

Running Head: MEDIATING ROLE OF THE LEAGUE ON CONSUMERS OF TEAMS

Title

The effect of the league brand on the relationship between the team brand and behavioral intentions – A formative approach examining brand associations and brand relationships

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Abstract

Understanding the role of the league brand on consumers' support for individual teams is important for the successful management and marketing of both leagues and teams. In the current research, brand architecture and brand association literature are integrated to examine the role of the league brand on the relationship between the team brand and team-related behavior. Data from an online survey of professional soccer league consumers ($N = 414$) were analyzed using structural equation modelling with bootstrapping procedures. The relationship between the team brand and team-related behavior was partially mediated by the league brand. Findings of this research contribute new knowledge by empirically demonstrating that characteristics of the league brand have an influence on team-related behavioral intentions. Furthermore, we contribute a different analytical approach for brand association research using formative indicators to measure team and league brand associations. In the managerial implications we outline how league managers can support individual teams, and how team managers can leverage off the league brand to attract consumers.

Keywords: Brand Architecture; Brand Associations; Brand Relationship; Sport League.

The effect of the league brand on the relationship between the team brand and behavioral intentions – A formative approach examining brand associations and brand relationships

Sport leagues and teams are connected through their structure and brands. Therefore, league management decisions designed to attract and retain consumers are made to promote and protect the league brand as well as individual team brands (Kunkel, Funk, & Hill, 2013). Sport consumers underpin the professional spectator sport industry because they are the main reason business stakeholders are attracted to invest in sports (Mason, 1999) and generate income for both the league and the teams through direct and indirect consumption behavior. For example, Major League Baseball (MLB) has economic and social reasons to promote all 30 teams collectively. Together, the MLB teams have a combined brand value of \$24.3 billion, but individual franchises contribute unique value to the league in addition to this sum (e.g., New York Yankees valued at \$2.5 billion compared to Tampa Bay at \$485 million; Forbes.com, 2014). Given that teams produce the league product and provide points of attachment for consumers (Robinson & Trail, 2005), it is in a league's best interest to assist teams in generating consumption and maximizing revenues to ensure the long-term viability of individual teams and the league (Kunkel, Funk, & King, 2014a).

Sport brand research shows that professional teams and leagues have mutual and differentiated brand characteristics. From a consumer perspective, teams and leagues have unique attributes and benefits that represent a core set of mental associations linked to a brand (Gladden & Funk, 2001, 2002; Kunkel et al., 2014a). Although each set of brand associations are conceptually distinct, a formal relationship exists in which the league acts as a master brand and teams operate as a set of subbrands (Kunkel et al., 2013). The symbiosis created by this structure is an emerging concept of sport brand architecture where both league-wide and team-

specific marketing activities theoretically contribute to game attendance, media consumption, and merchandise sales. Although this relationship is intuitive, research has failed to investigate and determine the relative influence of the league brand and its relevant associations on consumer behavior toward individual teams. As such, how consumers' perception of the league influences key behaviors toward individual teams has not been examined. In the current research, this gap is addressed by investigating the league's mediating relationship between a consumer's team brand associations and his or her behavioral intentions toward a favorite team. Gaining a better understanding of the relationship between the league brand and team consumption has implications for league and team management and marketing.

In the current research the relationship between league and teams is examined from a consumer perspective. Brand architecture was utilized as the theoretical framework for this study to assess the extent to which unique league brand associations mediate the relationship between consumers' perceptions of a team brand and team-related behavioral intentions. Data were collected from 414 consumers of Australia's elite soccer competition.

Literature Review

The formal relationship between leagues and individual teams is represented by their structural relationship (Mason & Slack, 2005). Differences related to ownership exist around the world and influence the structural relationship between leagues and teams. First, a league can act as a franchisor that provides a framework within which teams compete, and in which teams are franchisees providing the core product (i.e., games) that generates income (Mason, 1997). The formal relationship is based on a franchise (or license) contract that outlines an exchange of resources and knowledge to ensure quality standards of the league (cf. Mathewson & Winter, 1985; Rubin, 1978). Second, some leagues operate under a single-entity ownership structure in

which teams and players are centrally owned by the league and each team as an investor operator (e.g., Major League Soccer or Major League Ultimate in the USA). Third, competitions can function as closed competitions in which the team owners are shareholders of the leagues and have franchise contracts (e.g., National Football League or the National Basketball League in the USA). Fourth, leagues can operate as a governing body that grants membership for teams to compete for a certain time, using a promotion and relegation system (e.g., English Premier League).

Independent of their ownership structure, leagues provide a tournament in which teams compete, govern all involved parties (e.g., players and sponsors), and oversee strategic management and marketing directions, such as rule changes and promotions. As a result, “professional sports teams cannot compete without a great deal of coordination on matters such as where, when and how games will be played and the sequence of contests that will decide a league champion” (Flynn & Gilbert, 2001, p. 27). Furthermore, teams have access to the brand building knowledge of league organizations and can utilize the league brand to provide consumers with precise information about team quality (cf. Mathewson & Winter, 1985; Rubin, 1978). Therefore, the league provides a foundation from which a team can build its brand to develop its consumer base.

The relationship between leagues and individual teams is represented through the concept of brand architecture (cf. Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Brand architecture refers to (a) the structure of an organization’s portfolio of brands, (b) and the relationship that exists between these brands, from a consumer’s perspective (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Organizations can arrange their brand portfolio on a continuum from a branded house that includes a dominant master brand (e.g., the Virgin group), to a house of brands with dominant subbrands (e.g.,

Procter & Gamble). Between these two extreme brand architectures are a range of mixed-branding brand architectures, which are the most common type of brand architecture, as Strebinger (2014) identified in his examination of 75 European companies. He indicated that the optimal brand architecture varies from one company to the next depending on the market position of a master-brand's individual products and the relative advantages and disadvantages of different brand architectures in achieving corporate objectives. For example, Nike's branded house architecture allows them to capitalize on synergies in media expenditures across its various apparel lines, such as Nike Football or Nike Golf.

Brand architecture draws on the assumption that connected brands are evaluated within a broader context, rather than in isolation. Examination of brand architecture facilitates exploration of the degree to which each brand in a portfolio influences consumer attitudes and behaviors, and overall brand performance (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Rajagopal, & Sanches, 2004). Research on consumer evaluations of brands positioned in a mixed-branding brand architecture indicates that consumer perceptions of master brand fit can influence (fictional) subbrand success (Völckner & Sattler, 2006); and that consumer perceptions of master brand quality can influence service brand extension success (Völckner, Sattler, Hennig-Thurau, & Ringle, 2010). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that the master brand is used as an evaluative basis for its subbrands (Moreau, Lehmann, & Markman 2001), and consumers' perception of the master brand can influence the success of connected brands (Sood & Keller, 2012). However, research investigating this relationship has focused on the positioning of hypothetical brand extensions and the notion of 'brand fit' between brands and how they are positioned in a portfolio. The current investigation of the role of master brand image is unique, because there is a natural

‘brand fit’ between sport teams and leagues and the brands actually exist, opposed to fictional brand extensions.

Sport leagues and teams are organized in a mixed-branding brand architecture. This architectural perspective can be illustrated as a vertical relationship in which the league represents the master brand and the affiliated teams represent subbrands (Kunkel et al., 2013). Within this mixed-branding approach, leagues and teams are perceived as visibly connected by consumers, independent of ownership structure. Specifically, team consumers understand that their club competes in a specific league, and league consumers are aware of the teams that compete in the league. The apparent connection between a league and its teams highlights the uniqueness of sport within the context of brand architecture, because organizations operating in a mainstream business context can position their subbrands along the brand architecture continuum; from a house of brands to a branded house. For example, Proctor and Gamble can position their subbrand ‘Bounty’ without mentioning the master brand name at all (i.e., house of brands), or they could sell ‘P&G paper towels’ (i.e., branded house). Yet these products do not compete in a category with league standings (i.e., there is no paper towel league) or have a co-dependence on other brands for success (i.e., one paper towel brand doesn’t need the other brand to produce the product). Consequently, given the unique structure of leagues and teams in which sport teams compete and are publically ranked indicates that, by default, they operate in a mixed-branding brand architecture¹.

Within this brand architecture, Kunkel et al. (2013) identified three consumer brand archetypes within professional sport: 1) league-dominant consumers, comprising individuals that are more connected with a league than a specific team, 2) team-dominant consumers, including consumers that are more connected with a specific team than the master league brand and 3) co-

dominant consumers that display an equally strong connection to the master league brand and their team. In their research, the majority of respondents were categorized as co-dominant consumers, demonstrating that both league and team can influence consumer loyalty. Although this investigation has demonstrated that both brands can drive consumer loyalty, the development of brand associations linked to leagues conceptually starts at the team level.

Kunkel et al.'s (2013) initial findings provided a foundation to investigate the brand relationship between leagues and teams from a consumer perspective. The brand associations a consumer links with a sport brand play an integral role in attitude development (Funk & James, 2006). Brand associations represent any attribute or benefit that a consumer cognitively links to a brand (Keller, 1993). While brand awareness is commonly generated through socializing agents, such as the media or peer group influence, subsequent consumer interaction with the sport brand initiates evaluations of attributes and benefits that the brand provides, which represent brand associations. Positive associations are formed if the sport brand satisfies consumers' personal and social needs and the brand takes on functional, emotional, and symbolic meaning for the consumer if these brand associations are congruent with consumers' self-concept and reflect consumers' values (Funk & James, 2006).

Previous research has detailed the composition of unique brand associations and their links to important attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. For example, Ross, James, and Vargas (2006) developed a team brand association scale (TBAS) consisting of 11 dimensions. Biscaia, Correia, Ross, Rosado, and Maroco (2013) have used this scale to assess the relationship between brand associations and team-related outcome variables (i.e., satisfaction and behavioral intentions), showcasing that team brand associations were positively related with consumer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Similarly, Gladden and Funk (2001) developed a team

association scale (TAS) and demonstrated that seven of 13 team brand associations predicted team loyalty. Advancing these findings, Funk and James (2006) demonstrate how eight team brand attributes and benefits directly and indirectly influence team allegiance and behavior. The TAS has been applied to validate the relationship between brand associations and team loyalty in the German soccer market (Bauer et al., 2008), and the Australian football market (Doyle, Filo, McDonald, & Funk, 2013a). Building on these insights, Kunkel, Doyle, Funk, Du, and McDonald (2016) used the TAS to examine the influence of team brand associations on loyalty over time. In a longitudinal study, they tracked consumers over a period of 18 months and demonstrated that team brand associations had a positive influence on repeated measures of team consumer loyalty. Furthermore, researchers have demonstrated that the strength of the psychological connection a person has with a sport team is positively correlated with game attendance (Doyle, Kunkel, & Funk, 2013b; Funk & James, 2006), merchandise purchase (Kwon & Kwak, 2014), and media consumption (Doyle et al., 2013b). Researchers, however, have typically focused on the influence of brand associations on loyalty (Bauer et al., 2008; Doyle et al., 2013a; Funk & James, 2006; Gladden & Funk, 2001; Ross et al., 2008). Biscaia et al. (2013) did test the influence of brand associations on behavioral intentions; however, they operationalized intentions with 7-point Likert scale items and called for future research to test the reliability of the findings. Consequently, to support and extend previous findings in a new context, the first hypothesis focuses on the relationship between team brand associations and team-related behavior.

Hypothesis 1: *The team brand influences consumers' intentions to attend team games (1a), watch team games on television (1b), and spend money on team merchandise (1c).*

The consumption of the league product happens at the team level (Mason, 1999). Therefore, cognizant of the brand relationship between teams and leagues, consumers' evaluation of the team may also influence their evaluation of the league. Sport brand association researchers have demonstrated that league and team brand associations are distinct, yet related, and consumers can develop brand associations toward both simultaneously (Kunkel et al., 2013; 2014a). That is, the association network linked to the team brand may influence the association network linked to the league brand (cf., Uggla, 2004; Simonin & Ruth, 1998). For example, a consumer of Manchester United might associate Jose Mourinho with the team brand and the English Premier League (EPL). While the association linked to the team may also function as a league brand association, it does not transfer to other teams in the league (i.e., Mourinho is not an association directly linked to Arsenal FC). Consequently, the direction of a spill-over effect is proposed to flow from the subbrand to the master brand (cf. Simonin & Ruth, 1998). Based on this interrelationship, the second hypothesis focuses on the relationship between team and league brand:

Hypothesis 2: The team brand influences the league brand.

Collectively, league brand associations contribute to consumers' evaluation of the league brand and are related to league-based attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Kunkel et al. (2014a) identified 17 unique associations that were correlated with league commitment and league-related media consumption behavior. However, strategic league management and marketing may not only impact teams within the league through their formal relationship, but also team consumer behavior. For example, consumers' associations of a specific style of play linked with the English Premier League may influence their consumption of teams within the competition. Consequently, consumers may perceive the English Premier League to be superior to other

competitions, thus leading to more frequent behavior toward their favorite team. Based on this connection, the relationship between the team brand and team behavior (e.g., Biscaia et al., 2013; Doyle et al., 2013a; Funk & James, 2006; Kunkel et al., 2016) may be partly mediated by consumers' perceptions of the league. This relationship is reflected in the third hypothesis. All three hypotheses are presented in Figure 1.

***Hypothesis 3:** The influence of the team brand on consumers' intentions to attend team games (3a), watch team games on television (3b), and spend money on team merchandise (3c) is partially mediated by the league brand.*

=====Insert Figure 1 here=====

Method

A cross-sectional survey design was used to examine the mediating effect of the league brand on consumers' team consumption behavior. Consumers' perceptions of brands are socially constructed and context dependent (e.g., Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera, 2001), therefore, results may be influenced by contextual differences. Consequently, it is not claimed that the findings of this research are applicable to all sport leagues. Rather, we echo previous work that calls for further research to explore which league and brand associations are salient in a given context (cf. Lock, Filo, Kunkel, & Skinner, 2015). However, the use of one sport league context can generate knowledge that contributes to general understanding of the brand relationship between leagues and teams on a conceptual and empirical level. Accordingly, an overview of the research context is provided to alleviate concerns about the generalizability of the findings of this research.

Research Context

The research took place in the A-League, Australia's elite football (soccer) league. The A-League is a relatively young league that was established in 2005. The Australian 'football' market is very competitive, featuring four leagues that are interchangeably referred to as 'football' or 'footy' based on consumer preference and home state: Australian Rules football (AFL), football (A-League), rugby league (NRL), and rugby union (Super 15s) (Lock, Darcy, & Taylor, 2009). The A-League provides a relevant context for a few reasons. First, while the league was founded on a one-team-per-city model; augmentations have seen two teams introduced into the Sydney and Melbourne markets adding complexity to the brand architecture. Second, the A-League also competes with other football leagues. McDonald, Karg, and Lock (2010) demonstrate that some Australian football consumers watch and engage with international leagues instead of the A-League. Third, some A-League teams compete in markets containing two A-League teams and multiple entrants from the AFL, NRL, and Super 15 (with one team in Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne, Perth, and Sydney). As an example, Melbourne has two A-League teams, nine AFL clubs, one Rugby League organization, and one Super 15 team. Each of these teams vies for market share in the sport consumer market of the city and contributes to the brand architecture of their respective league. Therefore, in the Australian context, football teams compete with other A-League teams, other football teams playing in prestigious European competitions (e.g., Serie A), and clubs in other competitions (e.g., AFL, NRL, & Super 15).

The complex brand architectures make Australia a beneficial context for research that has many similarities with other markets. For example, there are 13 professional football (soccer) teams in London (United Kingdom), six professional football (soccer) teams in Mexico City (Mexico), and five professional football (soccer) teams in New York City (USA). Not only do these four teams (i.e., NYCFC, NY Red Bulls, NY Cosmos, Sky Blue FC) compete against each

other for fan support, they also compete with two Major League Baseball teams, two NBA teams, one Women's NBA team, two National Football League teams, three National Hockey League teams, and several other teams of varying sports (e.g., Major League Ultimate, etc.).

In comparison to its competitors in football (nationally and internationally) and other sports, the A-League has financial disadvantages and has struggled with decreasing attendance figures (Ultimate A-League, 2011). This decrease coupled with owners experiencing issues with insolvency or management has led to the FFA taking financial and operational control of some teams (e.g., Brisbane Roar, Western Sydney Wanderers), and teams leaving the league because they were unable to fulfill franchise license agreements. The interventionist tactics of the FFA demonstrates a clear managerial understanding that issues with specific teams create issues with league stability and consumer perceptions. Consequently, the A-League has initiated league brand development strategies (e.g., Kunkel, Doyle, & Funk, 2014b), designed to influence consumers' league brand associations through rule changes (e.g., change in salary cap to enhance player quality) and league-wide marketing campaigns (e.g., television commercials) to increase the attractiveness of the league brand and provide support to teams. Therefore, the A-League provided a compelling research context to examine the relationship between the league brand and team-related behavioral intentions, because the league management has acknowledged that the league needs to help its teams in generating consumer interest.

Procedure

Quantitative data were collected via online questionnaires. Participants were recruited through Internet fan forums of all teams within the A-League. The lead researcher followed Kozinets' (2002) guidelines for online research by creating an online profile for each fan forum, introducing himself to a moderator of the forum and posting invitations to participate in the

research project after the moderator granted permission. The invitations provided an overview of the research project and linked interested participants to a webpage containing the questionnaire (cf. Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006). The first page of the questionnaire highlighted that participation was confidential and voluntary and that participants provided their consent by completing the questionnaire (cf. Riva, Teruzzi, & Anolli, 2003). The questionnaire was started by 752 participants, and 414 fully completed questionnaires were retained for analysis after a data cleaning process, resulting in a response rate of 55%.

Materials

To reduce method bias (Doty & Glick, 1998), the questionnaire was divided into three parts and respondents were provided with an introduction to each section and all items were presented in randomized order within each section. The first section contained 17 Likert scale items to measure the following unique league brand associations (LBA): Atmosphere, Community Pride, Competitive Balance, Diversion, Education, Excitement, Game Representation, Logo Design, Management, Nostalgia, Performance, Player Development, Rivalry, Socialization, Specific Team, Star Player, and Tradition (Kunkel et al., 2014a). The second section contained 13 Likert scale items to measure 13 unique team brand associations (TBA) based on previous research: Community Pride, Diversion, Excitement, Identification, Head Coach, Logo & Colors, Management, Nostalgia, Peer Group Acceptance, Socialization, Star Player, Success, and Tradition (Gladden & Funk, 2001). The items were derived from the TAS following previous applications to measure brand associations in the Australian context (Doyle et al., 2013a; Kunkel et al., 2016).

The use of single-item measures for each brand association was deemed appropriate given the aim of the current study. Multi-item measures are beneficial to examine abstract

constructs, such as identification or loyalty, and have also been utilized to investigate team brand associations in previous studies (e.g., Gladden & Funk, 2001; Ross et al., 2008). However, the league brand association items used in this research were based on a single-item scale (Kunkel et al., 2014). For consistency, the authors utilized single-items to measure unique team brand associations. The items have been previously used to examine team brand associations (Kunkel et al., 2016). Single-item measures have been shown to be beneficial when examining brand constructs, as they reduce respondent fatigue and avoid respondents getting frustrated when answering similar questions about the same brand association (e.g., a consumer associating a star player with the team) (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007). Given that single-item measures captured the core of each brand association, this approach was deemed suitable for the purpose of this research (for a detailed review see Rossiter, 2002).

Consumers' match attendance was measured with one open-ended item where respondents entered the number of games they intended to attend in the next season. Merchandise consumption was measured with one open-ended item where respondents entered the amount of money they intended to spend in the next season. Media consumption was measured with one open-ended item where respondents entered the number of TV games they intended to watch in the next season. The third section contained questions to assess respondents' demographic information. Demographic data were collected to examine whether respondents were representative of the A-League's target market. Items utilized in this study are presented in Table 1.

Participants

Participants were 414 football consumers with an interest in the A-League. Most respondents were male (86.4%) and within the A-League's main demographic target market age

group of 18 – 35 years (69.4%). Between 16 and 70 respondents were collected for each team. Participants showed similar demographic characteristics as European football fan forum users (Koenigstorfer, Groeppel-Klein, & Kunkel, 2010) and A-League consumers (Lock, Darcy, & Taylor, 2009; Kunkel et al., 2014b) identified in previous research. Therefore, it was concluded that participants adequately represented the A-League consumer base.

Analysis

Data were downloaded and imported into IBM SPSS Statistic 21. Participants who completed the questionnaire in an unrealistically short time, marked the same answer for every question, or provided inconsistent combinations were deleted in the data cleaning process (cf. Hospers, Kok, Harterink, & de Zwart, 2005). The quantitative data analysis involved calculating descriptive statistics, inferential statistics and multivariate statistics. Skewness ($< +/- 2$ indicated normal distribution) and kurtosis ($< +/- 2$ indicated normal distribution) were investigated (Kendall & Stuart, 1958).

The proposed hypotheses were tested using structural equation modelling (SEM). Data analysis was guided by a conceptual discussion related to the relationship between constructs and their indicators (Finn & Wang, 2014). Traditional approaches to theory development and testing follow a reflective causal flow from the latent construct to the measures. Following a traditional approach to measurement (e.g., Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, & Exler, 2008; Biscaia et al., 2013; Ross, Russell, & Bang, 2008), brand associations have been treated as reflective measures of a latent construct representing consumer perceptions of a brand, assuming that the associations are interchangeable, covary, and are based on the same antecedents. For example, the item “There are specific foods at the arena that I like to eat.” and the item “There is a successful history behind the team.” are both related to their latent constructs, “Concessions” and “Team History”,

respectively, which have been treated as reflective of the overall team brand (Biscaia et al., 2013; Ross et al., 2008). However, from a consumer perspective, these two unique associations are not conceptually interchangeable (i.e., a team can deliver phenomenal concessions without having a strong history), do not covary (i.e., their correlation coefficient was $r = .06$ in Biscaia et al.'s [2013] research), and have different antecedents. Although a reflective approach is relevant to psychological constructs (e.g., commitment), the next section outlines why brand associations should not be treated as reflective measures, but as formative measures that collectively form an overall construct representing the brand as perceived by consumers.

The decision to treat brand associations as formative measures was based on four decision rules to distinguish between formative and reflective measures (Jarvis, MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Podsakoff, 2003). These rules include the: 1) direction of causality from construct to measure implied by the conceptual definition; 2) interchangeability of the indicators; 3) covariation among the indicators; and 4) nomological net of the construct indicators. Following these rules, the brand associations utilized in this research were treated as formative measures forming an overall construct of their respective brand (i.e., league or team), because 1) the meaning of the brand was derived from the unique brand associations; 2) brand associations were not interchangeable; 3) brand associations do not necessarily covary; and 4) unique brand associations may have different antecedents (for a review of the direction of measurement, see: Bagozzi, 1981; Coltman, Devinney, Midgley, & Veniak, 2008; Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001, Finn & Wang, 2014; Jarvis et al., 2003). Consequently, brand associations were treated as formative measures in this research.

Measurement validity examination led to the omission of two team brand association items consistent with previous brand association research (Kunkel et al., 2016). The associations

identification and success were included in the questionnaire, but excluded from data analysis, for conceptual reasons (identification) and content validity issues (success). In particular, the identification measure was excluded, because identification reflects consumers' psychological connection to a team, not a brand association. In addition, the wording of the success brand association measure examined the importance of success (i.e., It is important that the team genuinely competes for the league championship.) instead of consumers' perception whether the team is successful.

Partial Least Squares (PLS) regression analysis with Hayes and Preacher's (2014) conditional process modelling procedure were employed to analyze the hypothesized model. PLS analysis examines causal explanation and maximizes the explained variation among various constructs (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013). It was the preferred method of analysis because it allows for the inclusion of formative and reflective measures (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011; 2013). The PLS-SEM model was assessed using guidelines recommended by Hair et al. (2011). To evaluate formative constructs, multicollinearity (each indicator's variance inflation factor [VIF] < less than five [5]; Hair et al., 2011) and validity (the parameter estimates for each formative indicator should be statistically significant after a nonparametric bootstrapping procedure of 5,000 resamples; Hair et al., 2011) were assessed, which represents the preferred method for testing models with mediating variables as recommended by Cheung (2007), and utilized in previous sport management research (cf., Magnusen, Kim, & Kim, 2012). A 5-percent level of significance was selected for investigating critical *t-values* of path coefficients (*t-values* > 1.96). Partial mediation effects of the league brand were examined, with confidence intervals for bootstrapping procedures needing to be significantly different from zero. The bootstrapping tests provided a robustness check on the standard error and corresponding statistical significance

of the proposed partial mediation effects. PLS regression analysis was used to test the direct effects of the team brand on team-related behavioral intentions (*Hypothesis 1a, 1b, 1c*), the direct effects of the team brand on the league brand (*Hypothesis 2*) and to test the (partially) mediating role of the league brand on the relationship between the team brand and team-related behavioral intentions (*Hypothesis 3a, 3b, 3c*).

Results

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. Mean scores of 14 league brand associations were above the mid-point of the 7-point Likert scale, with three mean scores below the mid-point related to *Management, Star Player* and *Tradition*. Mean scores of 11 team brand associations were above the mid-point, with only the association *Peer Group Acceptance* falling below the mid-point. The assessment of the formative model indicated that multicollinearity was not an issue, as VIF scores were between 1.18 and 2.40 (Hair et al., 2011). Validity assessment of league brand association items showed that the league brand associations *Competitive Balance, Community Pride, Education, Excitement, Game Representation, Logo, Performance, Player Development, and Tradition* had no statistically significant relationship with consumers' perception of the league brand. Validity assessment of team brand association items showed that the team brand associations *Community Pride, Head Coach, Logo & Colors, Management, Peer Group Acceptance, Star Player, and Tradition* had no statistically significant relationship with consumers' perception of the team brand. The influence of brand associations on their affiliated brand construct (i.e., the influence of a LBA on the league brand; the influence of a TBA on the team brand) is also presented in Table 1. The league brand associations *Diversion, Nostalgia, Rivalry, Socialization, Stadium Atmosphere, and Specific Team* had a significant positive relationship with the league brand, whereas the associations *Star Players* and *Management* had a

significant negative relationship with the league brand. The team brand associations *Diversion*, *Excitement*, *Nostalgia*, and *Socialization* had a significant positive relationship with the team brand.

=====Insert Table 1 here=====

Results of the structural model are pictorially presented Figure 2 and bootstrapping results are presented in Table 2. The models explained 28% of consumers' intentions to attend team games, 24% of consumers' intentions to consume the team via television, and 14% of consumers' intentions to spend money on team merchandise. There was a significant, positive relationship between the team brand and consumers' intentions to attend team games, watch the team on television, and spend money spent on team merchandise, which supported Hypothesis 1a, 1b, and 1c, respectively. The model shows a significant, positive relationship between the team brand and the league brand, explaining 61% of the league brand and supporting Hypothesis 2. Additionally, the league brand partially mediated the relationship between the team brand and consumers' intentions to attend team games and to watch team games on television, supporting Hypothesis 3a, and 3b, respectively. The league brand did not significantly mediate the relationship between the team brand and consumers' intentions to spend money on team merchandise, rejecting Hypothesis 3c. Results of direct, indirect mediated, and total effects are presented in Table 2.

=====Insert Table 2 here=====

=====Insert Figure 2 here=====

Discussion

The findings of this study provide the first empirical evidence demonstrating that consumers' perception of the league are related to team-related behavioral intentions. In this

section, three major contributions are outlined. First, the study findings are discussed in relation to brand architecture literature. Second, the influence of individual brand associations on their affiliated brand construct is linked to the research context and existing literature. Third, a discussion and recommendation of the contributions of this study for future conceptualizations of brand associations is provided.

Discussion of brand relationships

This research addressed a call to investigate the role that league brand associations have on consumers' attitudes toward a specific team within the league (Kunkel et al., 2014a). In this research, the league brand was operationalized as the amalgamation of league brand associations, and it was empirically demonstrated that the league brand had a mediating role on consumers' team-related behavioral intentions. Findings related to *Hypothesis 1* support the influence of team brand associations on team-related behavioral intentions thus supporting and extending previous research that highlights the influence of team brand associations on team loyalty (Doyle et al., 2013a; Gladden & Funk, 2001) and behavioral intentions (Biscaia et al., 2013).

Findings related to *Hypothesis 2* indicate that team brand associations have an influence on league brand associations. Conceptually, some team brand associations may simultaneously function as league brand associations, such as the example of Jose Mourinho functioning as an association linked to Manchester United and the EPL; whereas other league brand associations are uniquely linked to the league, such as league management personnel. Findings show that consumers' perception of their favorite team explain over half of their perception of the league, indicating that the association networks of both brands interact and overlap (cf., Uggla, 2004,; Simonin & Ruth, 1998). These findings show that there is a spill-over effect from the brand associations linked to existing (as opposed to fictional) subbrands (i.e., teams) to their master

brand (i.e., league). Consequently, the findings support and extend existing research (Kunkel et al, 2013) that indicates both involvement with the team and involvement with the league drive consumer loyalty.

Findings related to *Hypothesis 3* indicate consumers' perceptions toward the league brand mediate team-related behavioral intentions. The league brand partially mediated consumers' intentions to attend team games and watch team games on television, but did not mediate consumer intentions to spend money on merchandise. The findings related to game attendance and television consumption are likely rooted in the fact that the team and league product (i.e., games) is produced by two teams, not just consumers' favorite team, and the league brand provides a quality assurance of the product (e.g., Kunkel et al., 2014, Mason, 1999). The league brand had a stronger influence on television consumption than the team brand, supporting anecdotal evidence of the success of league-related television shows, such as Monday Night Football in the USA, The Footy Show in Australia, or the Sportschau in Germany. The non-significant mediation of the league on team merchandise consumption makes sense in the framework of team identification research. Consumers identify with their own team, whilst simultaneously seeking to disassociate from outgroups and rivals (Lock, Funk, Doyle, & McDonald, 2014). Merchandise plays a major role in obtaining distinctiveness from competitors, therefore, the alignment with the team subbrand drives consumption behavior and league master brand associations are less relevant to consumption of this product line.

Overall, these findings contribute to our understanding of related brands. While leagues and teams represent unique entities, their relationship shows that the team brands can influence the league brand, and the league brand can influence team-related behavior. Findings show that the league not only influences its teams through formal agreements (e.g., Mason, 1997; Mason &

Slack, 2005), but also team-related behavior through the master-brand – subbrand relationship posited by the brand architecture of leagues and teams (Kunkel et al., 2013). These findings extend research by Moreau et al. (2001) and Sood and Keller (2012) who demonstrate that consumers' perceptions of a master brand can influence their evaluation of connected brands. Our findings demonstrate that brand association spill-over effects are likely to occur from the subbrand to the master brand in the context of actual brands positioned in a mixed-branding brand architecture, extending research of hypothetical brand extensions (e.g., Moreau, 2001; Sood & Keller, 2012; Völckner et al., 2010). Collectively, the current findings empirically demonstrate that the league brand can influence team-related consumption behavior. As a result, teams affiliated with a strong league brand benefit from the positive brand associations consumers form toward the league.

Discussion of brand associations

Beyond the general brand relationships outlined in the discussion of the hypotheses, brand association research provides context-specific results. The investigation of the unique influence of each brand association on the overall evaluation of a brand addresses Aaker et al.'s (2001) argument that consumer perceptions of brands are socially constructed and depend on the context of the investigation, and the strength, direction, and significance of an individual brand association may differ from one context to another. Therefore, results of specific brand association are discussed in relation to their context. The team brand association of *Peer Group Acceptance* was rated below the midpoint, which is in line with previous research findings where this association scored low (e.g., Gladden & Funk, 2001). However, respondents agreed that 11 team brand associations were linked to their favorite team, supporting existing team brand association research (e.g., Biscaia et al., 2013; Gladden & Funk, 2001; Ross et al., 2008). While

these 11 associations existed in the mind of consumers, the current findings indicate that four core brand associations significantly influenced consumers' perceptions of the team brand in relation to the three outcome variables.

The team brand associations *Diversion*, *Excitement*, *Nostalgia*, and *Socialization* had a significant positive relationship with consumer perceptions of the team brand in explaining intentions for future behavior. This finding aligns with existing team brand association research in which *Excitement* and *Nostalgia* correlated with team loyalty (Doyle et al., 2013a; Gladden & Funk, 2001). The finding related to the brand association *Excitement* indicates that the stimulation provided by the team positively influences how consumers perceive the team brand and their future intentions (e.g., Funk, Filo, Beaton, Pritchard, 2009) and reflect the value associated with game consumption (e.g., Kunkel, Doyle, Berlin, in Press). *Diversion* in terms of the escape that teams provide to their consumers represent benefits derived from the brand (Gladden & Funk, 2002) and have been linked to team commitment (e.g., Funk et al., 2009). The association *Nostalgia* showed a high positive loading on the team brand, supporting previous research that highlighted a relationship between *Nostalgia* and attitudinal loyalty (Doyle et al., 2013a; Gladden & Funk, 2001). This indicates that fond memories linked with the team are influential in forming the team brand and influencing future behavior. The influence of the social benefits of following sport teams is well documented (Funk et al., 2009; Ross et al., 2008), therefore it is unsurprising that the brand association *Socialization* influenced the team brand and future behavior. Overall, the findings align with existing team brand association research, but, as any brand related research (Aaker et al., 2001), these findings are also influenced by the context of the current research.

The approach to investigate the unique influence of each league brand association on the overall evaluation of the league brand addresses a call from Kunkel et al. (2014a) to investigate the strength of unique league brand association on consumers' evaluation of the league brand. In the current context, the league brand associations *Diversion*, *Nostalgia*, *Rivalry*, *Socialization*, *Specific Team*, and *Stadium Atmosphere* had a significant positive relationship with consumers' perception of the league brand in its role of influencing team-related behavior intentions. This finding is in line with Kunkel et al.'s (2014a) league brand association research, where these associations were correlated with league commitment and league related media behavior. The influence of *Stadium Atmosphere* on the attractiveness of sport leagues was initially demonstrated in the context of European soccer leagues (Koenigstorfer et al., 2010) and the current findings support this research. The association *Rivalry* has been shown to drive consumption behavior toward a league (e.g., Havard, 2014; Mahony & Moorman, 1999), which is why many leagues highlight specific rivalries. The association *Nostalgia* showed a high positive loading on the league brand, indicating that consumers' unique memories about the league are an important element of the league brand from a consumer perspective. Additionally, the league brand associations *Diversion* and *Specific team* have been labelled as "important core brand associations that leagues need to provide to their consumers to build their fan base." (Kunkel et al., 2014a, p.60). The current research demonstrates that the A-League is succeeding in linking these associations positively to its brand.

Conversely, the associations *Competitive Balance*, *Community Pride*, *Education*, *Excitement*, *Game Representation*, *Logo*, *Performance*, *Player Development* and *Tradition* showed a non-significant relationship with the league brand. These associations were correlated with league commitment and league behavior in Kunkel et al.'s (2014a) research, and

Competitive Balance has been identified as a key aspect of the attractiveness of sport leagues (Koenigstorfer et al., 2010). In the current research, these associations were rated above the mid-point (besides the association of *Tradition*) indicating that respondents agreed to the existence of these associations. However, these brand associations were not influential in the league brand's role of influencing team consumers' behavioral intentions toward their favorite team.

Additionally, the associations *Star Player* and *Management* were rated below the mid-point and had a negative relationship with consumers' perceptions of the league brand. This finding likely reflects the research context of a the A-League and supports Kunkel et al.'s 2014 research that demonstrated brand associations linked with the A-League were rated significantly lower than brand associations linked with the A-League's main competitors, AFL, NRL, and Super 15. The negative relationship between the association *Star Player* and the league brand is potentially a result of the biggest stars in Australian soccer migrating to European or Asian leagues that pay higher salaries than in the A-League. The negative relationship between the association *Management* and the league brand reflects the unsuccessful approach of the league management in the first years of existence, where CEOs were underperforming (Mersiades, 2012) and teams were introduced to new markets without proper market research, resulting in their license being revoked shortly after because of low attendance figures. For example, Gold Coast United lost its license after three years and North Queensland Fury lost its license after two years. Therefore, the current findings reflected the brand as perceived by consumers.

Discussion of modelling approach

The formative approach to the analysis provided a conceptual advantage, compared with traditional reflectiveⁱⁱ modeling approaches. The formative approach avoided issues that are derived from "the misspecification of the direction of causality between a construct and its

measures, [which] can lead to inaccurate conclusions about the structural relationships between constructs” (Jarvis et al., 2003, p. 200). Applying decision rules outlined by Jarvis et al. (2003), brand associations were treated as formative measures, where the meaning of the brand is derived from cumulative effect of the unique brand associations. By treating brand associations as formative measures, researchers are able to test the meaning of each unique association on a league or team brand in specific research contexts. Therefore, the conceptualization of the brand through utilizing brand associations as formative measures may provide researchers with an alternative way to analyze sport brand association data. Consequently, it is recommended that in future research, sport brand researchers consider how they conceptualize brand associations to accurately account for the theorized direction of path relationships.

Managerial Implications

The contributions of this research have implications for sport management practice. Findings of the current research indicate that the league brand has a direct effect on consumers of teams, thus extending the brand architecture work to the context of sport consumption. Consequently, leagues can strategically support their teams in attracting consumers through developing a strong league brand and providing teams with brand development knowledge. Leagues could create a brand development framework that outlines responsibilities and activities for league and team management to leverage marketing efforts and control brand alignment and brand differentiation strategies (e.g., Kunkel et al., 2013). Such a brand development framework would impact the franchise (or license) contract that outlines the exchange of resources and knowledge (e.g., Mathewson & Winter, 1985), as well as the interaction between leagues and teams. The framework should outline how leagues and teams can work together to implement league strategies and learn from team-based innovations, that can then be spread to other teams

in the league. Therefore, it may improve synergies in advertising, e-commerce, and e-CRM techniques to leverage off the mixed-branding brand architecture (e.g., Strebinger, 2014).

Leagues may focus their brand development strategies on attracting new consumers to the sport to increase overall market share through market penetration strategies (e.g., Kunkel et al., 2014b). These strategies may include launching league-wide promotion campaigns (e.g., the ‘We are football’ campaign of the A-League); developing regular league related newsletters, hashtags (e.g., #BeautifulGame) or Twitter feeds (e.g., @ALeague); initiating fantasy sport leagues (e.g., Hyundai A-League Fantasy 2014/15); or introducing All Star games (e.g., the 2014 A-League All Stars Game against internationally renowned team Juventus Turin). Expanding the salary cap, the league could also benefit its marketing managers in creating and leveraging the power of star players. Additionally, to foster rivalry, leagues could follow the example of the MLS, which adjusts its game schedule to include “Rivalry Weeks” (MLS, 2016). These rivalry weeks, sponsored by a large company, pair location-based rivals to increase fan interest in the games. As a result, the league is able to increase fan interest and reap financial benefits, without additional investments.

Conversely, the teams may focus brand development actions on consumer retention and increasing the frequency of different types of team-related behavior through consumer engagement strategies. These strategies may include loyalty programs (e.g., “#SydneyIsSkyBlue become a 2014/15 Sydney FC member”), special access to certain events (e.g., Sydney FC holiday clinics), or direct communication (e.g., @SydneyFC twitter account). Teams can also leverage off positive league brand associations to foster team-related consumer behavior. This means, teams can utilize positive league brand associations, such as a strong tradition of the league, to market their games. In particular expansion teams without tradition may benefit from

nostalgic moments associated with the league. For example, a new team to the German Bundesliga (premier football/soccer league in Germany) could associate with the tradition of the league, which in 2013, promoted games with a “50 Jahre Bundesliga” [50 years of Bundesliga] campaign. Branding strategies, such as story-telling or imagery are able to activate consumer nostalgia prior to, and during, games.

Managers need to recognize that consumers also retain negative brand associations or perceptions of organizational action (Lock et al., 2015). In situations that negative associations are identified through research, managers need to ascertain whether they concern actual or perceived practices. If market research identifies that a team is genuinely underperforming in a given area which, in turn, gives rise to a negative association; there is a clear basis to develop practice. However, consumer perceptions do not necessarily represent the current practices of an organization (Lock & Filo, 2012). As such, the identification of negative associations in the marketplace can also underpin organizational efforts to communicate current practices through the media and public relations in order to recalibrate consumer associations. Potential avenues to gain data are data scraping from fan forums or social media. In this sense, managers need to recognize the temporality of brand associations, as teams rarely perform at a consistent level and, as such, brand associations are subject to change over time (Kunkel et al., 2016). Therefore, managers need to assess consumer brand associations on a regular basis to ensure that communications are operating to emphasize positive or repair negative associations.

Teams also need to be cognizant that league brand development actions, such as expanding the salary cap, may be more beneficial to the league, than the individual teams. For example, while star players can attract less involved consumers to the league, these players can also be perceived as ‘outsiders’ by consumers (e.g., Lock et al., 2013). Additionally, teams

should focus on team specific associations in their merchandise promotions, as league brand associations are not influential on team merchandise consumption.

Limitations and future research

There are five limitations of this research, which provide the basis for future investigation into league-team architecture. First, in this research the authors focused on consumers of a relatively young football league in Australia and the transferability of this research to other league contexts requires consideration. For example, consumers of established leagues may have had more exposure to the league and therefore the brand associations with the league may be more established, such as *Star Players* or *Tradition* (Kunkel et al., 2014a). Therefore, the influence of the league brand on consumers of teams may be stronger for established leagues, such as the National Football League. Consequently, researchers should explore the influence of the league on consumers of teams in the context of more established leagues. Additionally, given the contextual nature of brand associations, the development and change of brand associations over time needs further investigation.

Second, in this research the authors focused on consumers of a closed competition and the transferability of this research to leagues that operate as open competitions needs consideration. The influence of the league brand on consumers of teams may be weaker for teams that compete in an open competition with promotion and relegation, such as European football leagues. However, the brand associations consumers link with a league may play an important role for satellite fans of European football leagues (e.g., Kerr & Gladden, 2008), who follow their favorite team from a geographical distance. Therefore, researchers should address the influence of the league brand on consumers of teams in the context of open competitions and from the perspective of satellite fans.

Third, participants in this study represented consumers that were already involved with the league and team as they were recruited from online fan forums. They represented a knowledgeable segment of league and team consumers and were therefore deemed appropriate for this research (cf., Kunkel et al., 2014b). However, highly involved consumers remain loyal to their favorite team even when the team struggles against relegation (Koenigstorfer, Groeppel-Klein, & Schmitt, 2010), and the league in which the team competes may have a stronger influence on less involved consumers. Thus, researchers should consider exploring the influence of the league brand on less involved team consumers.

Fourth, the focus on positive associations and the measurement items utilized in this research present a limitation of this study. While the TAS was deemed the most appropriate measurement tool, there were construct validity issues present with two brand associations – identification and success – which were subsequently omitted from the analysis. Future research should address this limitation by examining the conceptual and content validity of these items, as well as by combining relevant measures from the TAS (Gladden & Funk, 2001) and the TBAS (Ross et al., 2008) to provide a comprehensive examination of current knowledge related to brand associations. Additionally, future research should focus on assessing negative associations linked to sport organizations. Following free-thought listing techniques (e.g., Ross et al., 2006; Kunkel et al., 2014) or scraping data from social media (e.g., Watanabe, Yan, & Soebbing, 2015) are beneficial first steps for assessing negative associations. Subsequently, Lock et al.'s (2015) approach of capturing perceptions of organizational legitimacy could be followed to develop measures and test the strength of the identified negative associations.

Fifth, findings may be influenced by method bias. To reduce the potential of respondents not being able to separate associations linked with a league from associations linked with a team,

the questionnaire was structured in separate sections for each entity. Each section contained an introduction that prompted respondents to specifically focus on the entity in question (i.e., league or team). Additionally, items in each section were presented in a randomized order. Although it is believed that these mechanisms were sufficient to reduce method bias in the current study, in the future, researchers could integrate distraction tasks between sections or collect data using two-wave designs or multi-stage sampling by investigating associations toward the league at one period in time and data toward the team at a second period in time (cf. Doty & Glick, 1998).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the authors examined the mediating effect of the league brand on consumers' behavioral intentions toward their favorite team. Formally, leagues influence their affiliated teams through their management and marketing, which is based on contractual agreements. Furthermore, the brand relationship of leagues and teams indicates that consumers perceive a connection between leagues and their affiliated teams. Findings of this research support that consumers' perceptions of teams influence their perception of the league, which has a partial mediating effect on the relationship between consumers' team brand associations and their team-related behavioral intentions. This research contributes to knowledge of the spill-over effects from subbrand associations to master brand associations and has implications on the management and marketing of the relationship between leagues and their affiliated teams.

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Table 1: *Items, Descriptive Statistics, and Factor Loadings*

Variable Factor Names and Items		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	β - weight	<i>t</i> -value
LBA	League brand associations				
CB	In the A-League, anybody can beat anyone.	5.81	.96	.03	.654
CMP	The league brings pride to the national football community.	4.67	1.42	-.02	.362
DIV	Watching, reading and talking about the league helps me forget my day-to-day problems.	4.83	1.71	.33*	4.91
EDU	Following the league helps me to increase my knowledge about football.	4.94	1.24	.03	.691
EXC	There is a lot of excitement surrounding the league.	4.36	1.42	-.02	.330
GR	The A-League represents the game of football very well.	4.59	1.30	.03	.503
LOG	I like the logo of the league.	4.56	1.39	-.06	1.32
MGN	The league is well managed.	3.09	1.43	-.21*	4.04
NOS	Thinking of the A-League brings back good memories.	5.97	1.16	.43*	6.36
PER	The style of football played in this league is attractive.	4.68	1.27	.01	.174
PD	The league helps young players to progress in their career.	5.74	1.01	-.06	1.07
RIV	There is a lot of rivalry between teams in the A-League.	5.28	1.41	.10*	2.01
STP	The league has star players.	3.95	1.46	-.12*	1.91
SOC	The A-League provides a chance to socialize and interact with friends and others.	5.45	1.35	.29*	4.16
STA	In the A-League's stadiums, there is a great atmosphere.	4.71	1.58	.12*	2.38
ST	The league has a specific team that I follow.	5.77	1.90	.24*	4.58
TRA	The league has a strong tradition.	3.37	1.47	-.03	.442
TBA	Team brand associations				
CMP	The team brings prestige to their host community.	5.49	1.42	-.08	1.33
DIV	The team provides me with a break from my daily routine.	5.89	1.19	.19*	3.08
EXC	Following the team is very exciting	5.65	1.35	.16*	2.23
HC	The head coach/ team manager does a good job.	5.08	1.74	.01	.136
LC	I like the logo and colors of the team.	5.73	1.42	.09	1.86
MGN	The management/ front office of the team does a good job.	4.61	1.51	-.01	1.67
NOS	I have fond memories of following the team.	6.15	1.08	.63*	9.23
PGA	I follow the team because my friends like the same team.	3.12	1.72	-.04	.824
STP	The team has star players that I like to watch.	4.96	1.47	-.03	.448
SOC	The team provides the chance to socialize and interact with friends and others.	5.34	1.49	.34*	4.95

TRA	The team has a strong tradition.	4.34	1.55	-.03	.500
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BHV	Team Behavioral Intentions				
GA	Please indicate how many games you intend to attend next season.	13.81	8.17	NA	NA
MER	Please indicate how much money you intend to spend on merchandise next season.	131.55	102.3	NA	NA
TV	Please indicate how many games you intend to watch live on TV next season.	11.35	6.34	NA	NA
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Table 2: *Path Coefficients, Indicator Weights, and Explained Variance of Mediated Structural Model*

Effect	Path	β-weight	t-value	LLCI	ULCI
Total effect	TB \rightarrow LB	.78*	30.11	.56	.67
Effect size	Kappa squared	.34*	NA	.23	.34
Total effect	TB + LB \rightarrow Game Att.	.49*	11.64	.41	.57
Direct effect	TB \rightarrow Game Att.	.27*	3.76	.13	.39
Direct effect	LB \rightarrow Game Att.	.29*	4.03	NA	NA
Indirect effect	TB \rightarrow LB \rightarrow Game Att.	.22*	NA	.08	.35
Effect size	Kappa squared	.16*	NA	.07	.24
Total effect	TB + LB \rightarrow TV Consumption	.43*	9.72	.34	.51
Direct effect	TB \rightarrow TV Consumption	.14*	2.02	.01	.27
Direct effect	LB \rightarrow TV Consumption	.37*	4.28	NA	NA
Indirect effect	TB \rightarrow LB \rightarrow TV Consumption	.29*	NA	.16	.46
Effect size	Kappa squared	.20*	NA	.11	.24
Total effect	TB + LB \rightarrow Merchandise	.35*	7.75	.26	.44
Direct effect	TB \rightarrow Merchandise	.28*	3.81	.13	.42
Direct effect	LB \rightarrow Merchandise	.10	1.44	NA	NA
Indirect effect	TB \rightarrow LB \rightarrow Merchandise	.07*	NA	-.04	.17
Effect size	Kappa squared	.05*	NA	.01	.12
Explained Variance					
League Brand			$R^2 = .61$		
Game Attendance Intentions			$R^2 = .28$		
TV Consumption Intentions			$R^2 = .24$		
Merchandise Consumption Intentions			$R^2 = .14$		

TB = Team Brand; LB = League Brand

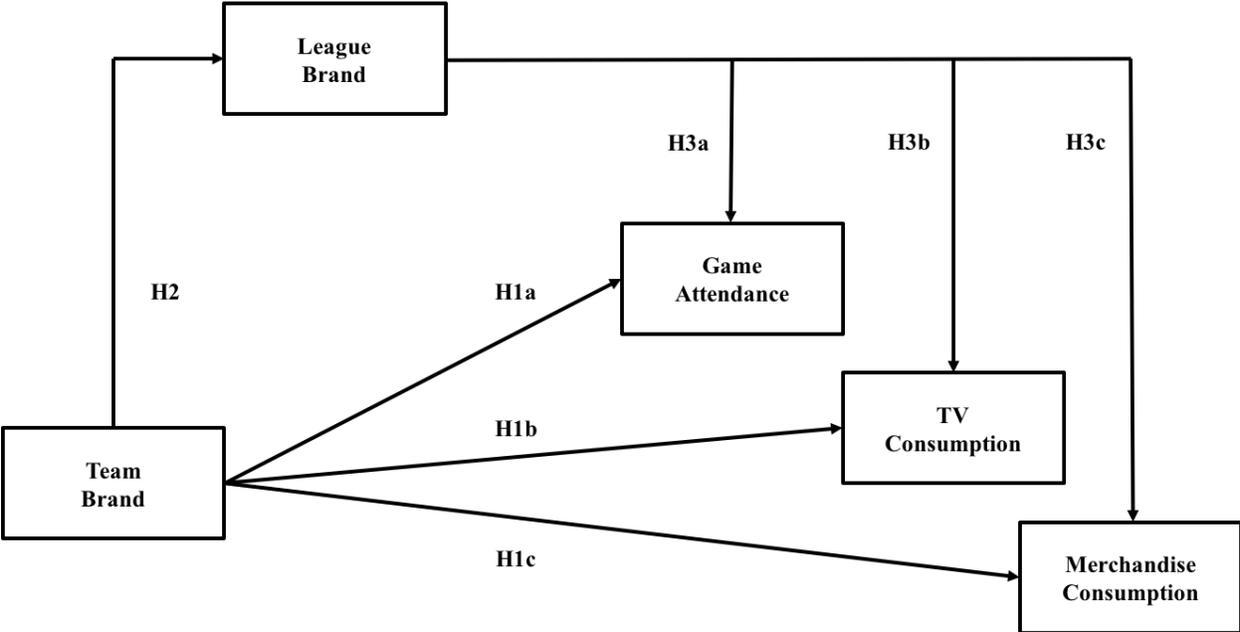


Figure 1: Overview of proposed hypotheses

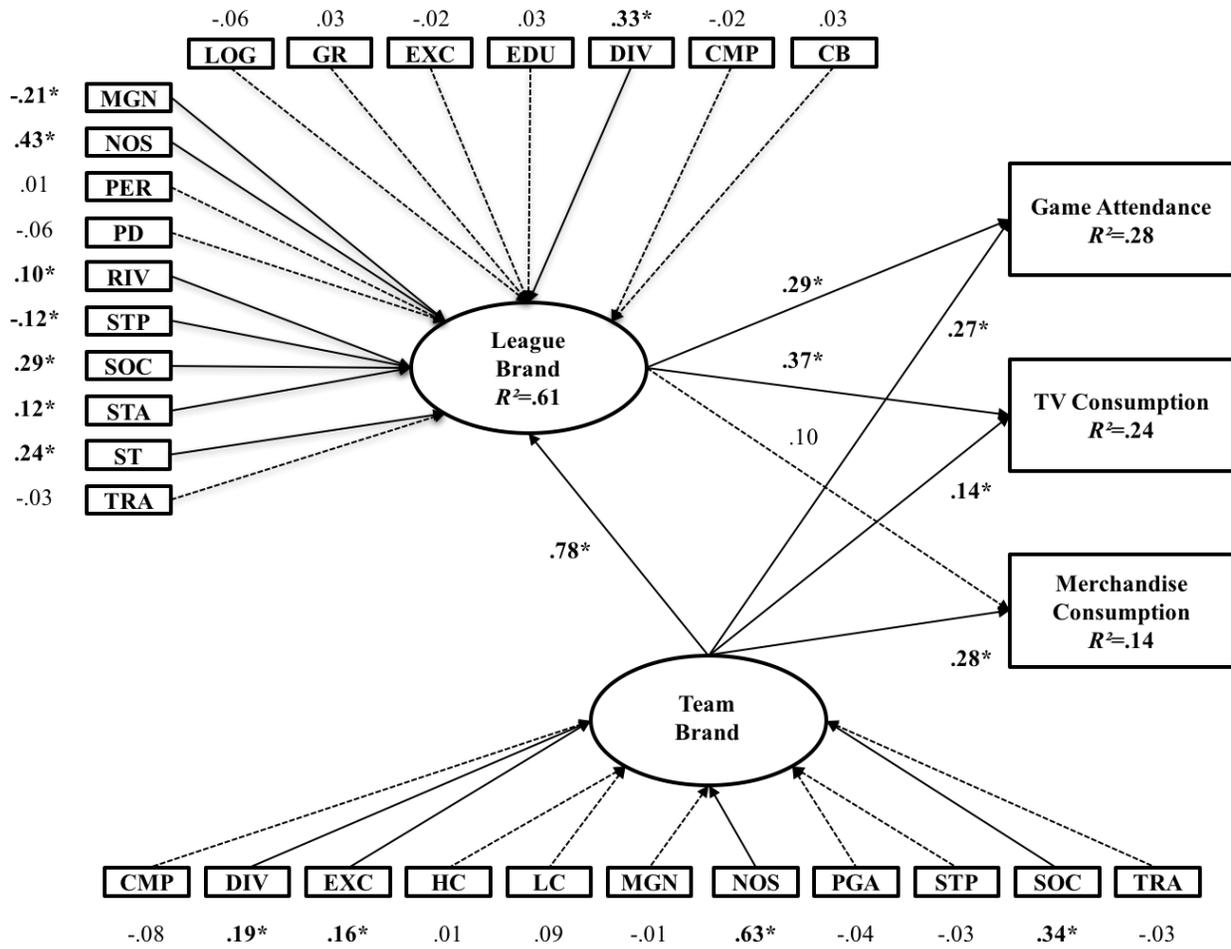


Figure 2: Structural model presenting the results of the mediating relationship of the league brand between the team brand and team-related consumption behavior

ⁱ We acknowledge that the brand portfolio of sport leagues can include entities that are positioned outside of the mixed branding brand architecture, such as forward vertically diversified investments in mobile applications or backwards vertically diversified investments in merchandise manufacturers (e.g., Kunkel et al., 2014b). However, the relationship between leagues and teams is limited to a mixed branding brand architecture.

ⁱⁱ The model was also tested using a traditional reflective approach using MPlus 6.1. The model fit ($\chi^2/df = 4.45$; $p < .001$; RMSEA = .091; CFI = .82; and SRMR = .077) did not satisfy thresholds recommended by Hair et al. (2010) and we encountered problems with low factor loadings of several team brand associations (*Community Pride*, *Diversion*, *Head Coach*, *Logo*, *Nostalgia*, *Peer Group Acceptance*, and *Socialisation* had factor loadings below .70) and league brand associations (*Competitive Balance*, *Diversion*, *Education*, *Logo*, *Management*, *Nostalgia*, *Player Development*, *Rivalry*, *Socialisation*, *Stadium Atmosphere* and *Specific Team* had factor loadings below .70). These low factor loadings are consistent with reflective brand association models previously published in sport management journals (e.g., Biscaia et al., 2013; Ross et al., 2008), and make theoretical sense as they represent different aspects of the brands that may be related, such as *Star Players* and *Performance*, or may not be related, such as *Star Players* and *Competitive Balance*. Following conventional decision rules related to examining reflective SEM models, these associations would have been deleted from the analysis to reach an acceptable model fit and satisfy guidelines related to factor loadings. As a result, associations that theoretically represent their respective brands and were identified to form the brand following a formative approach would have been lost. These findings indicate that a reflective approach was less suitable than a formative approach.