Sports Team Personality: It’s Not All about Winning!

Ashley Stadler Blank, The Pennsylvania State University
Jörg Koenigstorfer, Technische Universität München
Hans Baumgartner (Advisor), The Pennsylvania State University

Marketing

Thursday, June 4, 2015

20-minute oral presentation
(including questions)

Abstract 2015-006

Brand personality is a highly relevant concept for professional sports teams, because fans are attracted to and support teams that allow them to express themselves. Brand personality is defined as “the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands” (Azoulay and Kapferer 2003, p. 151). While prior studies have applied and adapted Aaker’s (1997) seminal Brand Personality Scale (BPS) in a sports context to measure sports teams personality, these scaling efforts yielded disappointing results (e.g., Braunstein & Ross, 2010; Ross, 2008). Given the uniqueness of the sports market and product (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2014), this is not surprising in that it seems unlikely that a general brand personality scale would be able to capture the sports-specific elements that characterize the personality of professional sports teams. Consequently, as there is still no commonly accepted scale available to study the personality of professional sports teams, we develop and validate the Sports Team Personality Scale (STPS).

Beyond sound psychometric properties, three main criteria guided the development of our proposed STPS. First, the scale should only contain items that refer to human personality traits that are applicable to and relevant for sports teams across a variety of professional sports. Second, the scale should capture the most important dimensions of sports team personality yet be sufficiently compact to encourage practical application. Third, the scale should be able to explain various phenomena related to sports team personality.

To develop and validate the STPS, we carried out a series of mixed-method studies. In a pre-study, we generated a list of potential traits using in-depth, semi-structured interviews (n = 7 avid professional sports fans in the U.S.). In Study 1, we assessed the applicability of these traits using descriptive statistics (n = 216 students in the U.S.). In Study 2, we assessed the dimensionality of the remaining traits using cluster analysis (n = 45 students in the U.S.). In Study 3, we employed exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses to calibrate the STPS (n = 781 students in the U.S.). In Studies 4 and 5, we employed confirmatory factor analysis to validate the STPS (n = 619 sports fans in the U.S. and n = 589 English Premier League fans in England). The final scale includes 18 items that load onto six dimensions: success, talent, entertainment, dedication, admiration, and care. Overall, the STPS demonstrated adequate psychometric properties (e.g., Study 5: $\chi^2(120) = 368.48$, standardized RMSR = .055, RMSEA = .059, CFI = .907, and TLI = .882) across multiple studies and professional sports leagues (EPL, MLB, NBA, NFL, and NHL).

To illustrate how researchers and practitioners can use the STPS to study issues related to sports team personality, we examined the perceptual similarities and differences between teams within a league using the STPS as well as the relationship between the STPS and fans' identification with their favorite team in Study 5. To map league structure, we computed individual-level factor scores based on the six-dimension confirmatory factor analysis solution, averaged the factor scores by team, calculated a Euclidean distance measure between all pairs of teams based on the scores of each team on the six dimensions of the STPS, and performed a metric multidimensional scaling analysis on the matrix of pairwise distances. Results demonstrated that a two-dimensional solution fit the data best, with a badness of fit statistic (i.e., Kruskal's stress formula 1) of .02 and a correlation between estimated and fitted distances of 1.00. To interpret the two dimensions, we correlated the coordinates of the 20 teams with the factor scores of the six dimensions of the STPS as well as team standings and the total number of points earned in the season. The first dimension represented team performance, and a team’s placement on this dimension was strongly related to success, talent, and entertainment (this interpretation is also supported by the objective performance measures). The second dimension represented the non-performance aspects of the team, and a team’s placement on the second dimension was strongly related to dedication, admiration, and care. (Note that a team’s placement along one dimension was completely unrelated to its placement on the other dimension, i.e., $r = .00$.)
To examine the relationship between the STPS and team identification, we ran a factor analysis on the factor scores for the six dimensions of the STPS. Two second-order factors accounted for 93% of the common variance among the six first-order factors: success, talent, and entertainment loaded primarily on the first factor and dedication, admiration, and care loaded primarily on the second factor. These results are consistent with the performance and non-performance dimensions obtained in the multidimensional scaling analysis. Next, we used the two factors as predictors of team identification. Because the data are hierarchical in structure (i.e., respondents are nested within teams), we used a mixed model where the performance and non-performance scores predicted team identification at the individual respondent level and the team-level performance and non-performance scores predicted team identification at the team level. Results demonstrated that the performance factor had no effect on team identification at the individual level (estimate = .063, t(567) = –1.30, n.s.); however, there was a strong effect of the non-performance factor on team identification at the individual level (estimate = .218, t(567) = 4.88, p < .0001). These results indicate that the non-performance dimension (i.e., dedication, admiration, and care) is a more important source of team identification for fans than the performance dimension (i.e., success, talent, and entertainment). (The effects of the team-level dimensions on team identification were not significant.)

Taken together, these findings contribute to both theory and practice in several ways. From a theoretical standpoint, this study develops a new sports team personality scale. Results demonstrated that the STPS can be used to adequately capture the personality of professional sports teams, create linear combinations of the six first-order factors to assist with the interpretation of results, and explain various phenomena related to sports team personality. From a managerial standpoint, the STPS can provide managers with a competitive analysis to help address positioning issues as well as isolate the dimensions of sports team personality that managers should focus on to enhance marketing outcomes.