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Fans exhibit pride towards their favorite sports teams in numerous ways. They celebrate the achievements of their team, both past and present, don the logo and colors of their favorite team on game day, and observe and engage in numerous traditions that they associate with being a die-hard fan of the team. For individuals, feelings of pride have been linked to the maintenance and enhancement of one’s self-identity (Brown & Marshall, 2001; Fischer & Tangney, 1995). Research has shown that positive psychological benefits can spawn from the success of an outside entity (i.e. a sports team) that has personal relevance to the individual (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, & Sen, 2012).

This study is one of the first attempts to develop a multidimensional conceptualization of sport fans’ feelings of pride. By examining the multidimensional nature of pride feelings, the current study extends previous sport management research that has focused mainly on unidimensional pride concepts such as community pride (Funk, Ridinger, & Moorman, 2004) and pride in place (Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, & Exler, 2008). Also, it provides empirical evidence of the role an often-encountered sport-related emotion (pride feelings) plays in two psychological processes underlying vertical self-team connection (also called team identification) as well as horizontal communal-team connection (also called fan community identification; Yoshida, Gordon, Heere, & James, 2015). This study aids in the understanding of how emotions impact desirable marketing outcomes as well as adds to the existing body of literature regarding how we can foster identification towards a team as well as among a fan community. Given the limitations of previous research, the purposes of this study are to (1) develop a multidimensional conceptualization of sport fans’ pride feelings and (2) examine the relationship between sport fans’ feelings of pride and identification toward their favorite team as well as their fan community. In the present research, two studies were conducted to achieve these goals.

The objectives of Study 1 were to (1) conceptualize the multidimensional construct of pride feelings among sport fans, (2) generate survey items for the proposed dimensions, and (3) provide evidence of reliability and validity for the proposed scale. Based on the low and high levels of conspicuous and contagious pride (Decrop & Debraix, 2010), we further developed a typology of sport fans’ feelings of pride and identified four objects of pride processions: logo, home stadium, fight songs, and glory of the past. Each of the four dimensions was measured with a three-item scale that captured self-esteem, self-regard, and pride (Laverie, Kleine, & Kleine, 2002). The wording was modified to reflect the fan’s point of view. Study 1 was conducted at 2014 season games of two major professional sport leagues in Japan: the Japan Professional Football League (J. League; n = 328) and Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB; n = 252).

To examine the psychometric properties of our measures, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using LISREL 8.8. In both settings, the comparative fit index (CFI) and non-normed fit index (NNFI) were greater than the cutoff point of .90 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) were smaller than the required cut-off point of .08 (Hu and Bentler, 1999). In both settings, the CR values for the four dimensions were greater than the recommended cutoff point of .60 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). A further assessment of convergent and discriminant validity was conducted by an examination of AVE values. The computed AVE values for the proposed dimensions ranged from .81 to .92 in the soccer setting and from .79 to .85 in the baseball setting, providing evidence of convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In both settings, the AVE values were greater than any squared correlations between all pairs of the constructs. Therefore, evidence of discriminant validity was found.
Study 2 examined how of the proposed pride dimensions (i.e. team logo, home stadium, past glory, fight songs) impacted the significance of different role identities (how consumers identify with the team and fan community). Besides the measures for the four dimensions of pride from Study 1, additional items for measuring mediator and outcome variables were included. A three-item scale for measuring each of team prestige and fan community prestige was adapted from Hur, Kim, and Woo’s (2014) reputation scale. Team distinctiveness and fan community distinctiveness were measured with a three-item scale adapted from the organizational distinctiveness scale used in Jones and Volpe (2010) and Carlson, Donovan, and Cumiskey (2009). To measure team identification and fan community identification, we adapted items used to measure these constructs from previous sport management research (Trail & James, 2010; Yoshida, Gordon, Heere, & James, 2015). Study 2 was conducted at a 2015 regular season game of a J. League Division 1 team based in a large sized city in eastern Japan (n = 412).

An examination of the hypothesized relationships was achieved through structural equation modeling (SEM) using LISREL 8.8. The hypothesized structural model demonstrated a reasonable fit to the data (CFI = .96; NNFI = .95; RMSEA = .099; SRMR = .126). With respect to direct and indirect effects, logo (gamma = .23, p < .05) had a positive effect on team prestige while the paths from fight songs to team prestige (gamma = .16, p < .05), team distinctiveness (gamma = .25, p < .01), fan community prestige (gamma = .26, p < .01), and fan community distinctiveness (gamma = .26, p < .01) were positive and significant. Further, the findings indicated that glory of the past had positive effects on fan community prestige (gamma = .26, p < .01) and fan community distinctiveness (gamma = .21, p < .01). The mediation analysis was performed using Mplus version 7.31. A bootstrap estimation using 5000 resamples revealed that (1) the indirect effects of logo (gamma×beta = .04, p < .05) and fight songs (gamma×beta = .03, p < .05) on team identification through team prestige, (2) the indirect effect of glory of the past on team identification through team distinctiveness (gamma×beta = .01, p < .05), the indirect effects of fight songs (gamma×beta = .16, p < .01) and glory of the past (gamma×beta = .16, p < .01) on fan community identification through fan community prestige, and (4) the indirect effects of fight songs (gamma×beta = .06, p < .05) and glory of the past (gamma×beta = .05, p < .05) on fan community identification through fan community distinctiveness. In addition to these indirect effects, the direct effects of logo (gamma = .22, p < .05) and glory of the past on team identification (gamma = .14, p < .05) were positive and significant. Therefore, the effects of logo and glory of the past on team identification were partially mediated by team prestige and team distinctiveness respectively. On the other hand, the indirect effects of fight songs and glory of the past on fan community identification were fully mediated by both fan community prestige and fan community distinctiveness. Also, it is important to note that the impact of fight songs on team identification was fully mediated by team prestige.

This study makes a worthwhile contribution to theory and practice. A multidimensional model of pride feelings in sport was constructed and validated. This marks one of the first attempts in the field of sport management to achieve such an objective. Additionally, the influence of pride feelings on different role identities was determined as well. Practitioners should consider engaging in content marketing that stokes pride feelings (utilizing the team colors/logo & stadium) among its’ fan base. This in turn could influence how highly they identify with not only the team but also the fan community where they hold membership.