

TITLE: Thinking about the same things differently: Examining perceptions of a non-profit
community sport organisation

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Abstract

This paper explores the differing perceptions and identity responses (identification, apathy and disidentification) that potentially exist in relation to one non-profit Community Sport Organisation (CSO), and whether they explain variations in individuals' existing values and beliefs, sport interest, community identification and views about one organisation's legitimacy. Data were collected using a quantitative online survey ($N = 390$), then analysed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Multiple Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) to test three hypotheses investigating whether existing values and beliefs, shared community values, local players, organisational practices and sport interest varied based on perception of organisational image and identity response. Based on the contributions of this study, non-profit CSOs should spend time developing understanding of the key dimensions that make them relevant to constituents and to decipher the values and beliefs that underpin what external audiences expect from organisations. In addition, understanding specifically what a CSO's audience expects is fundamental, if the organisation is to be perceived as legitimate in relation to its purpose.

Keywords: social identification, identity response, organisational image, organisational legitimacy

Thinking about the same things differently: Examining perceptions of a community sport organisation

1. Introduction

General understanding of sport audiences has emanated from research conducted in professional, or collegiate settings as a result of investigating individuals that attend, consume or identify with a team (e.g., Funk & James, 2006; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Seeking to build on this body of knowledge, academic interest in individuals that do not attend, consume or identify with sport organisations has increased. Research has explored the drivers of switching from one organisation to another (McDonald, 2010; McDonald & Stavros, 2007); constraints which impede attendance (Pritchard, Funk, & Alexandris, 2009; Trail, Robinson, & Kim, 2008); and the varying identity responses which former fans experience after a franchise relocates (Foster & Hyatt, 2007).

The recent shift to explore a broader range of consumer reactions and behaviours acknowledges the need to understand a broader cross-section of sport organisations external audience. It also acknowledges that people can hold disparate perceptions of sport organisations, which require understanding if they are to be managed. Within this recent shift, research has indicated that perceptions of the practices and actions of sport organisations can be positive or negative, which in turn, influences how people think about and act towards sport organisations (Lock & Filo, 2012). Positive and negative reactions have been previously shown to emerge when individuals maintain existing values and beliefs about how an organisation should act (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001), while other research extolls a position that an individual will hold stronger views about social groups that are relevant to him or her on some key dimension/s (Turner, 1975).

Understanding individual level responses to sport organisations that include positive (identified), neutral (apathetic) or negative (disidentified) reactions provides information relating to how an organisation's external audience interprets its 'image' (MacIntosh & Doherty, 2007). Within this article, the organisational image concept is broken down to a focus on organisational legitimacy (Deephouse & Carter, 2005; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Elsbach, 2003; Suchman, 1995). This focus on legitimacy is applied to a non-profit Community Sport Organisation (CSO), which derives partial funding from members of a local sport association. In this article we address two specific objectives. Objective one examines how differences in existing values and beliefs, sport interest and community identification are explained by the varying positivity of individuals' perception of organisational image and identity response (e.g., identified, apathetic or disidentified). Objective two tests whether the varying positivity of individuals' perception of organisational image and identity response explain differences in the extent that one CSO is perceived to be legitimate (Suchman, 1995).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is framed within social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and its further applications into the identity processes present within organisations (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Prior to elaborating on the theoretical framework, the conceptual focus of this study requires clarification and justification on two levels. First, we focus on organisational identification due to the nature of the entity and problem studied. There are certain parallels between the work exploring the images associated with brands (Ferrand & Pages, 1999; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Keller, 1993) and organisations (also referred to as corporate identity; Brown & Dacin, 1997; Brown,

Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten, 2006; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004; Sutton & Callahan, 1987). However, our focus on organisational image reflects a broader focus than that of branding studies, which focus on certain brand attributes and benefits relating to an organisation's products and services (e.g., Brown & Dacin, 1997; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Keller, 1993). The non-profit CSO examined within the present study also informs the decision to use an organisational framework. The focal organisation is not a professional sport entity, does not have sufficient resources for strategic brand building or marketing, and does not have a marketing department.

The focus on non-profit community sport also requires some justification, primarily due to the lack of research examining the images associated with such organisations. Extant research on sport consumers is mainly drawn from studies exploring professional or collegiate sport contexts. At the same time, research examining non-profit CSOs has advanced a plethora of important contributions in relation to volunteering (Cuskelly, 2004; Cuskelly, Taylor, Hoye, & Darcy, 2006; Engelberg, Skinner, & Zakus, 2011), organisational capacity (Misener & Doherty, 2009), sport governance (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2012; Hoye & Doherty, 2011) and social capital building (Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, 2008; Spaaij, 2011).

Yet the application of theoretical advances in consumer behaviour to non-profit CSOs are scant, despite calls for research into the marketing of non-profit organisations (Kotler, 1979). This oversight continues, despite cogent arguments presented in the community sport literature, noting the inherent differences between the management of professional and community sport entities (e.g., Cuskelly, 2004; Misener & Doherty, 2009). For example, the construction of identity in private and non-profit contexts is generally different. While for private organisations, identity creation is a statement of 'who it is', non-profit organisations generally have a specific mandate, which defines 'who it needs to be' (e.g., Dolnicar &

Lazarevski, 2009). As such, there is a distinct opportunity to develop understanding of how the images of non-profit CSOs are reacted to and perceived (Robinson, 2006).

The second level of clarification refers to the two streams of research on organisational identification, which have emanated somewhat separately in management and marketing (Brown, et al., 2006; Cardador & Pratt, 2006). The first stream of research focuses on the production, projection and embodiment of identity at a macro-organisation level (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Parent & Deephouse, 2007). This stream of research typically focuses on employees or former employees of organisations that have intimate knowledge of the intra-organisational environment (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Elsbach, 2003; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). The second stream of research – drawn from marketing – explicitly focuses on how an organisation is perceived by its external audience (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; Lock & Filo, 2012). Such studies are driven by the notion that people move strategically through the consumer landscape, associating with organisations that exemplify values and beliefs that match with their own (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). While drawing theoretical background from the intra-organisational and marketing literatures, the resonance of previous work on external audience interpretations of organisational image draws us inevitably to work with similar objectives (e.g., Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002; Cowden & Sellnow, 2002; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001).

2.2 Perceptions of Organisations: Image and Legitimacy

Perceptions provide an important frame of reference, determining how individuals respond to organisations (Bhattacharya, Rao, & Glynn, 1995). Before broaching the topic of organisational image and focusing perceptions of image on organisational legitimacy, two specific factors are introduced, which amplify the relevance of CSOs to constituents. Firstly, the existing values and beliefs an individual possesses in relation to how an organisation

should act. Secondly, key contextual dimensions of the organisation (e.g., football and community), which may lead to alignment or misalignment between individual and organisational interests.

Prior marketing research indicates that existing values and beliefs exert a strong influence on consumer reactions to organisations. Specifically, individuals that react positively or negatively to organisations are more likely to possess values and beliefs about how the entity should act (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Tajfel (1972) argued that people navigate the social world and make sense of it by associating their self-concepts with groups that epitomise values and beliefs that they share, or learn to share through membership. On the other hand, when people have existing values and beliefs that are contrasted by organisational actions, they will disassociate (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). If individuals lack existing values and beliefs about the actions of an organisation, prior theorising indicates that neutral organisational responses will eventuate (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002).

Research in the social identity tradition posits that social groups become relevant and appealing to a person because of a fit between his or her interests and the key dimensions (or facets) that define a group (Turner, 1975). Akin to the existing values and beliefs an individual maintains; his or her level of interest or identification with key dimensions of a sport organisation provides an explanation of when positive and negative reactions are more likely to occur (e.g., Lock & Filo, 2012). Following this argument, individuals with a strong interest in football and an enduring identification with the community that a non-profit CSO is situated within will be more likely to hold favourable or unfavourable perceptions of the work done by a local football organisation. Therefore, the level of interest or identification an individual maintains with key dimensions of what a sporting organisation does provides a key

basis to understand why some individuals maintain stronger perceptions of an organisation's image than others.

Organisational images provide “relatively current and temporary perceptions” that reflect the sum of the knowledge an individual maintains about an entity; however, there is some disagreement on the use of the term image in relation to organisations (Elsbach, 2003, p. 300). For example, Elsbach (2003) argued that an organisation's image is perceived by both internal (i.e., employees) and external audiences (i.e., in the broader marketplace). This contention has been challenged by others, who insist that external audiences judge organisations based on reputation (Brown, et al., 2006). This argument has been disputed by a group of researchers elucidating that organisational reputation is founded on status comparisons between organisations (Elsbach, 2003; Gioia, et al., 2000; Parent & Deephouse, 2007). Image perceptions, on the other hand, are based on audience cognitions and knowledge concerning only the organisation. Here we apply Elsbach's (2003) definition of organisational image as it (a) specifies the temporality of image perceptions, and (b) deviates from the status comparisons included in reputation studies to focus on cognitions relating to one CSO.

Prior conceptual work has advocated for the potential benefits of conducting image-based research in public and voluntary sport organisations (Robinson, 2006). In previous studies in sport, the organisational image concept has been studied amorphously (Kim & Trail, 2010; MacIntosh & Doherty, 2007). Yet in management, image perceptions have been dissected to comprise social judgements of an organisation's legitimacy, correctness, consistency and trustworthiness (Elsbach, 2003). Of the facets of organisational image outlined by Elsbach, legitimacy represents an important dimension for consideration, especially in relation to non-profit CSOs that draw funds from memberships, or other grant-based sources (This funding situation is detailed further within the research context sub-

section of the Method). While sport management researchers have addressed legitimacy from an institutional theory perspective (Santomier, 1979; Washington & Patterson, 2011), work from a social-psychological perspective remains sparse (See Johnson, Dowd, & Ridgeway, 2006 for a thorough review of the social psychological and organisational/institutional perspectives on legitimacy). Suchman (1995, p. 574) defined legitimacy as “the perception... that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, and definitions.” Therefore, legitimacy, relates to the socially constructed cognitive meanings that people apply to organisations aside from other relevant entities, which further distinguishes the concept from reputation (e.g., Deephouse & Carter, 2005).

Legitimacy emanates contextually and the norms that apply to any sport organisation emerge from its social situation. Given the social construction of legitimacy, other researchers have articulated the dialogic nature of the concept, emphasising that to be legitimate, organisations need to be perceived as legitimate by relevant stakeholders (Cowden & Sellnow, 2002; Massey, 2001; Suchman, 1995). The need to understand how sport organisations become legitimate fits neatly with previous work arguing for sport organisations to spend more time developing understanding of audience expectations (e.g., Robinson, 2006). This need is accentuated and made more difficult given that audiences are heterogeneous and organisations are likely to accrue opponents due to practices that are developed in detachment from the public (Suchman, 1995).

The three aspects of organisational legitimacy, which we explore during this manuscript emerged during previous qualitative research conducted in relation to one semi-professional Australian CSO (Lock & Filo, 2012). During this previous research, the themes were conceptualised as perceptions of organisational characteristics. In the present study, we reapply these three previous findings as legitimacy dimensions because each relates to

perceptions of a non-profit CSO that align with specific social expectations (Johnson, et al., 2006). The development of social expectations in relation to the target organisation emanates from its funding and situation in a local football association (detailed further in the Method section).

First, respondents described a belief that the CSO should 'give back' to the locality in which it was situated (i.e., shared community values). Negative reactions occurred when the organisation was perceived to focus on aspects of delivery seen as non-beneficial to the local community. Therefore, local participants felt that programs and delivery should focus on servicing the community to be considered as a legitimate sport organisation in the region.

Second, previous research has indicated that CSOs receiving full or partial funding from local community sources are perceived to have a responsibility to develop players from that locality (i.e., local players). This aspect of organisational image created a perspective that the CSO was 'taking away' from, instead of 'giving back' to the local community, which was incongruent with the social norms and values applied to the purpose of the club by community members. This theme marked a legitimacy dimension as the organisation received funding directly from community members who in turn perceived that player development should be focused on individuals from within the community.

Third, existing marketing and policy literature focuses intently on the values and characteristics of organisations (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; Hogg & Terry, 2000) as antecedent to positive and negative responses. This narrow focus neglects the influence of other interactions, which potentially transmit organisational values in sport, such as trialling processes and interactions with staff (i.e., organisational practices). This equated to the definition of legitimacy, as a primary role of the sport organisation studied was to develop elite players in the region. To this end, fair trials and approachable staff both combined to explain aspects of the club perceived to be illegitimate

in relation to its broader mandate. The delineation of organisational perceptions, image and legitimacy sets out the projected information to which people in the marketplace respond. To complete the literature review, identification, disidentification and cognitive apathy are introduced.

2.3 Identity Responses

Individuals derive a significant part of their self-concept from the social groups to which they belong (Tajfel, 1972). At the same time, as group memberships converge to represent an individual's self-concept, cognitive separation will occur if the projected norms, values and beliefs of a group are incongruent with the perceivers. This principle has guided explanations of why employees or former employees (Elsbach, 1999; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004), former fans (Foster & Hyatt, 2007) and broader cross-sections of the marketplace choose to identify with or disidentify from organisations (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; White & Dahl, 2007).

The work exploring employees or former employees (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004), and former fans of a relocated sport team (Foster & Hyatt, 2007) have focused on individuals that maintain specific experiences with the organisation in question. Consequently, direct experiences inform a broader raft of identity responses to organisations than those tested in sample groups that may or may not have any experiences with the target organisation (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). Therefore, the dimensions of identity response tested here are refined to identification, disidentification and cognitive apathy. The refinement reflects that the individuals sampled may or may not have direct experiences with the sport organisation in question (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; White & Dahl, 2007).

Each identity response tested represents the position of an individual's self-concept in relation to an organisation. The first response is identification. Identification is classically

defined in organisational contexts as a sense of oneness (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Essentially, previous work promotes the view that individuals will identify with organisations because of a perceived congruence between their own existing values, beliefs and expectations and those projected via the image of an organisation (Bhattacharya, et al., 1995).

The second response is disidentification. When the values and characteristics of an organisation are at odds, or incongruent with those of an individual, being associated with that organisation represents a means through which self-esteem can be reduced (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Therefore, individuals may choose to cognitively distance themselves from an organisation or disidentify. Consensus has formed that disidentification represents a distinct construct to identification (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; Kreiner, Ashforth, & Sluss, 2006; White & Dahl, 2007), which can be defined as “a cognitive separation between a person's identity and his or her perception of the identity of an organisation” (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001, p. 397). Furthermore, disidentification in the sporting context has been argued to occur when the characteristics of a sport organisation are perceived to be incongruent with the expectations of its external audience (Lock & Filo, 2012).

The third response is cognitive apathy. It represents the most frequent, yet under researched response to sporting organisations (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; Lock & Filo, 2012). While non-identification in an intra-organisational sense has been linked to the self-concept of an individual (e.g., why would I identify or disidentify?), apathy represents an ‘inert’ state in many cases in the broader marketplace (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002). As such, apathetic individuals lack sufficient feeling to either identify with or disidentify from organisations. This reaction can encompass the non-identification described, but in the general public, previous work also indicates that apathy can result from a lack of understanding, or interest in an organisation (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002; Lock & Filo, 2012). Taking into account each identity response provides a basis to conceptualise audience

reactions to CSOs more broadly than exclusively concentrating on identification. Based on the literature reviewed, three specific hypotheses were developed to test the findings of previous research.

H1: Existing values and beliefs will be more salient for individuals with:

- a) Positive and negative perceptions of an organisation
- b) Identified and disidentified organisational responses

H2: Respondents' level of community identification and sport interest will be higher when individuals:

- a) Maintain positive and negative perceptions of an organisation
- b) Identify or disidentify

H3: The extent that a CSO is perceived as legitimate for shared community values, local players and organisational practices will:

- a) Increase from negative → neutral → positive perceptions of an organisation
- b) Increase from disidentification → apathy → identification

3. Method

We tested the stated hypotheses using a cross-sectional quantitative research design in which registered members of a large football association in Sydney, Australia completed an online questionnaire. Prior to outlining the participants, procedure, materials and analysis, the research situation and context is described.

3.1 Context

The Manly Warringah Football Association (MWFA)¹ is a non-profit, member funded service organisation (e.g., Blau & Scott, 1962), which is responsible for the development of

¹ We use the term football, despite the contested nature of the term in Australia for consistency with the names of the Association from which the sample was drawn and the focal organisation.

football to a population of approximately 237,640 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). At the time of writing, the MWFA counted approximately 18,000 registered players across its 17 member clubs. The MWFA is member funded with fees paid by participants from Junior through to Over-35s competition paying an annual registration fee, which is divided between the member club, the MWFA, Football New South Wales and the Football Federation Australia to cover various costs.

Within the MWFA region, Manly United Football Club (MUFC) operates the elite development pathway as a separate non-profit CSO. Despite paying its First Grade squad (which plays in the NSW Premier League), the organisation satisfies the criteria for CSO status as it (1) relies on the work of volunteers at various levels, (2) is self-governing and (3) does not exist to profit from the services it provides (Misener & Doherty, 2009). In previous work (e.g., Lock & Filo, 2012), MUFC was defined as a semi-professional sport organisation, which reflected a focus on reasons for non-attendance at first team matches, not a broader focus on the whole organisation as presented here.

MUFC exists to develop talented footballers within the MWFA region. As such it receives an annual grant from the MWFA to identify, recruit and develop talented footballers. MUFC also receives funding from player registration fees (from MUFC players, excluding first team players, in the elite development pathway) and from local organisations that sponsor the club. This contributes to funding of the 14 MUFC male and female teams, which start at under-10 years of age and continue through to senior level. Despite the multiple funding sources, previous research indicates that community members perceive the grant paid by the MWFA to MUFC highly negatively in some instances (Lock & Filo, 2012). Such negativity emanates from community expectations that as MUFC is partly funded by the MWFA (which is member funded) the organisation maintains a specific service-to-mission

(Ferkins, Shilbury, & McDonald, 2009) to provide talent development opportunities for players drawn from the MWFA region.

Prior research in the same context indicated that the club is not viewed by all association members as fulfilling its role in the community (Lock & Filo, 2012). This view was evidenced through a series of perceptions elicited from members, including the recruitment of non-local players, not valuing the community, unfair trialling processes and problems with staff. As such, perceptions of MUFC's image relate quite specifically to the extent that the organisation is observed to fulfil a legitimate purpose (e.g., Suchman, 1995); specifically, for MUFC to develop talented footballers in the MWFA region. Accordingly, MUFC provides a rich sampling frame as previous research has highlighted the variety of perceptions and responses elicited by this community-based sporting organisation.

3.2 Procedure

MUFC distributed an electronic questionnaire hyperlink to 10,000 registered MWFA participants as part of its weekly online newsletter. This figure comprised all MWFA members for which the club retained an email contact. Reminder emails were sent after 3, 7, 10 and 14 days to maximise response rates (Dillman, 2007). After 21 days the survey was closed and all responses downloaded. Web statistics showed that < 3000 emails were opened in total. As the questionnaire was sent to individuals who in many cases were apathetic or potentially disidentified, we employed non-response analysis to assess the effects of potential non-response (Non-response analysis presented below; Jordan, Walker, Kent, & Inoue, 2011). Following survey closure, all data were downloaded directly into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 19 (SPSS), which was used in conjunction with AMOS 19 for data analysis.

3.3 Participants

Registered MWFA members included players, coaches, administrators, referees and parents, who were connected to football personally or through a family member ($N = 390$). This sample was chosen due to their existing involvement in football within the region. The sample included 226 males (57.9%) and 164 females (42.1%) and the mean age was 43 years ($SD = 8.13$), which represented the broader population in the Manly-Warringah and Pittwater peninsula (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). This comparison was made with the exception of the population under the age of 18, who were excluded from this study for ethical reasons. The majority of participants were in full-time paid employment ($n = 257$, 66%), drawn from across the 17 MWFA member organisations, and a mix of playing ($n = 100$, 26%), refereeing ($n = 6$, 2%), administrating ($n = 13$, 3%), coaching ($n = 52$, 13%), family involvement ($n = 187$, 48%) or spectating ($n = 13$, 3%) roles.

3.4 Materials

The questionnaire included demographic and behavioural items. Elsbach and Bhattacharya's (2001) three identification and three disidentification items (adapted from Mael & Ashforth, 1992) were included to measure respondents' identity response to MUFC. Other scales measuring identity responses exist (e.g., the Expanded Model of Organisational Identification (EMOI); Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004); however, the EMOI emanates from research conducted with current, or former organisational employees. Hence, its applicability to broader external audiences is uncertain. Therefore, as Elsbach and Bhattacharya's (2001) adaptation of Mael and Ashforth's original organisational identification scale emerged from work on external audience perceptions, it was selected as the most relevant measurement tool for the present study.

In addition, a single item measured perception of the organisation. The term image was not included in the question as it is an academic term. We apply broader perceptions of

the organisation as representative of Elsbach's (2003) definition of organisational image during the results and discussion. The validity of single-item measures has been endorsed, following comparisons with multi-item tests of the same construct (Jordan & Turner, 2008). Existing values and beliefs (items adapted from Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001) and shared community values were measured with three items. Two items measured organisational practices and local players. The items measuring shared community values, organisational practices and local players were developed by the research team and based on previous research in the same context (Lock & Filo, 2012). Community identification was measured with Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) four item collective identity scale, and sport interest was tested using two items examining the strength of connection with football. Each item was rated on a five point Likert scale anchored from [1] disagree to [5] agree.

3.5 Analysis

The data were analysed in three stages. First, we used a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to assess the structural properties of the items tested. Actual model fit was assessed using Chi Square ($\chi^2/df = \leq 3$ & $p > .05$); however, cognisant of issues with the Chi square test; fit was assessed across multiple indices. The Root Mean Standard Error Approximation (RMSEA) was examined using Browne and Cudeck's (1992) suggestion that a value of less than .05 indicates a close fitting model, while figures of less than .08 indicate acceptable model fit. Using Bagozzi and Yi's (2012), recent suggestions in relation to acceptable Standardised Root Mean Square Residual levels (SRMR), values of less than .07 were accepted. The incremental or comparative fit of the model was examined using indices, which are not sensitive to sample size including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI; > 0.95), Tucker Lewis Index (TLI; > 0.95), and Normed Fit Index (NFI; > 0.95) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Discriminant validity was established if the squared correlation between constructs

exceeded the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each latent factor (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2009).

Second, the perception of organisational image measure was categorised into three groups with response options 1-2 (partial or total negativity) coded negative; 3 (neither positive nor negative perception) coded neutral; and 4-5 (partial or total positivity) coded positive. Next, respondents were categorised based on identity response to MUFC. Respondents were deemed as identified or disidentified if their mean score for the identification or disidentification items ≥ 3.01 . Individuals scoring ≤ 3.00 on both dimensions were categorised as apathetic, which directly replicated previous research using the same instrument (cf. Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002).

Third, a MANOVA was used to test Hypotheses 1 (a, b), 2 (a, b) and 3 (a, b), to explore whether perceptions of organisational image (negative, neutral, positive) and identity response (disidentified, apathetic, identified) influenced the composite variables: existing values and beliefs, community identification, sport interest, shared community values, local players and organisational practices (cf. Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002).

3.6 Non-Response Bias Analyses

Direct participant follow-up was not possible after the data-collection for this study. Instead, non-response bias was analysed in two ways, following recommendations that late responders are most similar to non-responders (Jordan, et al., 2011). First, participants were assigned a 'days to complete' score (range 1 – 21) which represented the number of days it took each participant to complete the questionnaire. The days to complete score was used as an independent variable in a Multiple Linear Regression analysis for the identification, disidentification, perception of organisational image, existing values and beliefs, shared community values, local players, organisational practices, community identification and sport

interest composite mean scores. There was no effect for any of the construct measures based on completion time.

Second, respondents were categorised into one of five groups classifying the email reminder wave that they had completed the questionnaire after. This led to the creation of five categorical groups to examine whether completion time influenced responses (Initial distribution, Reminder 1, Reminder 2, Reminder 3, Reminder 4). A MANOVA test with the grouping variable 'completion group' displayed no significant differences indicating that each 'completion group' did not differ significantly from one another ($p > .05$) based on responses to any of the dependent variables. Following guidelines, these two tests provided a suitable basis to conclude that the sample was not biased due to non-response in the absence of direct participant follow-up (Jordan, et al., 2011).

4. Results

A Confirmatory Factor Analysis tested the structural properties of the eight latent constructs. One statement from the disidentification factor was deleted for theoretical reasons as the statement "[organisation's] failures are my successes" correlated strongly with the identification factor, which was theoretically untenable. The measurement model indicated a good fit to the data in relation to the guidelines set: $\chi^2/df = 1.16$, $p = .077$, RMSEA = .020 with a 90% upper confidence interval of .032, SRMR = .029 and incremental fit indices, NFI = .970, CFI = .996, and TLI = 0.994 (e.g., Bagozzi & Yi, 2012; Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Hu & Bentler, 1999). In total, the eight latent factors combined to explain 75% of the cumulative variance, which exceeded the .50 threshold recommended for convergent validity (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2012). The average variance extracted (AVE) for each dimension exceeded the squared correlations demonstrating discriminant validity for all pairs of latent constructs apart from local players and shared community values, which violated the AVE for local players (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

As local players violated the AVE test, a second measurement model was tested. Model 2 was conducted as a nested model with the correlation between shared community values and local players constrained to 1, thereby testing the hypothesis that shared community values and local players were the same latent construct (cf. Bagozzi, Yi, & Phillips, 1991). Model 2, displayed a worse fit: $\chi^2/df = 1.38$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .031 with a 90% upper confidence interval of .041, SRMR = .047 and incremental fit indices, NFI = .964, CFI = .990, and TLI = 0.986. The actual model fit (i.e., $p < .05$) of the nested model worsened and following Bagozzi et al. (1991) we retained Model 1 for additional testing. Descriptive statistics for each item statement, Cronbach’s Alpha (range from .75 - .95), AVE (range from .61 - .84), factor loadings and descriptive statistics are displayed for each factor in Table 1. Table 2 displays the correlation matrix for all latent constructs.

 Insert Table 1 about here

 Insert Table 2 about here

Following the CFA, factor composite mean scores were created (See Table 1). The mean scores for the identification and disidentification factors were low as respondents who neither identified nor disidentified disagreed with some if not all statements. Mean scores for the sport interest and community identification factors were highest as they did not relate to the target organisation and therefore were less likely to garner negative responses from participants.

The categorisation of the perception of organisational image measure resulted in an apportioning of 64 negative (16.4%), 147 neutral (37.7%) and 179 positive (45.9%) into each group. Categorisation of identity response led to a partitioning of 43 (11%) identified, 346 (89%) apathetic and 1 (0.3%) disidentified. In line with previous research, cognitive apathy represented the largest cross-section of respondents (cf. Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002);

however, the lack of participants in the disidentification category represented a significant problem for additional testing using the disidentification items, which is considered in the discussion (testing from this point removed the disidentification items from the analysis).

Following the categorisation of participants, H1b, 2b, and 3b were revised as follows:

H1: Existing values and beliefs about key organisational dimensions will be more salient for individuals with:

b) Identified organisational responses

H2: Respondents level of community identification and sport interest will be higher for individuals with:

b) Identified organisational responses

H3: The extent that a CSO is perceived as legitimate for shared community values, local players, and organisational practices will:

b) Increase from apathy → identification

Perception of organisational image (negative, neutral, positive) and identity responses (apathetic, identified – identification items only) were used as independent grouping variables to examine whether the mean scores for the dependent variables: existing values and beliefs, community values, organisational practices, local players, community identification and sport interest differed significantly between groups. The MANOVAs displayed significant main effects for perception of organisational image $F(6, 383) = 18.59, p < .001$ and identity response $F(6, 383) = 14.55, p < .001$. Means, standard deviations and significant between group differences from the post-hoc analyses (using Tukey's Honestly Significant Differences (HSD)) are presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Testing of Hypothesis 1a revealed a significant main effect for perception of organisational image and existing values and beliefs $F(2, 387) = 12.45, p < .001$. This effect occurred because the negative perception group reported higher levels of existing values and beliefs than the neutral and positive perception groups. While the mean score for the positive perception of organisational image group was higher than the neutral group, this difference was statistically insignificant. Hypothesis 1a was partially supported.

Hypothesis 1b tested the extent that existing values and beliefs varied based on identity response. There was a main effect for Hypothesis 1b, $F(1, 388) = 18.90, p < .001$, qualified by the identified group reporting a significantly higher level of existing values and beliefs than the apathetic group, thus supporting the revised version of Hypothesis 1b.

Testing of Hypothesis 2a revealed a significant main effect for perception of organisational image and sport interest $F(2, 387) = 4.54, p < .001$, but not community identification $F(2, 387) = 2.32, p = .099$. The main effect in relation to sport interest stemmed from positive and negative perception groups displaying higher levels of interest in football than the neutral perception group, which fully supported Hypothesis 2a for sport interest, but did not support Hypothesis 2a for community identification. Hypothesis 2b followed the same pattern as Hypothesis 2a. There was a significant main effect for sport interest $F(1, 388) = 12.51, p < .001$, but there was no significant difference between identity response groups for community identification $F(1, 388) = .173, p = .674$. As such, Hypothesis 2b was supported for sport interest, but not community identification.

Testing of Hypothesis 3a revealed significant main effects for perception of organisational image and shared community values $F(2, 387) = 77.41, p < .001$, local players $F(2, 387) = 59.16, p < .001$ and organisational practices $F(2, 387) = 83.03, p < .001$. The

main effect for shared community values, local players and organisational practices, supported Hypothesis 3a in all cases. Specifically, shared community values, local players and organisational practices increased significantly from negative → neutral → positive perception of organisational image groups.

Finally, there was a significant main effect for identity response and shared community values $F(1, 388) = 27.88, p < .001$, local players $F(1,388) = 55.47, p < .001$, and organisational practices $F(1, 388) = 22.81, p < .001$. The effect was explained by the identified group reporting higher scores for shared community values, local players and organisational practices than the apathetic group. The revised version of Hypothesis 3b was supported.

5. Discussion

Two primary objectives guided the data collection and analyses. First, we examined how differences in existing values and beliefs, sport interest and community identification were explained by the varying positivity of individuals' perception of organisational image and identity responses. Second, we tested three dimensions of organisational legitimacy – in a non-profit community sport context – to determine if organisational perceptions and identity response explained differences in the extent that one CSO was perceived to be legitimate by its external audience (Suchman, 1995). During the discussion, we consider the implications of the findings relating to identity response, specifically focusing on the lack of disidentified respondents in the sample. Next, we consider the role of existing values and beliefs in relation to audience expectations of how CSOs should act. Then, we discuss the varying perceptions of organisational legitimacy and use this basis to develop recommendations for future work.

As noted previously, individuals identify with groups that represent a consistent expression of how they view themselves (Hogg & Smith, 2007; Tajfel, 1972) and disidentify from organisations that embody characteristics incongruent with their own values and beliefs (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). The data collated in this present study illustrated that the organisational identification items functioned as expected; however, the disidentification items displayed problems. While other studies report that the largest cross-section of a consumer audience is apathetic (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002), the lack of disidentified respondents in our sample was a significant problem. There are two potential explanations for this finding.

First, while the definition of disidentification states that it is a “negative relational categorisation” and a “cognitive separation” between individual and organisation (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001) the item statements are more extreme. For example, the statement: “when someone criticises [organisation], it feels like a personal compliment” implies that in addition to cognitively separating themselves from a sporting organisation, an individual will also derive emotional value from the organisation being criticised. While it is plausible that disidentification would lead to such extreme responses, the reactions tested go beyond the stated definition. Simply distancing oneself from a social group due to value incongruence would be sufficient to maintain a consistent series of cognitions (Hogg & Terry, 2000). The disidentification items used by Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001) reversed the original Mael and Ashforth (1992) organisational identification measure. However, in the work Ashforth has since collaborated on (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004), measurement of intra-organisational disidentification has been captured with markedly different items, which feature a larger focus on cognitive separation, not joy in failure. Given the focus of Kreiner and Ashforth (2004) on current and previous organisational employees, we applied a previous marketing centred measure of identification, apathy and disidentification in this study.

Second, the almost total disagreement with the disidentification statements may be explained by arguing that the strength of feeling required to disidentify is absent in relation to CSOs. However, the response to Hypothesis 1a potentially disputed that argument.

5.1 Hypothesis 1a & 1b

Hypothesis 1a-b examined whether identity response and organisational perception explained variation in the existing values and beliefs individuals maintained in relation to how a non-profit CSO should act. Despite only one respondent displaying overall agreement with the disidentification statements, existing values and beliefs were highly salient for the negative perception of organisational image group. Previous research has extolled a position that value incongruence is a crucial antecedent leading to disidentification 'if' there are sufficient self-concept benefits available from cognitive separation (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). While disidentification was only observed in one case, the salience of existing values and beliefs in the negative perception group indicated that value incongruence did exist for some respondents.

While previous findings in relation to disidentification could not be tested, the salience of existing values and beliefs was significantly higher in the identified response group than for apathetic responders, which confirmed other work citing the importance of value congruence as antecedent to identification (Bhattacharya, et al., 1995; Tajfel, 1972; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It also extended the importance of existing values and beliefs into the identity processes of individuals in relation to non-profit CSOs.

5.2 Hypothesis 2a & 2b

The facets that make groups relevant to individuals are context-specific (Turner, 1975). In the present study, the two primary dimensions shown to be salient in other research related unsurprisingly to the sport played and the community in which the organisation was located. As such, we examined whether identification with the community and interest in the

sport were higher for positive and negative perceivers and identified responders as suggested previously (Lock & Filo, 2012). Community identification was high across all perception and identity response groups, which did not support the stated hypothesis. However, interest in football differed significantly based on perceptions of organisational image and identity response. This followed other research in Australia which has highlighted existing interest in the sport played by an organisation as a key dimension in the formation of identification (Lock, Taylor, & Darcy, 2011). Here, we extended this finding to show that higher levels of interest in a sport were also present in the negative perception group. This finding aligned with other work noting that individuals associate or disassociate based on the relevance of a group to their self-concept (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

5.3 Hypothesis 3a & 3b

Hypothesis 3a-b tested the extent that perception of organisational image and identity response type explained variation in perceptions of organisational legitimacy. Existing literature on image in sport has focused on the attributes and benefits consumers associate with brands (Gladden & Funk, 2002), or on organisations with which individuals have direct experiences (Foster & Hyatt, 2007; Parent & Foreman, 2007). As a result, this research developed on previous work by exploring legitimacy in a non-profit CSO with individuals that may or may not have had any experiences of the organisation. The extent that individuals perceived shared community values, local players and organisational practices to be legitimate varied based on the extent that the sport organisation's image was perceived positively, neutrally or negatively.

Findings demonstrated that the extent to which an individual perceived a community sporting organisation positively or negatively led to very different interpretations of whether certain dimensions of that organisation were considered to be legitimate or not, which paralleled existing work arguing it to be a subjective concept (Suchman, 1995). Although

identification led to favourable evaluations of the organisation, apathetic respondents espoused almost total neutrality on the scale measures. This extended previous arguments that apathetic sections of the market retain an 'inert' conception of organisations, which lack feeling (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002).

The varying perceptions of the aspects of organisational legitimacy highlighted the complex task CSOs face in maintaining a positive image. As Suchman (1995) argued, the external audiences of organisations are heterogeneous, thus satisfying all external stakeholders is not possible. Yet research of this kind is underpinned by an approach which seeks to improve how external audiences perceive the image of non-profit community organisations, while understanding that changing all perceptions is impossible. Given the dialogic construction of legitimacy in a broader organisational sense (Cowden & Sellnow, 2002; Massey, 2001), non-profit CSOs face significant challenges in creating a legitimate image for two reasons. First, studies of company image espouse the need to develop an organisational identity as a basis to state 'who they are' (Bhattacharya, Gruen, & Ahearne, 2005; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Yet in the context described, non-profit CSOs that receive at least partial funding from a community source maintain a prerogative to obtain legitimacy by catering to community needs (Robinson, 2006).

Second, in a community sport association consisting of 17 clubs and 18,000 people, determining what actions are conducive to being legitimate make the creation of an image that is suitable to all association members problematic. Couple such problems with the limited resources and capacity that non-profit CSOs generally maintain (Cuskelly, 2004; Misener & Doherty, 2009), and the difficulties faced in the development of a legitimate image become evident. Yet conducting research of this nature provides organisations with a mechanism to ascertain how external audiences perceive non-profit CSOs, and whether this reflects the image that it aims to project (cf., Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). From this knowledge

base, at the very least, non-profit CSOs can seek to concentrate image management work in areas in which legitimacy is questioned, and on dimensions which are of key salience to audience members.

6. Conclusions for Theory and Practice

This study has provided understanding of the range of perceptions and identity responses, which can occur in relation to non-profit CSOs. Accordingly, the current research has advanced three contributions. First, variations in individuals' values and beliefs were explained by perceptions of organisational image and identity response. Second, the current research revealed that an interest in key contextual factors increased the likelihood that an individual would react positively or negatively. Third, perceptions of legitimacy varied significantly based on whether perceptions of organisational image were positive, negative or neutral. These three contributions to theory and practice are elucidated, below.

The variation among values and beliefs based upon organisational perceptions and identity response presents a fundamental point of action for sporting organisations. By understanding what individuals value and believe that organisations should deliver, non-profit CSOs have the potential to refine practices to increase alignment with community expectations. In turn, this understanding provides sport organisations with data that inform whether perceptions of organisational legitimacy and image are accurate reflections of current practices. The response to this quandary will determine whether image restoration strategies are warranted (Cowden & Sellnow, 2002) or if the expectation is, in fact, incongruent with the enduring identity of the organisation and should be acknowledged but not actioned (Cardador & Pratt, 2006; Elsbach, 2003).

The relationship uncovered between interest in key contextual factors and positive and negative reactions to CSOs extends previous work. This finding confirms Turner's

(1975) arguments emphasising the importance of understanding the key dimensions that amplify group relevance to individuals. By directing effort to the key dimensions that polarise relevance, CSOs can focus attention on understanding key community values that specifically inform their actions in areas that are more important to external audience members.

Finally, perceptions of legitimacy in relation to shared community values, local players and organisational practices varied significantly based on whether perceptions of organisational image were positive, neutral or negative. While some audience members perceived aspects of the CSO positively, others rated exactly the same issue highly negatively, which supported the notion that people think about the same things differently. In a broader sense the outcomes of our study have indicated that people may distance themselves from non-profit CSOs due to negative perceptions. This said; the context investigated during our study influenced the nature of the image perceptions tested. However, the translation of the legitimacy framework employed in the present study to other contexts should provide a fruitful avenue to extend on the dimensions tested during this study. Yet we emphasise that the contextual circumstances of any non-profit CSO will be of paramount importance in determining how legitimacy is considered by its external audiences.

The potential influence of image perceptions on willingness to be involved with non-profit sport organisations has implications for the study of concepts that are premised on social involvement, such as social capital (Skinner, et al., 2008; Spaaij, 2011). The outcomes of this study indicated that perceptions of image and legitimacy potentially led to negative connotations for sport organisations, possibly reducing individuals' willingness to become involved and thus diminishing the volume of social capital available. If image and legitimacy perceptions lead to reductions in willingness to become involved with sport organisations, studies such as this one should be extended to provide additional understanding of how the networks around sport organisations can be developed. Using approaches alike to that

presented during this article would provide information that can be used to develop the size of the networks that exist around sport organisations if perceptions are managed suitably.

7. Limitations and Future Research

The findings presented here derive from research conducted in relation to one non-profit CSO in one context. Thus, to claim broad-based generalisability from the conclusions drawn is unwarranted, as in line with previous theorising on social identity dynamics and legitimacy, both are social constructions and specific to context (Suchman, 1995; Turner, 1975). Instead, we recommend that future work reassess the findings in other contexts to examine the level of transferability. This research was also limited in three additional ways. First, while this study provided understanding of how identification and apathy explained variation in existing values and beliefs, sport interest, community identification and three legitimacy dimensions, it was unable to do the same for disidentification. As the sample displayed disagreement with the disidentification items, further exploration of the manifestations of this negative identity response were not possible. Second, as this study was conducted with individuals who maintained some involvement in football it did not investigate perceptions and identity responses beyond members of this population. Additional testing in other contexts is required to examine whether these data are transferable. Third, this manuscript sought to extrapolate differences in existing values and beliefs, sport interest, community identification and legitimacy dimensions based on perception of organisational image and identity response. As such, the objective did not focus on modelling the sequence or directional influence of the variables tested.

The agenda for future research into perceptions and identity responses to non-profit CSOs images is diverse and necessary. There are many potential directions, but we concentrate on five areas for development. First, future work should seek to develop

understanding of the broader range of identity responses included in EMOI to external audiences (Elsbach, 1999; Foster & Hyatt, 2007; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). This has the potential to advance the conceptualisation tested in this paper. Second, further work is required to determine whether the absence of disidentification results from measurement error, or individuals deriving insufficient self-concept benefits from disidentifying with non-profit CSOs.

Third, there is a need to understand how negative perceptions develop in relation to sport organisations and to establish the extent to which they are changeable. Longitudinal work tracking consumer perceptions over time would provide an opportunity to explore the efficacy of organisational interventions, which seek to remedy negative organisational responses and perceptions. Fourth, future research should seek to develop a broader understanding of the dimensions of organisational legitimacy, to develop the three dimensions tested here. Such an exploration should be coupled with an examination of the core values that sport organisations use to define their organisational identity (at a strategic organisational mission and vision level) to determine whether they are important to or even recognised by the CSO's audience. Fifth, data is required from other sport contexts to validate these findings. The non-profit CSO context utilised for this study presents a number of nuanced characteristics (e.g. expectations of community service). Data collected in the professional sport context would provide a point of comparison for the findings of this research. Each direction for future research will provide new and important information to improve image and legitimacy perceptions in non-profit CSOs external audiences.

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Table 1

Confirmatory Factor Analysis: descriptive statistics, factor loadings, Cronbach's Alpha and Average Variance Extracted

Dimension of organisation perception and response	Mean (Std. D)	Factor Loading	Alpha	AVE
<i>Identification</i>	1.99 (0.99)		0.94	0.85
When someone criticises [organisation], it feels like a personal insult.	1.96 (1.02)	0.933		
When someone praises [organisation], it feels like a personal compliment.	1.96 (1.04)	0.971		
[organisation] successes are my successes.	2.06 (1.08)	0.858		
<i>Disidentification</i>	1.48 (0.68)		0.84	0.75
When someone praises [organisation], it feels like a personal insult.	1.43 (0.70)	0.814		
When someone criticises [organisation], it feels like a personal compliment.	1.52 (0.77)	0.911		
<i>Shared community values</i>	3.35 (0.99)		0.87	0.70
Plays an important role in the local community	3.34 (1.09)	0.766		
Shares community values	3.34 (0.91)	0.892		
Values its local community	3.36 (0.99)	0.844		
<i>Local players</i>	2.97 (1.06)		0.75	0.61
[organisation] players represent the local community	2.99 (1.04)	0.817		
[organisation] players are actively involved in developing football in the local community	2.95 (1.07)	0.744		
<i>Organisational practices</i>	3.18 (0.96)		0.80	0.67
[organisation] has approachable staff and coaches	3.32 (1.00)	0.805		
[organisation] has fair and transparent trialling procedures	3.04 (0.98)	0.827		
<i>Values & beliefs</i>	2.97 (1.15)		0.94	0.84
I have values and beliefs about the delivery of football in the community that have affected my perceptions of [organisation].	3.04 (1.19)	0.904		
I have values and beliefs about football that have affected my perceptions of [organisation].	2.88 (1.23)	0.859		
I have values and beliefs about football development in the community that have affected my perceptions of [organisation].	3.01 (1.24)	0.983		
<i>Community identity</i>	3.48 (0.99)		0.93	0.79
I feel strong ties with other members of the local community	3.47 (1.08)	0.909		
Being a local community member is an important part of who I am	3.62 (1.07)	0.801		

I identify strongly with other members of the local community	3.44 (1.09)	0.936		
I feel a sense of solidarity with other members of the local community	3.40 (1.07)	0.899		
<i>Sport interest</i>	3.55 (1.27)		0.85	0.75
I would always choose to watch football instead of other sports	3.28 (1.39)	0.941		
Football is my favourite sport	3.81 (1.33)	0.789		

Table 2

Correlation matrix for latent constructs

	ID	DISID	COMM ID	SPORT	PRAC	COMMVAL	VAL	PLAYERS
ID	1.00							
DISID	.43	1.00						
COMM ID	.08	-.01	1.00					
SPORT	.29	.11	-.09	1.00				
PRAC	.33	-.12	-.03	.08	1.00			
COMMVAL	.35	-.03	.03	.10	.81	1.00		
VAL	.23	.13	.12	.28	-.19	-.09	1.00	
PLAYERS	.44	.11	.02	.05	.72	.80	-.03	1.00

Table 3

MANOVA and descriptive statistics

	Perception of org' image			Identity response	
	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Apathetic	Identified
	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>M</i> (SD)
H1 a, b Existing values and beliefs	3.50* (1.17)	2.75 (1.11)	2.97 (1.12)	2.85* (1.19)	3.36* (.91)
H2 a, b: Community identification	3.64 (.90)	3.35 (1.05)	3.54 (.96)	3.47 (1.02)	3.52 (.87)
H2 a, b: Sport interest	3.50 (1.21)	3.33* (1.05)	3.75 (1.22)	3.42* (1.30)	3.94* (1.09)
H3 a, b: Shared community values	2.33* (.86)	3.20* (.77)	3.73* (.77)	3.17* (.92)	3.72* (.82)
H3 a, b: Local players	1.91* (.84)	2.44* (.80)	3.14* (.89)	2.48* (.91)	3.27* (.89)
H3 a, b: Organisational practices	2.18* (.86)	3.11* (.68)	3.60* (.78)	3.06* (.87)	3.56* (.90)

Note: *Significantly different at $p < .05$.