variations of the Team Association Model to better understand brand equity in team sport. The proposed theoretical framework presented is intended to spark additional interest in brand equity research and provide direction for the systematic study of the sport spectator and fan.

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