

The Integrated Conceptual Framework for Understanding Perceived Brand Equity in Professional Sports Teams

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ABSTRACT

Although the subject of perceived brand equity in professional sport has been subjected to substantial academic research, there are notable inconsistencies on the dimensions, antecedents and market consequences of brand equity in existing sport brand equity conceptual frameworks. This paper proposes the “Integrated Conceptual Framework for Understanding Perceived Brand Equity in Professional Sports Teams” as a contribution towards developing a conceptual understanding that can bridge existing conceptual inconsistencies in the subject area. The Framework was developed from the research findings of an exploratory sequential mixed methods study which was conducted in Zimbabwe, following an extensive review of existing sports brand equity conceptual frameworks. The Framework classifies the antecedents of perceived brand equity in professional sports teams into “Experience-Induced Antecedents”, “Macro Marketing Environment-Induced Antecedents” and “Management-Induced Antecedents”. These antecedents do not apply uniformly across different sport settings. As a result, the different conceptualizations of the antecedents of sports team brand equity in existing conceptual frameworks can be partly attributed to the fact that the frameworks were derived from studies that were carried out in different sport settings. In some cases, there are no tangible content differences, the inconsistencies are only in terms of the narrations used to describe the antecedents by different scholars. Dimensionally, the proposed Integrated Conceptual Framework for Understanding Perceived Brand Equity in Professional Sports Teams departs from this traditional conceptualizations of the dimensions of brand equity by noting that team sport brand equity is an aggregate of Brand Awareness, Brand Associations and Brand Relationship. Thus, the framework views Brand Relationship as an additional brand equity dimension, an insight that has not been explicitly captured in existing conceptual frameworks. The Conceptual Framework also illustrates how perceived professional sports team brand equity can generate negative and positive marketplace outcomes. The Proposed Framework supports the theoretical foundations on the dimensions, antecedents and market consequences of sports team brand equity captured in existing literature and goes further to provide new insights and an improved theoretical understanding of these elements.

Keywords: Experience-Induced Antecedents, Macro Marketing Environment-Induced Antecedents, Management-Induced Antecedents, Dimensions of Perceived Brand Equity and Market Consequences of Perceived Brand Equity

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The study sought to develop a conceptual understanding that can bridge existing knowledge gaps on the antecedents, dimensions and market consequences of perceived brand equity in professional sports teams. This was inspired by the fact that, although the subject of perceived brand equity in professional sport has been subjected to substantial academic research, there are notable inconsistencies on

the dimensions, antecedents and market consequences of brand equity in existing sport brand equity conceptual frameworks. These inconsistencies were noted in the sports brand equity conceptual frameworks that were developed in the last twenty years by such scholars as Gladden, Milne, and Sutton (1998), Gladden and Milne (1999), Gladden and Funk (2002), Bauer, Sauer, and Schmit (2005), Ross (2006), Ross, James, and Vargas (2006), Kaynak, Salman, and Tatoglu (2008), Kerr and Gladden (2008), Ross, Russell, and Bang (2008), Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer and Exler (2008), Biscaia, Correia, Rosado, Maroco, and Ross (2013), Naik and Gupta

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(2013), Arai, Ko, and Kaplanidou (2013), Arai, Ko, and Ross (2014), Kunkel, Funk, and King (2014) and Charumbira and Stotlar (2015).

Inconsistences in Literature

Antecedents Related Inconsistences

The classification of the antecedents of brand equity in professional sports teams remains one of the contentious subjects in sports brand equity literature. Gladden et al. (1998), Gladden and Milne (1999), Gladden and Funk (2002), Bauer et al. (2005), Ross (2006), Kaynak et al. (2008), Kerr and Gladden (2008), Arai et al. (2013), Arai et al. (2014) and Charumbira and Stotlar (2015) grouped the factors which lead to the creation of professional sport brand equity into three categories by clustering related factors together.

Gladden et al. (1998), Gladden and Milne (1999), and Kerr and Gladden (2008) identified and classified the antecedents of brand equity in professional sport into; Team-Related Antecedents, Organization-Related Antecedents, and Market-Related Antecedents.

In the same vein, Ross (2006) classified the antecedent of professional sports brand equity into; Organization-Induced Antecedents, Market-Induced Antecedents, and Experience-Induced Antecedents. Charumbira and Stotlar (2015) followed the same approach when they classified the antecedent of perceived brand equity in sports teams into; Consumption Experience-Triggered Antecedents, Significant Others-Triggered Antecedents and Sports Entity Triggered Antecedents.

Gladden and Funk (2002), Kaynak et al. (2008), Bauer et al. (2008) grouped the antecedents of professional sport brand equity into attributes, benefits and attitudes while Bauer et al. (2005) grouped the factors which lead to the creation of customer-based brand equity in the team sports industry into awareness, attributes and benefits.

Finally, Arai et al. (2013) and Arai et al. (2014) grouped the antecedents of athlete brand equity into Athletic Performance, Attractive Appearance, and Marketable life style.

On the other hand, Ross et al. (2006), Ross et al. (2008), Biscaia et al. (2013), Naik and Gupta (2013), and Kunkel

et al. (2014) examined the individual factors which lead to the creation of sports brand equity separately without having to cluster them into themes.

Ross et al. (2006) identified: nonpayer personnel, team success, team history, stadium community, team play characteristics, brand mark, commitment, organisational attributes, concessions, social interaction, and rivalry as the eleven dimensions underlying professional sports team brand associations.

Ross et al. (2008), identified Commitment, Concessions, History, Logo, Organisation Attribute, Rivalry, Non-Player Personnel, Stadium, Socialisation, Success, Team Characteristics, Identification and Internalisation as the thirteen factors which lead to the creation of brand equity in sports teams.

Biscaia et al. (2013) empirically examined the Spectator-Based Brand Equity Model by Ross et al. (2008) outside the context of the North American professional sport by using it to measure brand equity within a European professional soccer context. The results gathered from a confirmatory factor analysis indicated an acceptable fit of the model to the data and confirmed the relationship between brand awareness (Internalisation), a single first-order construct, and brand associations, a second-order construct with ten dimensions (Brand Mark, Concessions, Social Interaction, Commitment, Team History, Organisational Attributes, Team Success, Head Coach, Management, Stadium). The differences observed between the results obtained by Ross et al. (2008) and Biscaia et al. (2013) reinforce the idea that brand equity is environmentally sensitive.

Naik and Gupta (2013) identified Brand Mark, Social Interaction, Team Rivalry, Team Success, Team History, Organisational Commitment, and Organisational Attributes, on-Player Personnel, Event Image, Sponsors, Celebrity Players, Team Identification, and Team Internalisation as the antecedents of Viewer-Based Brand Equity.

Kunkel et al. (2014) Community Pride, Diversion, Excitement, Logo Design, Management, Nostalgia, Performance, Rivalry, Socialisation, Star Player, Tradition, Atmosphere, Competition, Education, Game Interest, Player Development, and Specific Team lead to the creation of sports leagues brand equity.

Dimensional Inconsistences

Biscaia et al. (2013) note the dimensionality of brand equity in professional sports teams has not been unanimous.

The sport brand equity conceptual frameworks by Gladden and Funk (2002), Ross et al. (2006), Kayak, Salman, and Tatoglu (2008), Bauer et al. (2008), Arai et al. (2013), and Kunkel et al. (2014) focused on a single dimension of brand equity (brand associations).

The framework by Bauer et al. (2005) is grounded on Keller's (1993) Brand Knowledge model, and it conceptualises brand equity as an aggregate of brand awareness and brand associations. In the same vein, although the models by Ross (2006), Ross et al. (2008), Biscaia et al. (2013), Naik and Gupta (2013) and Charumbira and Stotlar (2015) were not developed from a manufactured goods perspective, they also conceptualise sports brand equity as an aggregate of brand awareness and brand associations.

The sports brand equity by Gladden et al. (1998), Gladden and Milne (1999), and Kerr and Gladden (2008) are grounded on the Brand Equity Model by Aaker (1991). As a result, they conceptualise sports brand equity as an aggregate of brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty.

Market Consequences Related Inconsistences

Diverging views were also noted in existing literature on the market consequences of perceived brand equity in sports organisations. Gladden et al. (1998) argue that based on the team's brand equity, six forms of marketplace consequences result in national media exposure, merchandise sales, individual donations, and corporate support, atmosphere and ticket sales. Gladden and Milne (1999) expanded the Conceptual Framework by Gladden et al. (1998) to allow for application to professional sport in a broader context. This expansion also entailed changing the consequence "individual donation" to "additional revenues", to capture the abundance of miscellaneous marketing outcomes that result from brand equity.

Bauer et al. (2005) note that brand image is an important antecedent of fan loyalty and has a higher and significant effect on economic success of sports teams.

According to Ross (2006), the main components of Spectator-Based Brand Equity consist of brand awareness and brand associations. The combined effects of these brand equity components is revealed in a set of consequences similar to those proposed by Gladden and Milne (1999) that can either positively or negatively affect a sports organisation. These consequences include; Team loyalty, Media exposure, Merchandise sales, Ticket sales, and Revenue solicitation

Kerr and Gladden (2008) note that brand equity results in such market consequences as, international media distribution and exposure, merchandise sales, ticket sales, global corporate partners, and additional revenues.

In the same light, Naik and Gupta (2013) contend that high or low brand equity in sports teams will result in such market outcomes as fan loyalty, merchandise sales, jersey rights, media exposure, increased viewers, ticket sales, revenue solicitation and brand extension opportunities.

Finally, Charumbira and Stotlar (2015) note that sports teams that are perceived as having a positive brand equity by individual and corporate consumers may realise such benefits as gate revenue, merchandise sales, corporate sponsorship, broadcasting rights revenue, advertising revenue, jersey rights revenue, stock exchange revenue, beneficial media coverage, fan loyalty, free brand promotion by consumers, unsolicited protection from consumers and political leaders, enhanced ability to attract and retain quality playing, technical and administrative personnel, and preferential treatment by sports, corporate and political leaders. On the other hand, professional sports teams which are perceived as having a negative perceived brand equity by individual and corporate consumers may experience such negative consequences as; heavy dependence on owners for operational capital, low revenue generation from both the core brand and brand extensions, inability to attract and retain sponsorship, inability to attract advertisers, inability to attract and retain quality playing and technical and administrative personnel, negative or limited media coverage, and low levels of customer loyalty (Charumbira & Stotlar, 2015).

Table 1: Summary of the Study's Research Methodology

| Research Philosophy | Research Approach | Research Design | Study Population | Validity and Reliability | Data Collection Procedure | Sampling Procedure | Sample Size | Study Sites | Respondents Description | Data Analysis/ Organising Tool |
|---|---|---|--|--|--|--|--------------|--|--|--|
| Pragmatism: Where qualitative and quantitative methods were mixed in order to offset their shortcomings and achieve completeness by capturing both the researcher and research subjects' perspective. | Inductive: The study started with a blank mind and the data collection process was not based on hypothesis testing. The research findings were then used to construct the Integrated Conceptual Framework for Understanding Sports Team Brand Equity. | Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods: A sequential two-phase mixed method research design in which data from the initial qualitative phase were collected by means of Free-Thought Listing, Semi-Structured Interviews and Focus Group Discussions. Informed the second quantitative phase where data was collected through Questionnaires. | All individual and corporate producers and consumers of the products of professional sports teams that are available on the Zimbabwean market. | The use of a mixed methods research design was meant to achieve the principles of Triangulation, Offset and Completeness, as informed by Bryman (2006), and enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. In the qualitative strand, validity and reliability were ensured through such strategies as: a. Having extended engagement with the participants to build rapport and trust with them. b. Member Checking, where the data transcripts were returned to the research participants to check if they accurately capture their responses. c. Peer Debriefing by allowing two marketing academics who held impartial views of the study to examine the methodology and provided feedback which was used to enhance credibility and ensure validity. In the Quantitative strand, the results of a Reliability Test showed that all the 22 questionnaire items were reliable because each of them had more than 0.7 Cronbach's Alpha as detailed in Table 2. | Qualitative Strand Free-Thought Listing Semi-Structured Interviews | Stratified Purposive Stratified Purposive | 69 64 | All the Country's 10 Provinces All the Country's 10 Provinces | 30 rural-based and 39 urban-based individual consumers of football brands 8 marketing managers from football sponsoring companies, 7 Sports Journalists, 6 managers of professional football teams, 41 individual consumers of football brands. | NVivo 11 Software NVivo 11 Software |
| | | | | | Focus Group Discussions | Stratified Purposive | 3 | Bulawayo & Somabhula. | -A group of 10 urban-based undergraduate Marketing and Sports Science students. -A group of 12 rural-based consumers of football brands. -A group of 12 practicing sports managers. | NVivo 11 Software |
| | | | | | Quantitative Strand | | 402 | All the Country's 10 provinces | Individual consumers of football brands | SPSS version 21 Software |
| | | | | | Questionnaire Survey | Stratified Convenience | | | | |

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The exploratory sequential mixed methods research design was adopted as the guiding model for the data collection, analysis and interpretation process in this study. In the qualitative strand of the study data was collected by means of a free-thought listing survey, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The

findings from the qualitative strand were used to generate data collection instruments for the questionnaire survey. This was meant to assess the overall prevalence of the variables that were identified in the qualitative phase from a large number of users of sports brands. The NVivo 11 and Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0 software packages were used to analyse and organise qualitatively and quantitative data, respectively. The Methodology is summarised in Table 1.

RESULTS

Reliability Test Results

Table 2: Reliability Test Results

| <i>Questionnaire Items</i> | <i>Scale Mean if Item Deleted</i> | <i>Scale Variance if Item Deleted</i> | <i>Corrected Item-Total Correlation</i> | <i>Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted</i> |
|--|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| 1. My loyalty to the team was influenced by experience with the brand. | 103.18 | 12.265 | .261 | .861 |
| 2. My loyalty to the team was influenced by macro marketing environmental factors | 103.03 | 12.702 | .478 | .846 |
| 3. My loyalty to the team is influenced by the way the brand is managed. | 103.35 | 13.195 | -.021 | .893 |
| 4. My knowledge levels about this team are very good. | 103.04 | 12.250 | .789 | .838 |
| 5. I have strong emotional connections with this team. | 103.06 | 11.850 | .909 | .832 |
| 6. I perceive this team in a positive manner. | 103.06 | 11.850 | .909 | .832 |
| 7. Fans buy and display merchandise belong to sports teams they perceive as strong brands. | 103.05 | 11.902 | .893 | .833 |
| 8. Sponsors associated their brands with sports teams they perceive as strong brands. | 103.05 | 11.907 | .890 | .833 |
| 9. Teams which are perceived as strong brands earn good returns from broadcasting rights agreements. | 103.06 | 11.850 | .909 | .832 |
| 10. Teams which are perceived as strong brands earn good returns from jersey rights agreements | 103.06 | 11.850 | .909 | .832 |
| 11. Teams which are perceived as strong brands earn good returns from their stock exchange activities. | 103.03 | 12.203 | .836 | .837 |
| 12. Teams which are perceived as strong brands earn good returns from licencing agreement. | 103.05 | 12.062 | .828 | .835 |
| 13. Team which are perceived as strong brands earn good returns from sale of advertisement space. | 103.05 | 12.062 | .828 | .835 |
| 14. Teams which are perceived as strong brands earn good returns from sale of advertising space. | 103.05 | 12.062 | .828 | .835 |
| 15. Teams which are perceived as strong brands find it easy to attract quality human resources. | 103.05 | 12.062 | .828 | .835 |
| 16. Being perceived as a strong brand gives teams competitive advantage on the market. | 102.98 | 13.645 | .000 | .855 |
| 17. Teams which are perceived as strong brand receive free brands promotion from fans. | 102.98 | 13.645 | .000 | .855 |

| <i>Questionnaire Items</i> | <i>Scale Mean if Item Deleted</i> | <i>Scale Variance if Item Deleted</i> | <i>Corrected Item-Total Correlation</i> | <i>Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted</i> |
|---|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| 18. Teams which are perceived as strong brand receive preferential treatment from sports and political leaders. | 102.98 | 13.645 | .000 | .855 |
| 19. Customers are loyal to teams they perceive strong brands. | 102.98 | 13.645 | .000 | .855 |
| 20. The revenue bases of strong sports team brands are diversified. | 102.98 | 13.645 | .000 | .855 |
| 21. Teams that are perceived as strong brands have high revenue generation capacities | 102.98 | 13.645 | .000 | .855 |
| 22. Teams which are perceived as strong brands earn good retains from naming rights agreements | 103.45 | 11.495 | .244 | .885 |

The reliability of 22 questionnaire items that were used to collect data in the quantitative study was tested in SPSS and the results were as summarised in Table 2. The results show that all the 22 questionnaire items were reliable because each of them had more than 0.7 Cronbach's Alpha.

The Antecedents of Perceived Brand Equity

The findings from the qualitative strand of the study identified 206 factors which lead to the creation of brand equity in professional football teams. These factors were grouped into three categories by clustering related elements together in NVivo 11, as follows:

Table 3: Qualitative Results on the Antecedents of Perceived Sports Team Brand Equity

| <i>NVivo Node</i> | <i>Number of Coding References</i> |
|---|------------------------------------|
| Experience-Related Antecedents | 32 |
| Macro Marketing Environment-Related Antecedents | 74 |
| Management-Related Antecedents | 100 |

The qualitative results were incorporated in the questionnaires that were used to collect data from 402 individual consumers of football products to determine whether "Experience-Induced Antecedents", "Macro Marketing Environment-Induced Antecedents" and "Management-Induced Antecedents" were perceived as significant sources of professional sports team brand

equity in wider population. A One-Sample T test with a test value of 3.0, indicating the midpoint of a 5-point Likert type scale, was used to analyse the resultant data as follows:

Table 4: Results on the Antecedents of Perceived Sports Team Brand Equity

| <i>Antecedents of Perceived Sports Team Brand Equity</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Std. Deviation</i> | <i>Std. Error Mean</i> |
|--|----------|-------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Experience-Induced Antecedents | 402 | 3.58 | .551 | .027 |
| Macro Marketing Environment-Induced Antecedents | 402 | 4.78 | .414 | .021 |
| Management-Induced Antecedents | 402 | 4.86 | .347 | .017 |

The findings from the quantitative strand confirmed that the antecedents that were identified in the qualitative strand were perceived as significant determinants of brand equity in professional sports teams by the 402 quantitative study participant.

Dimensions of Perceived Brand Equity

The data were analysed in a three-round coding sequence. In the first round, the NVivo 11 Word Frequency Query Analysis was used to identify the fifty most frequently used words in the Free-thought Listing Survey, Focus Group Discussions and Semi-Structured Interviews, as captured in Figure 1.



Fig. 1: Word Cloud Showing the 50 Most Frequently Used Words in the Qualitative Strand of the Study

These words were then classified into three brand equity dimensions, namely; “Brand Awareness”, “Brand Associations” and “Brand Relationship” by clustering related themes together.

In the second round of the analysis, the brand equity dimensions that were identified in the first round of the coding process were used to code the qualitative data in NVivo 11 and a code sheet was developed. The sheet contained the identified perceived brand equity dimensions, direct quotes from the respondents, and the definition of each perceived brand equity dimension.

In the third round of the analysis, the code sheet were submitted to two marketing academics for expert review. The feedback provided by the experts support the conceptualisation of brand equity as an aggregate of Brand Awareness, Brand Associations and Brand Relationship.

The qualitative results were incorporated in the questionnaires that were used to collect data from 402

individual consumers of sports products to determine whether Brand Awareness, Brand Associations and Brand Relationship were perceived as significant dimensions of professional sports team brand equity in wider population. A One-Sample T test with a test value of 3.0, indicating the midpoint of a 5-point Likert type scale, was used to analyse the resultant data as follows:

Table 5: One-Sample T Test Results on the Dimensions of Sports Team Brand Equity

| <i>Brand Equity Dimensions</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Std. Deviation</i> | <i>Std. Error Mean</i> |
|--|----------|-------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Brand Awareness is a significant element of sports team brand equity. | 402 | 4.94 | .242 | .012 |
| Brand Relationship is a significant element of sports team brand equity. | 402 | 4.92 | .275 | .014 |
| Brand Image is a significant element of sports team brand equity. | 402 | 4.92 | .275 | .014 |

The results corroborated the findings from the qualitative strand by showing that Brand Awareness, Brand Associations and Brand Relationship were perceived as significant dimensions of professional sports team brand equity.

Thus, the study identified Brand Relationship as an additional brand equity dimension, an insight that has not been explicitly captured in existing literature.

The research findings showed that Brand Awareness, Brand Associations and Brand Relationship can be further broken down into sub dimensions and the resultant sub dimension can also be classified into sub types as detailed in Table 6.

Table 6: The Dimensions of Sports Team Brand Equity

| <i>Brand Equity Dimensions</i> | <i>Dimension Description</i> | <i>Types</i> | <i>Type Descriptions</i> |
|--------------------------------|--|--------------|---|
| Brand Awareness | | | |
| Brand Knowledge Levels. | The levels of consumer familiarity with sports teams and the easy with which consumers can recognise or recall a sports teams. | Opinion | Enough knowledge to form an opinion about the sports team. |
| | | Meaning | Know what the sports team stands for. |
| | | Familiarity | Familiar with the attributes and features of the sports team. |
| | | Recognition | Ability to identify the sports team. |
| | | Recall | Ability to retrieve the sports team from memory. |

| <i>Brand Equity Dimensions</i> | <i>Dimension Description</i> | <i>Types</i> | <i>Type Descriptions</i> |
|--------------------------------|---|---------------------|---|
| Brand Associations | | | |
| Characteristics Features | The tangible and intangible attributes of sports teams. | Tangible | Team features like; Brand Mark, Team Play Characteristics, Non-Player Personnel, Players, Stadium or Venue Factors, Owners, Sponsors, Fans, Geographical Location, Management Structure, Concessions. |
| | | Intangible | Characteristics like: Team Success, Rivalry, Team Tradition, Service Quality, Atmosphere, Regional Importance, and Fan Commitment. |
| Brand Evaluation | Consumer mental pictures of the quality, favourability and uniqueness of the sports team. | Perceived Quality | Market competitive position, Brand Credibility, Team Success, Positive or Negative Brand Image. |
| | | Favourability | Goodwill, Favourable or Unfavourable Brand Perceptions |
| | | Uniqueness | Similar, Unique, Original, Imitation. |
| Brand Relationship | | | |
| Emotional Connections Levels | The depth of the emotional connections that customers have with sports team. | Identification | The psychological significance of the team to the fan e.g. Sense of security, Sense of community, escape from social problems, affiliation with success. |
| | | Internalisation | The extent to which fan have incorporated the brand into their personal lives. |
| | | Affective reactions | Excitement, fun, sadness, like, love, hatred |
| Consumption Benefits | The benefits that consumers derive from consuming team sports products and services. | Physiological | Physiological benefits like; consuming food and beverages at the stadium or arena |
| | | Psychological | Emotional benefits such as; Affiliation with Success, Pride in Place, Nostalgia, Sense of Security, Escape from stressful life situations. |
| | | Social | Consumption benefits like Social Interaction, Peer group acceptance, Entertainment. |
| | | Economic | Economic gains like; Return on Investment, Value for Money. |

The Market Consequences of Perceived Brand Equity

The findings from the qualitative strand of the study showed that brand the perceptions held by corporate and individual consumers for professional football teams can generate negative and positive market consequences.

The market consequences of brand equity identified in this study are similar to those identified in existing sports brand equity frameworks by Gladden et al. (1998), Gladden and Milne (1999), Ross (2006) and Naik and Gupta (2013).

However, this study identified such additional consequences as; stock exchange revenue, ability to attract and retain quality playing, technical and administrative personnel, free brand promotion by consumers, unsolicited protection from consumers and political leaders, enhanced

ability to attract and retain quality playing, technical and administrative personnel, preferential treatment by sports, corporate and political leaders and heavy dependence on owners for operational capital.

The Integrated Conceptual Framework For Understanding Perceived Brand Equity in Professional Sports Teams

The Framework seeks to develop a conceptual understanding that can contribute towards the resolutions of the current inconsistencies in literature on the antecedents, dimensions and market consequences of perceived brand equity in professional sports teams. The Framework was developed from the research findings, following an extensive review of existing sports brand equity conceptual frameworks

The Antecedents of Perceived Sports Team Brand Equity

This conceptual model divides the antecedence of into three dimensions, as shown in Figure 2.

“Experience-Induced Antecedents”

This category represents the experience-induced brand impressions that sports consumers develop as they consume the core product of sports teams through one or a combination of the various modes of sport consumption as; live attendance at the match venue, radio, television, newspaper, the internet and the social media.

The customer's consumption experience with the sports team can increase the level of brand awareness through repeated exposure to the brand. Unpleasant customer consumption experience with a sports team may have a halo effect on brand knowledge and create inaccurate brand impressions. Furthermore, a positive consumption experience can lead to the development strong, favourable and differentiated brand association. On the other hand, a negative consumption experience can lead to the development of negative brand associations. Finally, a positive consumption experience can result in the development of deep emotional connections between the sports brand and its users. However, a negative consumption experience can weaken the emotional connections between the sports brand and its users.

“Macro Marketing Environment-Induced Antecedents”

This category includes the impressions about a sports team which are created in the minds of its current and prospective customers by external factors beyond its control. These antecedents include the brand perceptions that sports customers develop as a result of such factors as; the geographical significance of the sport team, the brand management and marketing activities of competing brands, the actions of other fans who promote their favourite sports brands indirectly by wearing and displaying licenced team merchandise, the positivity or negativity of stock price movements and the actions or attitudes of individuals or organisations they admire or respect like the media, corporate sponsors, family members, peers and celebrities towards the sports team.

The External Marketing Environment-Related Antecedents avail more brand information to the consumers and increase the levels of brand awareness. These factors are however, not controlled by the sports team, as a result, wrong or inaccurate brand information and impressions can also be transmitted to consumers, with negative consequences on brand knowledge.

The positivity of External Marketing Environment-Related Antecedents may influence consumers of sports team products and services to develop positive team brand associations. On the other hand, the negativity of External Marketing Environment-Related Antecedents may influence the consumers to develop negative team brand associations.

In the same vein, positive External Marketing Environment-Related Antecedents may influence the consumers to develop deep emotional connections with the sports brand. Negative External Marketing Environment-Related Antecedents, on the other hand, may weaken the emotional connections between the sports brand and its users.

“Management-Induced Antecedents”

These are impressions about sports teams which are created in the minds of current and prospective customers by the sports team's marketing mix management efforts and brand management activities.

Effective marketing mix and brand management efforts by a sport team can increase the levels of customer awareness of team attributes, products and services. This can also lead to the development of strong emotional connections between the sports team and its customers. Finally, effective marketing mix and brand management efforts by a sport team can create positive customer experiences resulting in the development of a strong, favourable and differentiated team brand image in the minds of current and prospective customers.

On the other hand, ineffective marketing mix and brand management efforts by a sport team may fail to generate or increase team brand visibility. It may also weaken the emotional connections between sports teams and their customers and create negative customer experiences and lead to the development of a weak, unfavourable and undifferentiated team brand image in the minds of current and prospective customers

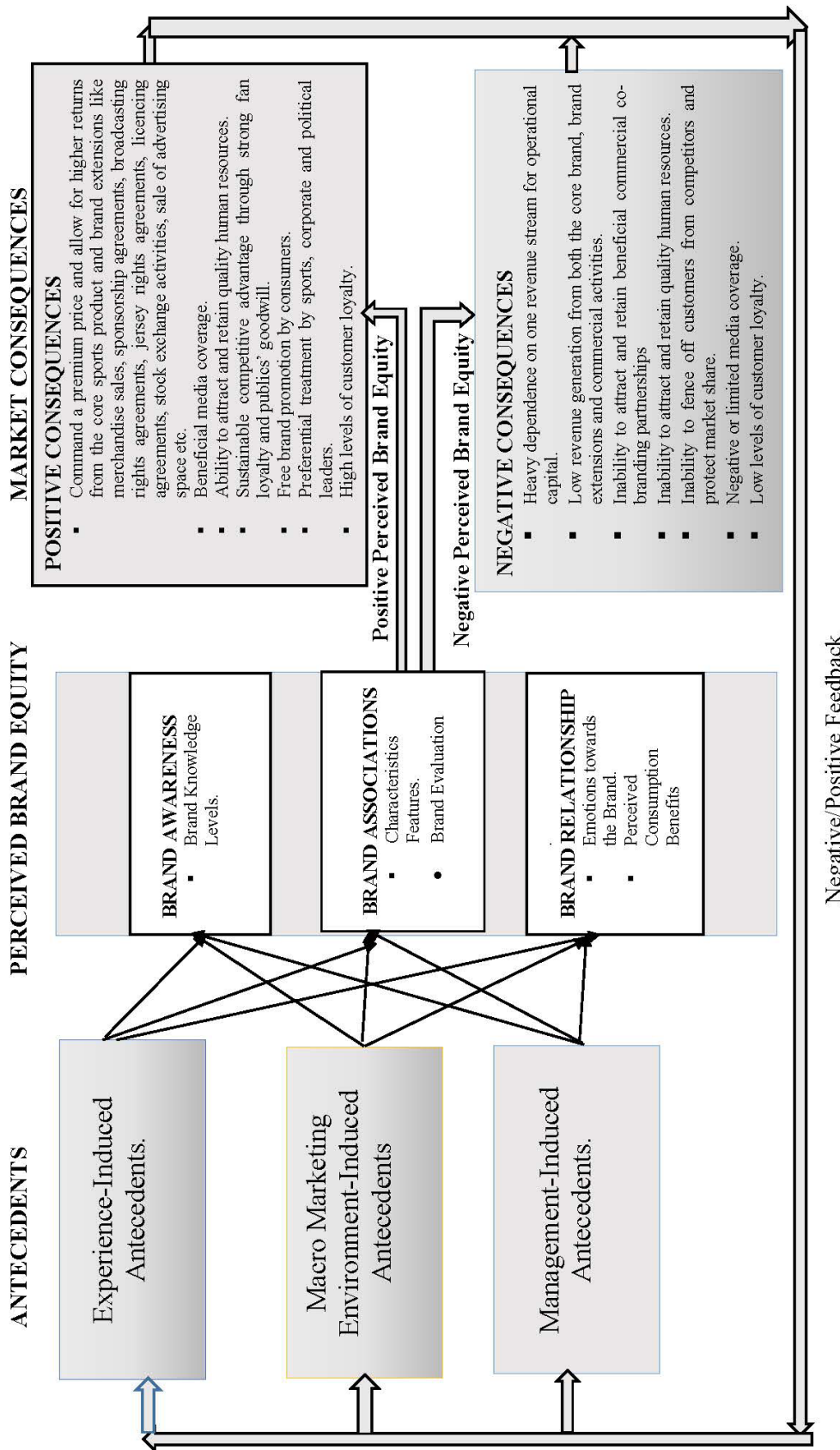


Fig. 2: The Integrated Conceptual Framework for Understanding Perceived Brand Equity in Professional Sports Teams.

Dimensions of Sports Team Perceived Brand Equity

The Framework conceptualises brand equity in professional sports teams as an aggregate of the levels of consumer familiarity with sports teams and the ease with which consumers can recognise or recall a sports team (Brand Awareness), the totality of consumer mental pictures of the quality, favourability and uniqueness of the sports brand (Brand Associations), and the depth of the emotional connections that customers have with the sports brand (Brand Relationship).

It shows that brand equity can be positive and negative. and considers positive perceived brand equity to mean that the professional sports team's current and prospective customers have good levels of brand familiarity, hold strong, unique and favourable brand associations about the team in their minds and have deep emotional connections with the sports brand. Negative perceived brand equity means that the professional football team's current and prospective customers have low levels of brand familiarity, they view the sports brand as undifferentiated and hold weak and unfavourable associations about it in their minds and have weak emotional connections with the brand.

The Market Consequences of Sports Team Perceived Brand Equity

The Integrated Conceptual Framework for Understanding Perceived Brand Equity in Professional Sports Teams shows that the brand perceptions held by current and prospective corporate and individual users of products and services of professional sports teams can generate negative and positive market outcomes.

Having a positive perceived brand equity in the minds of current and prospective users of products and services of professional sports teams allows teams to command premium prices and reap higher returns from the core sports product (gate revenue, athlete transfer fees) and brand extensions (merchandise sales, sponsorship agreements, broadcasting rights agreements, jersey rights agreements, licencing agreements, naming rights agreements, stock exchange activities and sale of advertising space, among

others). They can also reap such positive market outcomes as; beneficial media coverage, ability to attract and retain quality human capital, sustainable competitive advantage through strong fan loyalty and publics' goodwill, free brand promotion by consumers, preferential treatment by sports, corporate and political leaders and high levels of customer loyalty.

Having a negative perceived brand equity in the minds of current and prospective users of products and services of professional sports teams, on the other hand, makes sports teams depend heavily on one revenue stream for operational capital and generate low revenue from the core brand, brand extensions and commercial activities. Other market consequences of having a negative brand equity include; inability to attract and retain beneficial commercial co-branding partnerships, inability to attract and retain quality human capital, inability to fence off customers from competitors and protect market share, negative or limited media coverage and low levels of customer loyalty.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Although existing conceptual frameworks on sport branding have established rich theoretical foundations on the antecedents, dimensions and market consequences of brand equity in professional sports teams, the proposed Integrated Conceptual Framework for Understanding Perceived Brand Equity in Professional Sports Teams supports these theoretical foundations and goes further to provide an improved theoretical understanding of these elements.

The Conceptual Framework suggests that, although there are notable inconsistencies on the antecedents of brand equity in professional sports teams in existing conceptual frameworks, these factors can be grouped into experience-induced antecedents, macro marketing environment-induced antecedent and management-induced antecedent. These antecedents do not apply uniformly across different sport settings. As a result, the different conceptualizations of the antecedents of sports team brand equity in existing conceptual frameworks can be partly attributed to the fact that the framework were

derived from studies that were carried out in different sport settings. In some cases, there are no tangible content differences, the inconsistencies are only in terms of the narrations used to describe the antecedents by different scholars. In that way, the proposed Integrated Conceptual Framework for Understanding Brand Equity in Sports Teams gives an improved understanding of the antecedent related inconsistencies that were noted in existing frameworks.

This framework departs from the traditional Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) inspired conceptualizations of the dimensions of brand equity. The Aaker (1991) inspired sport brand equity conceptual frameworks by Gladden et al. (1998), Gladden and Milne (1999), and Kerr and Gladden (2008) conceptualise sport brand equity as an aggregate of brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty. The framework by Bauer et al. (2005), Ross (2006), Ross et al. (2008), Biscaia et al. (2013), Naik and Gupta (2013) and Charumbira and Stotlar (2015) follow Keller's conceptualization of brand equity as an aggregate of brand awareness and brand associations. The proposed Integrated Conceptual Framework for Understanding Perceived Brand Equity in Professional Sports Teams departs from this traditional conceptualizations of the dimensions of brand equity by noting that team sport brand equity is an aggregate of Brand Awareness, Brand Associations and Brand Relationship. Thus, the framework views Brand Relationship as an additional brand equity dimension, an insight that has not been explicitly captured in existing conceptual frameworks.

The framework also provides new insights on the consequences of team sport brand equity by identified consequences which are not captured in existing conceptual frameworks.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTION FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The framework is informed by finding from a study carried out in one country, Zimbabwe, on a single sport, football. As results, it may fail to capture the situation in other sport settings. There is therefore, a need to externally validate the Framework by extending the study to other sport settings.

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