

# **TEAM IDENTIFICATION AND SATELLITE SUPPORTERS: THE POTENTIAL VALUE OF BRAND EQUITY FRAMEWORKS**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Professional team sport, like other forms of popular culture, has become a marketable commodity subject to the logic of the marketplace. The forces of globalisation and advances in communications technology have greatly expanded the potential marketplace for professional sports teams, especially for those sports internationally popular. As a result, many sports organisations have seen the value, or equity, of their brands significantly enhanced and in the process have created a global fan base. For instance, certain teams, Heller (2002) claimed, such as Manchester United, “almost rival the great consumer brands for recognition” (p. 46), and could have as many as 350 million supporters worldwide (Henriksen, 2004). Furthermore, Spanish football club, Barcelona F.C., is believed to have 70 millions fans worldwide (“Nike extends FC Barcelona sponsorship in \$189M deal,” 2006), while English rival, Liverpool, claims to have 28 million (Rice-Oxley, 2007).

Yet, Wann and Hamlet claimed, only four percent of the published research in sports sociology and psychology actually studied spectators (1995, cited in Crawford, 2003), and that was before the growth in the number of these foreign fans. Indeed, Kerr and Gladden (2008) coined a new term, the ‘satellite fan’, to recognise these individuals, although given that the strength of their loyalty is unknown, they might instead be referred to as ‘satellite supporters’. Despite their importance, the reasons satellite supporters identify with their chosen sports teams remain largely unexplored.

As branding has become more important, conceptual frameworks have been developed to assess the value, or equity, of a sports organisation’s brand (Gladden & Milne, 1999; Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998; Kerr & Gladden, 2008). Satellite supporters represent significant revenue and can enhance an organisation’s brand equity. For instance, 20 percent of merchandise sold through the National Basketball Association’s (NBA) official website are to overseas fans (Eisenberg, 2003) and Spanish football’s Real Madrid now earns 60 percent of merchandise revenue from international markets (D. Jones, Parkes, & Houlihan, 2006). This paper will therefore examine the proposed relationship that exists between brand equity frameworks and the antecedents of team identification. In particular, it will examine the value of Kerr and Gladden (2008) to shed light on the team identification of satellite supporters.

## **2. BRAND EQUITY AND TEAM ID: A PROPOSED RELATIONSHIP**

Social identification, Underwood, Bond and Baer (2001) claimed, is important in the creation of brand equity, especially for service brands, and sports teams, as service brands, generate high levels of consumer identification (Underwood et al., 2001). Indeed, team identification, defined by Wann, Melnick, Russell and Pease (2001) as “the extent to which a fan feels psychologically connected” to a particular team or player (p. 3) is itself based upon social identification (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002; Madrigal, 2004; Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Wann et al., 2001). Ultimately, Underwood et al. (2001) suggested, the greater the degree of social identification between consumer and product, the greater the level of customer-based brand equity. A similar sentiment was expressed by Carlson, Quazi and Muthaly (2002) who proposed that the level of consumer-based brand equity was positively associated with the level of team identification.

The degree of identification greatly influences supporter behaviour, loyalty and attitudes towards their adopted teams (Milne & McDonald, 1999; Murrell & Dietz, 1992; Sutton, McDonald, Milne, & Cimperman, 1997; Wann & Branscombe, 1990, 1993, 1995). For instance, for fans with high levels of identification, the role of fan is an important component of their identity. An individual's identification with a sports team is positively correlated with personal self-esteem (Branscombe & Wann, 1991) and collective, or group, self-esteem (Wann, 1994). Highly-identified fans are also less anxious and possess higher levels of energy and self-esteem (Wann, Inman, Ensor, Gates, & Caldwell, 1999).

It would also appear that conceptual frameworks to assess brand equity in sports and team identification share at least one common antecedent, team success. Successful teams are more likely to generate brand equity whereby on-field success translates to off-field riches (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005; Milne & McDonald, 1999). Moreover, Milne and McDonald (1999) explained, successful teams often have higher gate receipts, sell more licensed merchandise, and receive greater media revenue and exposure. In an age of increased commercialism, success even enhances the value of their franchise. Brand consultant, *FutureBrand*, determined that a brand's value is largely dependent upon its ability to generate revenue, which in turn is largely dependent upon team success. As a result, they stressed the importance of team success in their valuations of European football (Gieske & Forato, 2004), Australia's National Rugby League (NRL) and Australian Football League (AFL) (Stensholt, 2006), teams. Likewise, consultant, *Brand Finance*, explained that Liverpool F.C.'s memorable Champions League victory in Istanbul had reignited the brand's appeal and enhanced its brand value (Haigh & Park, 2006). European success also significantly boosted the Merseyside club's fortunes: they received more than 50 million dollars in bonus revenue from European competition, renewed deals with sponsors, Reebok and Carlsberg, and saw their worldwide fan base more than double to 18 million (Gage, 2006).

While successful teams are likely to generate brand equity, the possibility for vicarious achievement and the enhancement of self-esteem suggests they are also more likely to attract potential fans. Fink et al. (2002) found vicarious achievement, or "the need for social prestige, self-esteem and sense of empowerment that an individual can receive from their association with a successful team" (p. 198), to be the primary indicator for team identification. Sports fans, Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman and Sloan (1976) claimed, would publicly announce their association with successful teams, or tend to 'bask in reflected glory' (BIRG). It is no surprise, therefore, that spectators often choose to follow successful teams rather than those which perennially struggle (Branscombe & Wann, 1991; End, Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, & Jacquemotte, 2002; Mahony, Howard, & Madrigal, 2000; Wann, Tucker, & Schrader, 1996).

Therefore, while team success is a likely driver of brand equity, it is also likely to influence team identification, as fans can 'bask in the reflected glory' of successful teams. It is this degree of identification, Wann and Branscombe (1990) explained, that accounts for the 'die-hard' and 'fair-weather' fan. Die-hard fans maintain their allegiance irrespective of on-field performance, while fair-weather fans associate with the team only when it performs well. The need for vicarious achievement, Sutton et al. (1997) concluded, is why successful teams attract fans and why fans 'jump on the bandwagon' when teams perform well.

Team success is beneficial for sports teams both in terms of the creation of brand equity and the growth of a supporter base. Successful teams therefore are more likely to have greater numbers of fans and possess more valuable brands than their less-successful counterparts. Recently, it has been theorised that the level of brand equity is associated with the level of

team identification, and it has been shown, both brand equity and team identification share at least one common antecedent. However, although team identification has received increased attention in recent years, most notably, Sutton et al. (1997), I. Jones (1998), Kolbe and James (2000), Gwinner and Swanson (2003), Jacobson (2003), and Greenwood, Kanters and Casper (2006), the team identification of satellite supporters has remained largely ignored. Research on factors that contribute to a fan's original choice of sports team, Richardson and O'Dwyer (2003) claimed, would be a welcome addition to the field. Therefore, a closer examination of brand equity and the sports team might shed light on this phenomenon.

Kerr and Gladden (2008) revised existing conceptual frameworks of brand equity in the sports environment to account for professional sports teams in an increasingly-competitive global marketplace. Like earlier research (Gladden & Milne, 1999; Gladden et al., 1998), the revised framework included antecedents related to the team, organisation, and market, and a feedback loop whereby the consequences of brand equity could further impact the sports team. However, it now did so via the newly-developed brand community antecedent. According to Kerr and Gladden (2008), the antecedents contained within the revised framework can influence the creation of brand equity and "theoretically have an impact on each of the four main dimensions set forth by [David] Aaker" (p. 70). Two of these dimensions, namely, perceived quality and brand associations, directly influence support for professional sports teams. Furthermore, parallels exist between the consequences of brand equity and the consumptive practices pursued by these foreign consumers.

### **3. DIMENSIONS OF BRAND EQUITY**

Brand equity, according to Aaker (1991), is "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service" (p. 15). Furthermore, he conceptualised brand equity as comprised of four main dimensions: brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty. A fifth dimension, other proprietary brand assets, such as patents or trademarks, received little attention in his original publication and in literature since. These dimensions, when astutely managed, create value, or equity, for the brand.

A brand, according to Lamb, Hair and McDaniel (2000) is "a name, term, symbol, design, or combination thereof that identifies a seller's products and differentiates them from competitors' products" (p. 323). Indeed, *FutureBrand* explained, any organisation that "seeks a relationship with its audience can be considered a brand" (Kleinman, 2001, p. 5), and so sports marketing practitioners have increasingly adopted branding principles. "Everything is in the brand", a Manchester United executive explained, "the brand is the team, its logo, the red shirt, the players, the story; it is everything related to Manchester United. It is a precious asset in developing the business" (Richelieu, 2004, p. 5). Although Bobby (2002) claimed that only a few clubs have the potential to be real brands, professional teams, Bihl (2002) argued, will ultimately become brands so as to survive in a competitive marketplace. Consequently, professional leagues (Burton & Howard, 1999), and teams (Adam & Adam, 2002; E. Fisher, 2003; Gillis, 2004; Heller, 2002; O'Reilly, 2005), have become marketable brands.

As sports marketing has become increasingly sophisticated and professional sport has evolved into a marketable commodity, various studies have examined the equity of these team brands. Although largely confined to North America (see Boone, Kochunny, & Wilkins, 1995; Gladden & Funk, 2001, 2002; Gladden, Irwin, & Sutton, 2001; Gladden & Milne, 1999; Gladden et al., 1998; Robinson & Miller, 2003), the concept has increasingly been applied to

the European sports environment (Bauer, Sauer, & Schmitt, 2005; Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005; Ferrand & Pages, 1999; Richelieu, 2004; Richelieu & Pons, 2006).

The first of Aaker's (1991) five dimensions, brand awareness, is defined as "the ability of a potential buyer to recognise or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category" (p. 61). Awareness is critical to the creation of brand equity, for if potential consumers are unaware of the brand, these brands will not feature in their evoked, or consideration set. An evoked set, Hawkins, Best and Coney (1998) explained, is a group of brands "one will evaluate for the solution of a particular consumer problem" (p. 525).

For satellite supporters, certain market-related antecedents may be pivotal in the creation of brand awareness. International media arrangements ensure the foreign sports product is available to a domestic audience, although a heavily-saturated sports landscape is likely to hinder the awareness of these foreign brands. A shared cultural history or geography is likely to benefit those teams which compete in familiar or popular sports, and give the foreign product a distinct advantage. Conversely, Kerr and Gladden (2008) claimed, intense competition might make it "impossible for even a high quality brand to gain awareness among fans in foreign markets" (p. 70). In addition, a sizable or enthusiastic brand community can cultivate and maintain support for a foreign-based team. These external characteristics should increase the chances of inclusion in the satellite supporter's evoked set.

Brand equity, Aaker (1991) explained, creates value for both firm and customer, as it assists consumers when they process product or brand information, provides confidence in their purchase decision, and can enhance product satisfaction. The perceived quality and brand associations can ultimately enhance a customer's satisfaction with the use experience. Perceived quality, according to Aaker (1991) is "the customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service with respect to its intended purpose, relative to alternatives" (p. 85) and brand associations are "anything 'linked' in memory to a brand" (p. 109). This might apply equally to a luxury automobile (Mercedes-Benz), a bottle of fine champagne (Dom Perignon), or a ticket to a high-quality sports event (Real Madrid). For instance, the Spanish club are billed 'los Galacticos' – the superstars – since they have boasted quality and popular athletes such as Ronaldo, Zidane, Beckham and Raul in recent years. Furthermore, these two dimensions, perceived quality and brand associations, differentiate and position the brand in the consumer's mind and provide potential consumers a reason to purchase (Aaker, 1991). However, for the sports fan, their decision to purchase the sports product is largely governed by their identification with a particular team.

Perceived quality can influence those brands considered, and ultimately selected, and when this is high, enhances the effect of brand advertising and promotion. Brand associations, on the other hand, can provide an important distinction for consumers when faced with multiple brands (Aaker, 1991). As a result, this dimension can assist consumers in brand selection and provide a specific reason to purchase and use the brand, especially when brand associations enhance its credibility. Sports organisations and corporations often use athletes to achieve these objectives: differentiate brands and, by providing credibility, help consumers choose between brands. For instance, Nike and Adidas use Brazilian, Ronaldinho, and David Beckham, respectively, to differentiate their brands, enhance product credibility, and drive sales. Likewise, Barcelona F.C. and Major League Soccer's (MLS) Los Angeles Galaxy achieve the same objectives.

For conventional products, the consumption process is quite straightforward. A consumer makes a selection from their evoked set, or that group of brands most preferred, and completes the transaction. Contingent upon previous satisfaction with the brand, they may decide to re-purchase and, Griffin (1995) explained, this cycle might occur hundreds of times during their relationship with a particular company or brand. However, for the sports fan, the cycle is arguably more complicated, for their primary reason to purchase the product, in this instance, the sports team, is usually dependent upon their degree of team identification. According to Todd Donovan, Colorado State University, “people want to identify with something, [and when] they identify, they buy things. Before they can identify, they must have a need to affiliate themselves with something” (May, 2003). Therefore, it appears logical, and likely, that team identification influences individual sports consumption.

#### **4. TEAM IDENTIFICATION AND CONSUMPTION**

According to Wann (2006), sports consumption can be divided into three distinct categories: game, team-related and sponsorship. Game consumption includes fans in attendance and those who follow the game via media channels. Team-related consumption relates to fans that purchase team-related merchandise, while sponsorship consumption, he explained, concerns a fan’s “perception and patronage of sponsors’ products” (p. 338). In an increasingly-commercialised environment, it is logical that team-related consumption could include the purchase of football club shares and membership in supporter groups, such as the Liverpool Scandinavian Supporters’ Club (Nash, 2000) or ‘Browns Backers’ (Kolbe & James, 2000).

Team identification greatly influences game attendance, or direct consumption (see for instance, Fink et al., 2002; R. J. Fisher, 1998; R. J. Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Greenwood, 2001; Kahle, Kambara, & Rose, 1996; Matsuoka, Chelladurai, & Harada, 2003; Murrell & Dietz, 1992; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2000; K. Wakefield, 1995; K. L. Wakefield & Sloan, 1995; Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Wann, Roberts, & Tindall, 1999). The influence of identification upon indirect consumption, the likely avenue for the satellite supporter, has received less attention. However, highly-identified fans are more likely to monitor their teams through television or radio (R. J. Fisher, 1998), and fans, versus spectators, are more invested in the viewing experience (Gantz & Wenner, 1995). Furthermore, team identification, James and Trail (2005) discovered, is highly related to sports media consumption intentions. Therefore, it appears likely, team identification influences both direct, and indirect, sports consumption. Consequently, it is also likely that teams with highly-identified supporters attract greater attendances, ratings and media coverage.

This identification also significantly predicts the purchase of team merchandise (R. J. Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Greenwood, 2001; James & Trail, 2005) and influences impulse purchases of these products, both the act and the amount spent (Kwon & Armstrong, 2002, 2006). It appears likely team identification also significantly influences other team-related consumption, such as share purchase or membership in supporter groups. For instance, ice hockey fans were more likely to join a supporters club as they became more ‘enthusiastic’ about the team (Crawford, 2003). In addition, membership in fan clubs was one means of increasing team identification (Mahony, Nakazawa, Funk, James, & Gladden, 2002), so perhaps identification is likely to drive membership.

Sponsorship recognition was higher among higher-identified fans (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Lascu, Giese, Toolan, Guehring, & Mercer, 1995). A positive relationship between team identification and sponsorship consumption, whereby sponsors are more likely to be

successful in meeting their corporate objectives, was also more likely among these fans (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Madrigal, 2000, 2004). Sports fans are often intensely loyal to those companies that financially support their favourite teams, such as the renowned brand loyalty shown by U.S. NASCAR's fans. These fans consider sponsorship crucial to the success of their team, or driver, and support those sponsors accordingly (Amato, Okleshen Peters, & Shao, 2005; Johnson, 2001).

In their exploration of collegiate athletics, Gladden et al. (1998) explained how brand equity antecedents influence each of Aaker's (1991) main dimensions. Kerr and Gladden (2008) introduced additional antecedents to encompass professional sports in a global environment and came to similar conclusions. The team, or organisation, antecedents were especially prevalent, and in nearly each instance impacted perceived quality *and* brand associations, two critical dimensions of brand equity. Furthermore, Aaker (1991) claimed, both dimensions provide a reason for individuals to purchase a particular brand. The next section discusses the potential impact these antecedents have upon perceived quality and brand associations.

## **5. PROPOSED LINK: ANTECEDENTS AND PERCEIVED QUALITY**

Successful competition has the most impact upon the perceived quality of a sports organisation (Gladden et al., 1998). Winning games, participating in post-season play and holding aloft championship trophies are visible signs of a quality team. Likewise, they claimed, a head coach with a history of success can enhance team credibility. For instance, when American college, Texas Tech, hired Bobby Knight, the decision gave an instant boost to their basketball program's credibility and achieved increased media exposure, merchandise sales and attendance (Robinson & Miller, 2003). This also occurs in professional sport when either an experienced coach (Phil Jackson) or a legendary former athlete (Leigh Matthews) joins the coaching staff. For instance, the NBA Los Angeles Lakers and AFL Brisbane Lions hired Jackson and Matthews respectively, to restore faith in struggling franchises. In addition, star players, Gladden et al. (1998) argued, contribute to brand equity since they create brand awareness for their teams. However, it appears likely these players also influence the perceived quality of their team. Their addition enhances the team's perceived quality inasmuch as their athletic skills contribute to its on-field success.

A college's athletic conference can influence perceived quality (Gladden et al., 1998). Teams, they suggested, which boast more competitive schedules, are likely to be perceived as high quality programs despite losses. Likewise, Kerr and Gladden (2008) claimed, professional teams can benefit from their conference or league affiliation, and an organisation's reputation and tradition might influence perceived quality. Therefore, those teams that struggle in the National Football League (NFL), National Hockey League (NHL), or English Premier League (EPL) might benefit given the perceived quality of the competition. The inverse, Gladden et al. (1998) suggested, was also true. For instance, critics have questioned the quality of the Australian Socceroos citing their dominant performance in the Oceanic Football Conference. The perceived quality of Australian football should improve if the national team qualifies for future World Cups and performs well in the far stronger Asian Football Confederation.

A socially desirable fan base can increase fan support and media attention, illustrated by the sideline presence of celebrities such as Jack Nicholson (NBA Los Angeles Lakers), Woody Allen (NBA New York Knicks) and Russell Crowe (NRL South Sydney Rabbitohs). These celebrity fans, according to *FutureBrand*, enhance the brand value of their beloved teams (Evans, 2001; "FutureBrand Sports Team Brand Valuation Study Ranks New York Yankees,

New York Knicks and New York Rangers in the Top Ten Sports Team Brands in the World," 2001). Furthermore, Kerr and Gladden (2008) suggested, sponsor alignment can influence perceived quality. For instance, electronics giant, Samsung, committed to, at the time, the largest sponsorship deal in British football with the Chelsea F.C. – a team which historically struggles (Bradley, 2005). The involvement of high-profile parties (fans or sponsors) can enhance the perceived quality of a sports organisation. Potential fans may reconsider the team brand, especially if they consider those associated with it to be reputable and high-quality.

## **6. PROPOSED LINK: ANTECEDENTS AND BRAND ASSOCIATIONS**

Although brand associations, as earlier explained, were “anything ‘linked’ in memory to a brand” (Aaker, 1991, p. 109), they might also, Gladden et al. (1998) claimed, include “anything that the consumer takes away from the attending or viewing experience” (p. 13). As a result, together with success, they argued, reputation and tradition, conference affiliation, and product delivery all contribute to brand associations. Furthermore, a star player, head coach, conference and league affiliation, or stadium/arena can influence these associations (Kerr & Gladden, 2008). Ultimately, Gladden and Funk (2002) concluded, team-related (success, head coach, star player), and organisation-related (reputation and tradition, product delivery, logo, and stadium/arena), characteristics were important dimensions of brand associations. It therefore appears likely that any, or all, of the team or organisational characteristics discussed in Kerr and Gladden’s (2008) revised framework could potentially contribute to the brand associations for satellite supporters.

The NRL Canterbury Bulldogs illustrate how an organisation’s reputation and tradition might contribute to brand associations. In recent years, the club has withstood charges and allegations of salary cap impropriety, sexual misconduct, and unruly crowd violence. These incidents may alienate potential fans as they form negative associations about the Bulldogs’ brand. In addition, the product delivery of games might influence brand associations as certain elements of the game-day experience can enhance spectator enjoyment. However, satellite supporters, as indirect consumers, find these elements mediated by broadcasters, whereby the media influences many of the brand associations available to audiences. For instance, the NFL Dallas Cowboys are famous for their cheerleaders and Major League Baseball’s (MLB) Philadelphia Phillies for the antics of their mascot, the Phillie Phanatic. Despite (arguably) an integral part of the event, these elements are only available to satellite supporters at the discretion of broadcasting authorities.

Often star players or coaches become synonymous with specific sports teams. For instance, coaches, Vince Lombardi (NFL Green Bay Packers) and Wayne Bennett (NRL Brisbane Broncos) remain iconic fixtures in their club folklore. Likewise, quarterback, Brett Favre, has been the public face of the Green Bay NFL franchise for more than a decade. Furthermore, when they attract attention, for instance, as an ‘ambassador’ for certain communities or due to their celebrity status, they likely contribute to the brand associations of their organisation. Fans, Basil and Brown (2004) claimed, could identify with sports celebrities and examined how athletes could therefore be effective community spokespersons. As a result, there might be uniquely personal reasons why many supporters associate key individuals with their beloved clubs. For instance, Lebanese-Australian fans of the NRL Canterbury Bulldogs might associate Lebanon-born winger, Hazem El Masri, with the Bulldogs’ brand. Likewise, David Beckham was a strong brand association for millions of Asian Manchester United fans but might now be associated with Real Madrid, and perhaps increasingly, the brand of MLS Los Angeles Galaxy. For instance, consultant, Sport+Markt, found the popularity of Real Madrid

rose eight percentage points in key Asian markets following his acquisition, while Manchester United's popularity fell by seven percentage points (Walsh, 2007).

Logo design, and stadium or arena, are other notable elements that potentially influence a supporter's brand associations. The MLB New York Yankees have left their uniforms unchanged since 1936 (Lieberman, 2003). As a result, their pinstripes and intertwined 'NY' insignia often come to mind whenever one mentions the franchise. The association is so popular, entertainers worldwide regularly incorporate it within their on-stage wardrobes (Richelieu, 2004). Conversely, teams such as the NBA Toronto Raptors changed their logos to capture market share and appeal to new audiences ("Laying the Groundwork for the NBA in Toronto,"). Furthermore, it is nearly impossible to discuss the MLB Boston Red Sox or Chicago Cubs without reflecting upon their historic ballparks, Fenway Park and Wrigley Field, and outrage invariably meets proposed changes to these venues.

Although discussed earlier due to their influence upon perceived quality, celebrity fans and sponsor alignment might also influence brand associations. Indeed, Keller (1993) explained, celebrity endorsement and sponsorship activities can influence these associations. A celebrity fan's support for their favourite team, I suggest, is an explicit endorsement. As a result, actor, Russell Crowe's much-publicised support for the NRL South Sydney Rabbitohs ensures he remains linked to the inner-city franchise ("Crowe's Rabbitohs deal," 2005). In the case of sponsorship, Keller (1993) claimed, when a sponsor becomes linked with the event, "some of these associations with the event may become indirectly associated with the brand" (p. 11). Therefore, due to their lengthy association, the brands of Winfield, and Benson & Hedges, might remain associated with Australia's premier rugby league and cricket competitions, respectively. Likewise, some fans are likely to include Sharp as a brand association for Manchester United, especially since the electronics company sponsored the Red Devils for so many years ("Man U lose \$21m Vodafone deal," 2005).

## **7. PROPOSED LINK: CONSEQUENCES AND TEAM IDENTIFICATION**

Professional sports teams with significant brand equity receive tangible benefits due to their strong market position. Thus, *FutureBrand* argued, there is a strong relationship between a brand's value and the revenue that brand can generate (Gieske & Forato, 2004). Stronger team brands can therefore generate multiple income streams – the positive consequences of their healthy brand values. Possible outcomes, Kerr and Gladden (2008) explained, are international media distribution and exposure, merchandise and ticket sales, the involvement of global corporate partners (sponsorship), and additional revenue through licensing and brand extensions. Milne and McDonald (1999) explained that on-field success enhances the long-term value of a sports franchise, however, the majority of a club's market value is comprised of intangible assets, most importantly its trademark and associated goodwill, in other words, its brand (*The Brand Champions League: Europe's Most Valuable Football Clubs*, 2005). Therefore, a legitimate consequence of brand equity would be a healthy market, or franchise, value and so might constitute an additional revenue source.

Indeed, there appears a remarkable parallel between these revenue streams, the consequence of brand equity, and the consumption options available to satellite supporters. However, when one considers that this relationship is simply the exchange process viewed from the other party's perspective, perhaps this relationship is not so remarkable. Professional sport is a business; moreover, sports fans or supporters are its customers. As O'Hara (2004) explained, "sports consumers are fans, Microsoft consumers are, well, consumers. [Sports fans] invest

more than money; they invest emotion and time over much of their lives". Due to the globalisation of professional sport, there are now multiple opportunities for fans to make such an 'investment'. Satellite supporters can watch team games or other media coverage, purchase team-related merchandise or sponsors' products, or even brand extensions like the Manchester United credit card. They may purchase tickets if, or when, their club embarks on overseas tours, or make the pilgrimage to see them play abroad: Japanese baseball fans spend millions to see Matsui, Suzuki and now, Matsuzaka, play in the U.S. (Reed, 2006; Whiting, 2003).

From a financial perspective, the fan consumes the sports product so as to identify with, or express support for, their favourite team. Often this relationship is straightforward, and the transaction occurs directly, as when a fan attends a game. On other occasions, a fan may purchase team-related merchandise from a retail store. In this instance, the sports team benefits from licensing fees paid by apparel companies such as Nike or Adidas. Supporters might even purchase shares in, or join an officially recognised supporter branch of, their favourite team. This might benefit the organisation through an improved franchise value (the team's market capitalisation) or even the receipt of membership association fees. However, due to the rise in television and sponsorship, the sports fan may no longer be the primary customer (Meenaghan & O'Sullivan, 1999).

In this era of commercialism, Mason (1999) argued, television, other media companies, and corporations, are legitimate customers of professional sport in their own right. In these circumstances, the financial relationships and fan support is less apparent, although no less noteworthy. Media organisations purchase the broadcast rights to sports properties to attract an audience, often supporters of the televised teams. Companies profit when fans subscribe to their services and when advertisers pay to promote their products. Professional teams benefit indirectly from these broadcasts through rights fees, either collectively, as with the English Premier League, or individually, such as in Major League Baseball. However, clubs have recently profited from a more direct relationship with fans through the introduction of pay-per-view services; for instance, Manchester United's subscription channel, MUTV. The technology, Glasgow Celtic's Ian Reid, explained, "had global appeal for people who cannot get to the game, allowing them to enjoy the Celtic experience" (Sharkey, 2001).

Corporations sponsor professional teams so as to drive sales revenue, hopeful that supporters of those teams, or audiences exposed to their brand, will purchase their products. A sponsorship, according to Crimmins and Horn (1996), "improves the perception of a brand by flanking our beliefs about the brand and linking the brand to an event or organization that the target audience already values highly" (p. 12). For instance, insurance giant, AIG, and Chang Beer, entered into agreements with Manchester United and Everton, respectively, in order to drive sales in Asian markets. These sponsorship rights fees are extremely lucrative for professional sports teams: AIG paid Manchester United US\$106 million (Cheng, 2006).

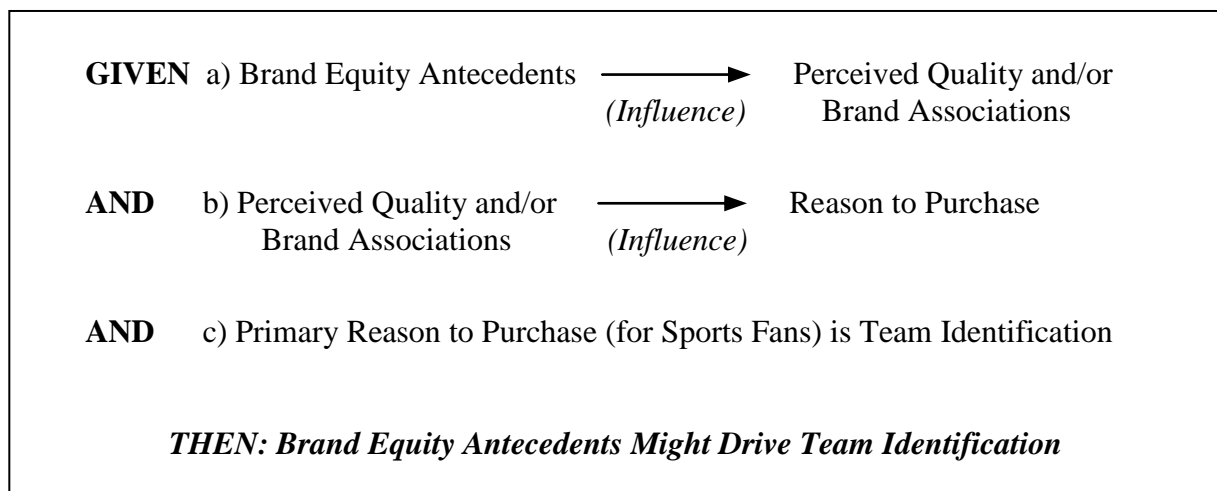
Professional sports teams with positive brand equity benefit significantly through profitable income streams. These revenues include game (ticket sales or media rights), team-related (merchandise, franchise values, and brand extension sales) or sponsorship income. Furthermore, Wann (2006) claimed, sports consumption encompasses these same categories. The consumer (sports fan) participates, directly or indirectly, in a market-centred exchange with the supplier (sports team). Team identification manifests itself through this exchange, whereby individuals more highly-identified invest more money, time and emotion in their support of their favourite team.

The success of professional sports organisations ultimately depend upon the level of fan support, and degree of identification, they can maintain. Therefore, those organisations that do not satisfy consumers, or provide a quality product, inevitably fail. For instance, the XFL, a much-hyped rival to the NFL, recorded historically low television ratings ("XFL ratings plummet to historic low," 2001) and lasted only three months. The league failed, as one journalist described it, because it was "everything a sports league should not be, drawn up on a marketing man's story board with no respect whatsoever for the fan, the game or the integrity of sport" (Todd, 2000, p. F6).

## 8. THE RELATIONSHIP: AN OVERVIEW

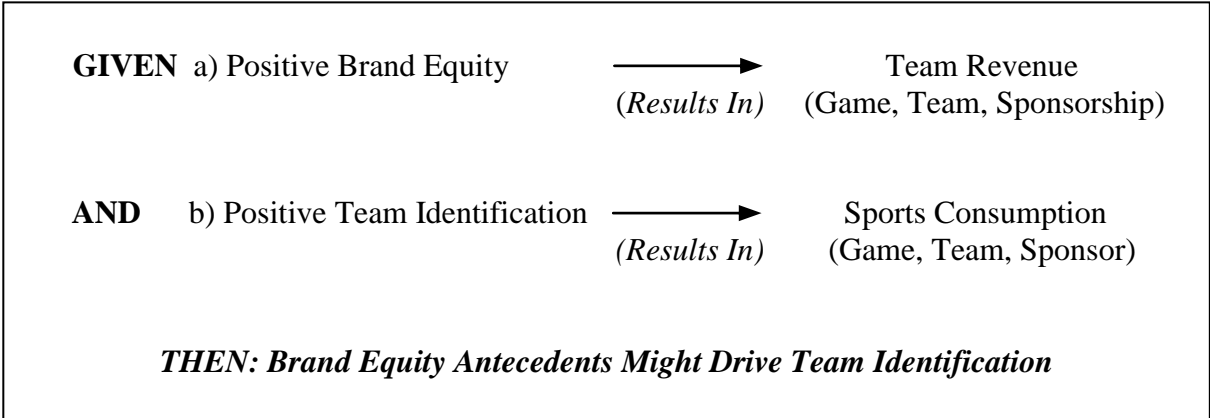
It appears likely that many of the brand equity antecedents influence perceived quality or brand associations and, in many cases, both. This is logical as perceived quality and brand associations are, according to Aaker (1991), dimensions of brand equity. Furthermore, he claimed, these dimensions differentiate the brand and provide potential consumers a reason to purchase. However, a fan's primary reason to purchase team products, or engage in sports consumption, is their identification with the team. Moreover, perceived prestige is positively related to organisational identification (Bhattacharya, Rao, & Glynn, 1995; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003) and since perceived prestige is similar to perceived quality, this also suggests a relationship. Therefore, this paper theorises, brand equity antecedents inasmuch as they impact perceived quality and/or brand associations, might drive team identification. This relationship can be seen in Figure 1.1.

**Figure 1.1: Proposed Relationship between Brand Equity and Team Identification (A)**



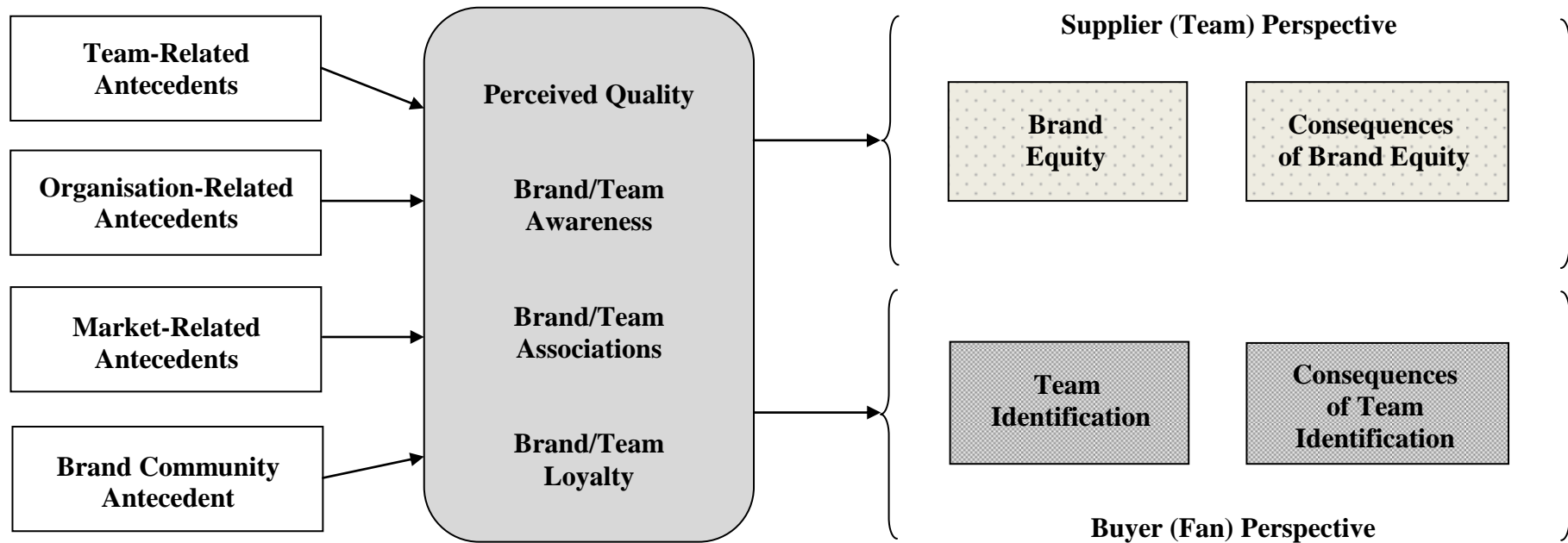
The consequences of brand equity (revenue streams) are related to the consequences of team identification (sports consumption), albeit, revenue from the supplier's perspective, and consumption from the consumer's perspective. For instance, positive brand equity for a team generates revenue from merchandise sales. A fan's purchase of merchandise is due to their identification with the team. Since the consequences of brand equity and team identification, reflected here in the sale of team-related merchandise, are similar, then it is plausible that the antecedents responsible for these conditions might also be similar. As a result, it is therefore logical, and indeed likely, those antecedents that drive brand equity can be used to understand those that drive team identification. This relationship can be seen in Figure 1.2.

**Figure 1.2: Proposed Relationship between Brand Equity and Team Identification (B)**



In summary, recent research has suggested relationships between brand equity and team identification might indeed exist (Carlson et al., 2002; Underwood et al., 2001). Both conceptual frameworks hypothesised that the greater social (Underwood et al., 2001), or team (Carlson et al., 2002), identification, the greater the level of brand equity. Since team identification is based upon social identification, both studies came to the same conclusions. Both perceived quality and brand associations provide a reason for consumers to purchase a particular product (Aaker, 1991). In addition, brand awareness is a necessary condition for product purchase. In sports consumption, a fan’s primary reason for purchase depends upon their degree of team identification. Therefore, it appears plausible that brand equity antecedents, since they influence perceived quality and/or brand associations, can prompt supporter identification with their chosen teams. Furthermore, if the consequences of brand equity for the professional sports team, manifested as multiple revenue streams, are related to fan consumption, then brand equity frameworks can likely shed light on those factors instrumental in the development of team identification. The conceptual relationship between brand equity and team identification can therefore be seen in Figure 1.3.

**Figure 1.3: Conceptual Relationship (Brand Equity/Team Identification)**



**Assumptions:**

- 1) If professional sports teams are brands, then it is possible to substitute ‘team’ for ‘brand’.
- 2) There might be exceptions. For instance, the Chicago Cubs have a strong supporter base, yet arguably its brand equity is not strong.

## 9. CONCLUSION

Professional sports teams have increasingly become brands as they seek to differentiate their product in a competitive marketplace. For instance, EPL Manchester City launched a major branding campaign (Gibson, 2005) and Dutch football giant, Ajax F.C., established a South African franchise, Ajax Cape Town (Browne, 1999). Some global brands, such as Manchester United, “almost rival the great consumer brands for recognition” (Heller, 2002, p. 46), which has prompted some to argue that only those teams that successfully adopt branding principles will ultimately survive (Bihl, 2002). As a result, brand equity is critical to those sports franchises that seek to market themselves to a global audience. However, this paper has proposed, a revised brand equity framework might provide insights into the team identification of these foreign consumers, the satellite supporter.

Perceived quality and brand associations, key dimensions in Aaker’s (1991) discussion on brand equity, differentiate and position the brand in the consumer’s mind and provide potential consumers a reason to purchase. However, for the sports fan, the decision to purchase the sports product is largely dependent upon their level of identification with the underlying sports team. It appears likely that many brand equity antecedents influence either perceived quality or brand associations and, in many instances, both. It therefore appears logical that these antecedents, to the extent they impact these key dimensions, might drive team identification. Furthermore, the consequences of brand equity result in important revenue streams for the professional sports organisation, and relate to the consequences of team identification, notably, sports consumption. For instance, positive brand equity for a team generates revenue from merchandise sales, whereas the purchase of team merchandise is itself due to fan identification. Given this connection, it is therefore likely that a relationship also exists between brand equity and team identification.

In recent years, it has been suggested that as social, or team, identification increases, brand equity likewise increases (Carlson et al., 2002; Underwood et al., 2001). This paper argues that a logical relationship indeed exists between brand equity and team identification. For instance, success is a key component of a sports team’s brand equity, yet since fans seek to ‘bask in the reflected glory’ of successful teams, team success is likely to drive team identification. Therefore, successful teams most likely have more fans and possess more valuable brands than less-successful teams. It is likewise conceivable that this, and other, shared antecedents are important in the creation of brand equity and team identification.

The proposed relationship between brand equity and team identification has implications for sports marketing practitioners worldwide, as brand equity frameworks might also be used to better understand the more traditional, or local, sports fan. For instance, perhaps conceptual frameworks of brand equity in collegiate athletics (Gladden et al., 1998), and professional team sport (Gladden & Milne, 1999), can shed light on the team identification of collegiate, and domestic, team fans, respectively. However, in these instances, the influence of socialisation agents, such as family or friends, or geographic proximity, is likely to prove more important than items contained within these frameworks.

In conclusion, there is substantial evidence to suggest the existence of a relationship between brand equity and team identification. However, according to consultants, Octagon, “it is only through a thorough understanding of the way fans feed their passion for a particular activity, that a brand can truly harness the power of fan emotion as a means through which to enhance brand equity” (“The passion of the fans,” 2006). It is not yet known to what extent this

relationship allows one to better understand the team identification of satellite supporters. Therefore, research that explores these brand equity antecedents and their influence in the creation of team identification would be a welcome, and valuable, addition to the field. To somewhat address this need, future studies are in the pipeline that will examine satellite supporters and their relationship with two famous and popular European football teams: AFC Ajax of Amsterdam (Ajax F.C.) and the English Premier League's Liverpool F.C.

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