

# **Measuring Consumer Based Athlete Brand Equity and its Relations with Identification, Consumer Behaviour and Attitudinal Brand Loyalty**

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## **Aim**

The purpose of this study is to explore the concept of Consumer Based Athlete Brand Equity (CBABE), to identify its specific dimensions and its relation with sport and athlete identification, consumer behaviour and brand loyalty. In order to achieve this, the study uses the Consumer Based Brand Equity Model, the revised Psychological Continuum Model by Funk and James (2006) and Thomson's (2006) Human Brand concept as basic conceptual backgrounds to develop the scales to measure brand association, sport and athlete identification, attitudinal loyalty and consumer behaviour.

Similar to the results of Fan Based Team Brand Equity model by Bauer et al. (2008) we assume that in case of athlete brand equity (H1) the levels of product-related and non-product related attributes lead to more positive brand benefits while (H2) positive brand benefits create positive brand attitudes. We also presume that (H3) brand attributes forms athlete identification which (H4) elaborate the level of perceived brand benefits and (H5) brand attitudes and (H6) has a positive effect on attitudinal loyalty what (H7) leads to elevated consumer activity towards the athlete. Next, to these effects, positive sport identification (H8) increases perceived brand benefits and the (H9) level of athlete identification.

Theoretical background and literature review

The concept of Consumer Based Brand Equity in a sport setting is at the centre of sport management scholars' attention, since the end of the 1990s. There were several articles explaining different consumer based models built on different brand equity concepts. Although the first mentions of "athlete brand" emerged soon after the first appearance of professional brand equity studies and athlete "celebrity" endorsement also gathered some attention, only fractions of the athlete brand equity concept appeared. Like the model of athlete brand image (MABI) from Arai et al. (2013) which missed to conclude the benefit and attitude dimensions of brand equity and produced weak psychometric results. Although Hasaan (2016) and Williams et al. (2015) created two different conceptual frameworks for Athlete Brand Equity, for today there is no scale to measure athlete brand equity exists.

## **Research Design and Data Analysis**

As a result of a widespread literature review of scales developed to measure brand equity in a sport setting, we created an item pool containing an overall of 118 seven-point Likert Scale items in 22 prefabricated factors. An overall of 972 Hungarian sport consumers was surveyed in order to create the final, Hungarian version of the scale (using EFA), to measure its psychometric properties (CFA) and to test the proposed model (SEM). As the first step of the analysis, the sample was randomly divided into two parts. A calibration sample (n=486) for the EFA, and a validation sample (n=486) for the CFA and SEM. The used sample sizes were deemed adequate for performing this analysis. The proposed structural model was performed both on the validation sub-sample and the whole sample as well. A final SEM was conducted in order to test whether the brand equity model helps to predict the sport consumers' attitudinal loyalty and consumer behaviour. The EFA, CFA and SEM were performed using version 24 of SPSS and AMOS.

## Results and Discussion

As a result of the EFA seven brand attribute factors were created from which three are product related (performance, the athletes' team and sportsmanship) and four are non-product related (fan relationship, athlete personality, style, sponsor and the athlete's physical appearance). Furthermore, four brand benefit (entertainment and excitement; escape, local pride and national pride) and two brand attitude (knowledge and importance) factors were defined. The final CBABE scale contained 58 items. Along with CBABE, sport identification was measured with four items, athlete identification with four, while attitudinal brand loyalty with six. Consumer behaviour was measured with the (i) consumption of the athlete-related games or events, the purchase of (ii) merchandised products, the (iii) knowledge about and (iv) the purchase intention of the products of the sponsors and endorsers related to the athlete and (v) the consumption of the athletes' social media pages.

As a result, we can conclude that our hypotheses were supported and further studies using Multi-Group Analysis showed that fans with stronger psychological attachment evaluate the brand attitudes, benefits and attitudes higher than those with lower attachment levels.

Conclusion, contribution and implications

The results of the data analysis supported the proposed model and provided empirical evidence of the reliability and validity of the Hungarian measurement scale and its relationship to attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. From a theoretical point of view, CBABE scale provides a comprehensive measurement tool by synthesizing the existing frameworks and partial measurement tools from the field of sport and athlete branding. With the use of the proposed scale practitioners (athletes, managers and agents) will be able to identify the main characteristics of the athletes' brand which help them build and rebuild his or her personal brand.

## References

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