The brand image of professional sport teams – an empirical investigation of the relevance of brand personality

1. Introduction

Professional sports have emerged as a rewarding business with many opportunities to prosper (Gladden and Funk 2002; Kaynak, Salman and Tatoglu 2008). Sport managers are beginning to view their teams as brands to be managed. The aim of professional sport teams is to create a strong brand, which influences the behaviour of fans (Gladden and Funk 2001). A strong brand ensures the loyalty of these groups even when the team has a losing season. As a result of such loyalty, a price premium can be charged (Aaker 1991). Furthermore a strong team sport brand creates opportunities for product extensions beyond the core product (Aaker 1991; Keller 1993). New products such as team related merchandise stores and restaurants in close proximity to the venue enable the team to create additional revenue. The image of a sport team brand influences the behavioural intention of sport team fans (Gladden and Funk 2001, 2002, Ross 2006, Bauer, Stockburger-Sauer and Exler 2008). “Brand image is the cumulative product of brand associations in the consumers mind.” (Keller 1993) Brand benefits and brand personality are important types of brand associations (Keller 1993, Burmann and Stolle 2007). The current research is extensively focussed on brand benefits of professional sport teams (e.g. Wann 1995, Gladden and Funk 2001, 2002, Trail and James 2001, Koo and Hardin 2008, Bauer, Stockburger-Sauer and Exler 2008). However the relevance of brand personality in the context of professional sport teams is not evaluated in the current research (see chapter 3). The aims of this paper is to analyse the relevance of brand personality for the behavioural intention of sport team fans. Based on this results practical implications for the positioning of professional sport teams can be developed. In the next chapter the dimensions of a brand image will be presented. Based on the self-congruency theory the relevance of brand personality for professional sport teams will be analyzed (chapter 3). At the end of chapter 3 a research model will be presented. In the next step this research model will be empirically tested by using a structural equation model. In chapter 4 the research design will be described. The empirical results are presented in chapter 5. The paper ends with a conclusion and a development of practical implication for professional sport teams.

2. Dimensions of brand image

One of the aims of professional sport teams is to influence the behavioural fan loyalty independent of sportive success (Gladden and Funk 2001, Kaynak, Salman and Tatoglu 2008). Behavioural fan loyalty is determined by the global image, which is defined as consumers overall evaluation of a brand (Burmann and Stolle 2007, Bauer, Stockburger-Sauer and Exler 2008). Keller (1993), Aaker (1997), Burmann and Stolle (2007) assert that brand benefits and brand personality are the determinant factors of the global image of a brand. The relations between brand benefits, brand personality, global image and behavioural fan loyalty is shown in Fig. 1.

![Figure 1: Brand Image Conceptualization](image-url)

Source: modified from Burmann and Stolle 2007, p. 69.

Figure 2: Preliminary Research Model

3. The relevance of brand personality for professional sport teams

Brand personality is defined as a “set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker 1997). Practitioners view the brand personality as a key way to differentiate a brand (McCracken 1989, Aaker 1997, Plummer 2000, Geuens, Weijters and De Wulf 2009) and as a central driver of consumer preference and usage (Biel 1993). Furthermore a brand personality enables a consumer to express his or her own self or ideal self through the use of a brand (Graeff 1996, Batra, Lehmann and Singh 1993, Malhotra 1988, Sirgy 1982, 1986). The brand personality is not considered in the current research of professional sport team brands. Exceptions are the studies by Ross (2008) and Carlson, Donavan and Cumsiskey (2009). Ross (2008) examined the applicability of Aaker’s brand personality scale (BPS) (1997) in the context of professional team sport. The BPS contains five dimensions of brand personality: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. The results of Ross’ study suggest that the BPS is not fully applicable to the area of sport. Carlson, Donavan and Cumsiskey (2009) developed an own brand personality for professional sport teams. This scale contains five dimensions: wholesome, charming, successful, imaginative and tough. However the validity of this scale is not empirically checked. In the current research a valid brand personality scale for professional sport teams does not exist. Beyond that finding the relevance of brand personality for the behavioural intention of sport team fans is not
Self-concept is defined as “the totality of an individuals feelings having reference to himself as an object” (Rosenberg 1979, p. 7). Self-congruity is made up of two components, namely brand personality and self-concept. It can be defined as the perceived match between brand personality and self-concept. (Sirgy 1986). The self-concept is extremely important and valuable to individuals, and they are expected to behave in ways that protect and enhance their self-concept (Sirgy 1982, Puzakova, Kwak and Rocereto 2009). So consumers are able to strengthen their self-concept by buying and using brands whose brand personality is congruent with important aspects of one’s own self-concept. Rosenberg (1979) distinguishes between different self concepts: a) actual self-concept is an image an individual has of himself or herself; b) ideal self-concept is an image one aspires to have; and c) ideal social self-concept is an image one aspires others to have of himself or herself. According to the three self-concepts, three self-congruence motives exist (see figure 3). The first is the need for self-consistency as a motivational tendency serving to ensure consistency between one’s actual self-concept and related attitudes or behaviours (Johar and Sirgy 1991). The greater the congruence between the brand personality and the ideal self-concept, the greater the satisfaction of self-esteem needs (Higgins 1987, Johar and Sirgy 1991). The last motive is the need for social approval. The greater the congruence between the brand personality and the ideal self-concept, the greater the satisfaction of social approval needs.

![Figure 3: Self-congruence motives](source: modified from Johar and Sirgy (1991), p. 25.)

Much of the consumer behaviour research in self-congruity has proved the relevance for consumer behaviour (e.g. Sirgy and Samli 1985, Govers and Schoormanns 2005, Kressmann et al. 2006). Fan behaviour is most intense when fans believe that the team represent important facets of their own self-concept (Bee and Kahle 2006). It can be assumed that the self-congruity determines the global image of a sport team brand. So the preliminary research model can be enhanced by the actual-, ideal- and ideal social self-congruity as determinants of the global image. From literature review the final research model was developed (see Fig. 4).
4. Design of the empirical study

The empirical study involved the sport team brands 1. FC Köln from the German “Fußball Bundesliga”, TBV Lemgo from the German “Handball Bundesliga” and ALBA Berlin from the German “BEKO Basketball Bundesliga”. Data was collected from fans of these three sport teams using an online survey. A total of 2,767 usable questionnaires were collected.

To operationalise the “purchase intention of tickets and merchandise” an existing scale from Bauer, Exler and Stockburger-Sauer (2007) was used. Items by Wenske (2008) were adapted to measure “willingness to pay of tickets and merchandise”. The “global image” was measured by items adapted from the “Attitude Toward the Brand” scale (Pecheux and Derbaix 1999). The self-participant image congruence scale (Kang 2002, Kwak and Kang 2009) was used to measure the actual-, ideal- and ideal social self-congruity. Based on Sirgy et al’s (1997) study, Kang (2002) employed a direct measure to estimate the degree of image congruence between self concept and image of typical sport team fan (e.g. “How much does your own actual self image (what do you think you actually are) and the perceived overall image of the typical team follower overlap?”; Kwak and Kang 2009). Therefore the actual-, ideal- and ideal social self-congruity was measured by single items each.

To reduce the discontinuation rate of the survey, the benefits “nostalgia”, “escape”, “emotions”, “star players”, “catharsis”, “aesthetics”, “eustress” and “demonstration of identification with a city or region” were measured by single items each. To operationalise these benefits items from different scales were used (Trail and James 2001, James and Ross 2004, Bauer, Exler and Stockburger-Sauer 2007, Kaynak, Salman and Tatoglu 2008). The benefits “identification”, “social interaction”, “BIRG” and “atmosphere” are too complex to be operationalised by single items. Therefore these benefits were measured by three items each. To operationalise “identification”, “social interaction” and “BIRG” items from the “Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption” (MSSC) by Trail and James (2001) were used. The benefit “atmosphere” was measured by using a scale by Uhrich (2008).
5. Empirical Results

The explained measurement model was tested by using an exploratory factor analyses. These analyses have shown none of the indicators have to be eliminated (factor loadings ranged from .638 to .891; the extracted variance was 67.2% (“behavioural intention”), 60.2% (“global image”) and 71.6% (“benefits”). The structural equation model was estimated using Smart PLS 2.0. The results are presented in figure 5.

![Figure 5: Structural equation model](image)

Based on the empirical results, relevant brand benefits of professional sport teams are identified. The most relevant benefits are: “identification” and “demonstration of identification with a city or region”. The benefits “atmosphere”, “BIRG”, “catharsis”, “aesthetics”, “eustress”, “escape”, “nostalgia” and “emotions” are relevant, too. The structural path between the benefit “star players” and “global image” is statistically not significant. This result might be caused by nonexistent star players at 1. FC Köln, TBV Lemgo and ALBA Berlin. The benefit “social interactions” is not a relevant benefit, too. Furthermore the empirical results show the relevance of the three self-congruity effects. By visiting games of a professional sport team or wearing team merchandising a fan can satisfy the needs for self consistency, for self esteem and for social approval. The actual self-congruity (need for self consistency) is most relevant.

6. Conclusion and practical implications

The aim of the current research was to analyse the relevance of brand personality. A professional sport team should formulate a brand personality statement as a communication goal for the brand. In order to develop a brand personality statement, professional sport teams should measure the actual self-concept of their fans, so that the most relevant personality traits can be identified. For instance, “humorous” is one of the most relevant personality traits of fans of 1. FC Köln. So a “humorous” communication (e.g. advertisement) is an appropriate way for the 1. FC Köln to strengthen the brand.
References


