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Are They Wearing Their Pride on Their Sleeve? Examining the Impact of Team and University Identification upon Brand Equity

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Abstract

This study examined the effectiveness of sportswear companies' sponsorship of intercollegiate athletic departments, and the subsequent effects on the students of the university. The value of these sponsorship contracts has grown exponentially, with new contracts averaging $6 million a year per institution (Kish, 2014). However, little research has been devoted to the impact of the relationship between sportswear brands and university students, and it is uncertain what the return on investment of these sponsorships are to the apparel companies, other than media exposure. To examine how effective these sponsorships were, the researchers asked students about their identification with a college basketball team, the university itself, and conducted a linear regression analysis to understand the effect of these identification processes on the brand equity of the sportswear sponsor. Results were not statistically significant, signifying that team and university identification did not impact sportswear brand equity.

Keywords: brand equity, team identification, intercollegiate athletics, sponsorship, sportswear

Introduction

College athletic departments have transformed into large commercial sport organizations, and many entities are taking notice (Southall, Southall, & Dwyer, 2009). Today, NCAA Division I college athletics generates $7 billion in revenue, and in 2014 alone, 44.3 million fans attended NCAA Division I FBS football games and events (Sport Business Research Network, 2014). Media coverage of college sports has grown significantly as major media corporations acquire exclusive rights to games and tournaments. Corporations have capitalized on the increased media exposure, and are using college athletics as a platform to market their brand and products. In particular, sportswear companies recognize that college athletics are a powerful vessel for brand exposure to a loyal and leverageable consumer base (Covell, 2001).

The ability to leverage an individual's fandom towards their perception of a sportswear brand could have long-lasting profit implications for companies in a competitive industry, as fans become loyal to the brand's products, and become repeat purchasers (O'Keeffe & Zawadzka, 2011). Much like the growth of the sport industry, the sportswear and footwear industries have seen changes. Historically, collegiate athletic departments would purchase uniforms and footwear from vendors that sold products by adidas, Nike, or Reebok. Beginning in the late 1990s the relationship changed, and large Division I athletic departments no longer pay for their uniforms, apparel, and footwear (Rovell, 2015). In fact, adidas, Nike, and Under Armour provide their contracted NCAA Division I universities with an average of $1.7 million per year in cash and equipment, with many contracts lasting 10 years or more (Kish, 2014). The University of Notre Dame, University of Michigan, and UCLA hold the largest sportswear contracts, valued at $9 million, $8.2 million, and $7.5 million, respectively (Kish, 2014). This begs the question as to what companies receive in return for these large investments.

The goal for each brand is to "own" the campus through contracts with the university's athletic department, and exhibit this ownership to two distinct target groups (Kish, 2013). The first group exists of those people who are not directly affiliated with the university as student or faculty/staff and follow the college's athletics teams because they have an affinity for the teams, or the university they represent. As they are not on campus, their perception towards the sponsor might be predicated on the media exposure the sponsorship receives (i.e., through games, interviews, etc.). The vast exposure of college athletics gives sportswear companies access to millions of stakeholders, and the opportunity to influence their consumer behavior. The "official outfitter" status gives sportswear companies "the kind of ubiquitous exposure that drives an astounding level of consumer spending and loyalty" (Kish, 2013).

The second group consists of students, whose affiliation with the university might be stronger and who not only receive information about the sponsorship through the media, but also directly on campus. The contracts between universities and sportswear companies allow the latter access to university bookstores, athletic facilities, recreation centers, and union buildings. While this second group is much smaller, it still represents a considerable consumer base and one that, because of its strong affiliation with the university, might be more likely to build an attachment with the sponsor of its favorite college sport team. With constant exposure to these athletic teams, students of these universities build and strengthen their attachment to these teams.

These sentiments have been examined in the field of sport marketing through the concepts of team and university identification, which are grounded in social identity theory (Clopton, 2008; Heere & James, 2007). Through the sponsorship activity, the assumption is that students might also consciously, or subconsciously, bond to the brand that supports and clothes their favorite university teams. Yet, empirical research of this second group of consumers is missing. While sportswear companies spend millions of dollars becoming sponsors of university athletic programs, there remains a lack of evidence that validates the overall magnitude of these expenditures. Because of this, an in-depth examination of the intricacies of sport sponsorship relationships among college students is warranted.

These sport apparel brands are competing in a highly concentrated marketplace where most companies make comparable products that are difficult to distinguish from their competitors. Yet, the industry is also marked by responsive consumers, who once they are loyal to a particular company or product, will continue to make repeat purchases for a considerable portion of their lifetime (Tong & Hawley, 2009). Nevertheless, very little research and inquiry has examined the role that these sportswear brands hold in the collegiate sport paradigm, and their subsequent connection to university athletic departments and university students. To illustrate, adidas holds the rights to the three largest sportswear sponsorship contracts in college sports, each lasting more than six years and worth upwards of $7 million per year for each university (Kish, 2014). It would seem that an important target market for this sponsorship activity would be the students at the universities they are sponsoring, representing a consumer base that can be as large as 60,000 highly desirable consumers. Many large NCAA Division I institutions represent a large group of highly desirable potential consumers, whose attitudes toward the sportswear brand can be shaped over a four-year period. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine how students' perception of the university and university basketball team at a large Midwestern university affects the sport apparel brand equity. Such a relationship would provide credence to the effectiveness of the sponsorship, extending it beyond mere exposure to a local or national sports television viewership.

Literature Review

Brand Equity

Brand equity is a critical issue among sport marketers, as both the demand and popularity of the sport industry has increased on a global scale (Keller, Parameswaran, & Jacob, 2011). Keller (1993) defined brand equity as "…the marketing effects uniquely attributable to the brand…that would not occur if the same product or service did not have that name" (p. 1). Brand equity not only provides an interesting vehicle for scholars to study the interaction of consumers and their decision making, but also for firms and companies to understand the power and effectiveness of their brands as they are observed in the consumer marketplace (Keller, 1993; Mortanges & Riel, 2003; Torres & Tribo, 2011). When a firm or company is able to understand the value and positive characteristics of its brand, it gains a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

The outcome of increased brand equity has been considered a positive outcome of sport sponsorship (Cornwell, Roy, & Steinard, 2001). The use of sport sponsorship by corporations as a marketing communication strategy has been a direct result of corporations attempting to leverage the sponsorship into brand equity building opportunities (Cornwell et al., 2001). Sport sponsorship can be a key component of brand equity generation, and primary among the sponsor's objectives (Henseler, Wilson, & Westberg, 2011). Brand equity has also been seen as a significant positive predictor of purchasing intentions and greater consumer preference (Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, & Donthu, 1995). This competitive advantage becomes incredibly pertinent in markets and industries where the competitors make and sell products that have similar characteristics and benefits (Aaker, 2009). The value of the brand has important implications upon the well-being of the consumer as well. Brands, much like teams and universities, can be used by consumers to create a positive construction of their self-identity (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). By choosing brands that project particular image associations (e.g., sporty, high fashion) consumers seek to project certain perceptions about themselves to the society that surrounds them (Wu & Chalip, 2013).

While scholars have examined the construct of brand equity in relation to sport organizations much of this research has focused on the examination of brand equity of an individual sport organization (Ross, 2006). Consequently, a gap exists in the literature that explicitly examines the role sport fandom plays in fostering brand equity of sport-based products. Congruently, what is also missing from the literature is a focus on how sponsorship can build brand equity within sport organizations. The authors of this research hope to further the understanding of brand equity as it relates to ancillary sport-based brands and sport sponsors.

Sport Sponsorship of Collegiate Athletics Programs

As the business of sport has grown, the relationship between large corporations and sport organizations has become increasingly intertwined (Stotlar, 2000). Sport organizations require more revenue than generated from ticket sales and concessions. Fostering sponsorship relationships between large corporations gives sport organizations an opportunity to increase their budgets. Intercollegiate athletics in particular has developed large-scale sponsorship relationships as collegiate sports have become more commercialized (Dees, Bennett, & Villegas, 2008). Increasingly, collegiate sport organizations have become a target for large corporations as they try to build relationships with highly vested fans as a primary target to foster brand awareness and enhance brand image (White & Irwin, 1996). The sponsorship of intercollegiate athletics is unique in that corporations have the opportunity to leverage the identification fans have with a university's athletic team, as well as their identification with the university (Heere, Walker, Yoshida, Ko, Jordan, & James, 2011; Madrigal, 2001).

At its heart, sport sponsorship is a tool for marketing communication for corporations, and allows them to separate themselves as distinct entities in their industry. In a media-saturated marketplace, sponsorship enables an organization to hold an advantage among its competitors (Meenaghan, 2001). However, sport sponsorships are not simple relationships, they require strategies from the sponsor to activate and leverage the sponsorship into increased awareness of the relationship with sport partners (Papadimitriou & Apostolopoulou, 2009). Activation strategies allow sponsors to leverage the fandom and identity of the fans of the sport organization they sponsor into awareness and interest for the sponsor's brand (Delia, 2014). Strategies such as signage, advertisements, giveaways, and social media promotions help to cement the sponsorship relationship in the minds of the consumer (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2014). Through these activities sponsors are able to create a competitive advantage for themselves in the marketplace (Papadimitriou & Apostolopoulou, 2009). The use of activation and leveraging activities help to more clearly link the relationship of the sponsor and the sport organization in the consumers' minds, and through this the sponsor benefits from an increased brand image (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999).

Scholars have analyzed the realm of intercollegiate sport sponsorship from several facets. Pitts and Slattery (2004) examined the variable of *time* and its role in developing brand awareness for the sponsor. The authors found that only a small change in brand awareness occurred among season ticket holders when asked to identify sponsors of a university football team, showcasing that time does have a positive impact on the sponsor's image to fans; however, the impact may not be as strong as the sponsor desires. Tomasini, Frye, and Stotlar (2004) assessed corporate sponsorship in intercollegiate athletic programs adding affirmation to the increasing role of large-scale sponsor relationships in intercollegiate sport. They found the sponsorship objectives of visibility, increased sales, advertising, and promotional opportunities to be key components in college sport sponsorships.

Understanding that each individual sponsorship relationship may have different objectives provides a basis to understand that the measure of sponsorship effectiveness between corporations may be different. Dees, Bennett, and Villegas (2008) examined sponsorship effectiveness within an elite Division I college football program, and found that goodwill of the corporation had the largest effect on consumer support. Goodwill, as described by Dees et al. (2008), represents any actions of the sponsor to make positive contributions to the university or its athletic teams. The sportswear sponsorship relationships examined in this research showcase sportswear sponsors providing a semblance of this goodwill, as the official suppliers of the products and equipment that help student-athletes achieve success in athletic competition.

Within the context of collegiate sports, it is likely that the affinity that students have with their university and with the teams of the university affects how they perceive the sport apparel brand that sponsors their college sport teams. To examine this affinity, team identification and university identification might be useful in developing a greater understanding of the factors that influence sport sponsorships in creating brand equity perceptions. In this case, the analysis of team and university identification provides a unique lens from which to examine the effectiveness of sportswear sponsorship of collegiate sports, and further the literature in understanding the factors that influence sponsorship effectiveness.

Social Identity Theory and Sponsorship Effectiveness

Social identity theory is a broad-based concept that focuses on the varying group identities of the individual and assumes that part of the self-concept is defined by our belonging to social groups (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Tajfel, 1978). Membership and identification with these groups allows individuals to assimilate with like individuals and differentiate themselves from those not sharing similar characteristics (Heere, Walker, Gibson, Thapa, Geldenhuys, & Coetzee, 2013). Underwood, Bond, and Baer (2001) were among the first to note the relationship between social identities (i.e., team identity, university identity) and offered a model of how to increase brand equity through social identities. Yet, since their focus was solely on sport teams, they did not focus on the extent to which social identification with the team would spill over to other organizations, such as sportswear sponsors.

Team identification research in sport management has focused on the impact on self-esteem, consumer behavior, certainty, commitment, and satisfaction (Dimmock & Grove, 2006; Heere & James, 2007; Heere et al., 2011; Mahoney, Madrigal, & Howard, 2000; Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Wann & Pierce, 2005). Team identification has implications for consumer behavior and has been found to positively influence merchandise consumption, media consumption, and attendance (Heere et al., 2011). The role of identification and sport sponsorship recall has been examined previously in the context of NASCAR. Levin, Joiner, and Cameron (2001) found that identified fans of NASCAR were more susceptible to recalling the brands of the sport league's sponsors. However, the authors measured sponsorship recall of the sport sponsors, and not brand equity. While the role of identification in fostering sponsorship recall creates a valuable understanding within the sport sponsorship literature, the scope of the current study is to further the understanding of identification and sport sponsorship, and its impact in fostering brand equity.

Social identification is a powerful process on many college campuses as well. Through participation in various social groups and attendance at university events, notably sporting events, students are able build a sense of identity with those groups they view themselves as members of, and are able to more clearly define those groups with which they are not (Clopton, 2008; Heere, 2007; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Students are voluntarily making a commitment to attend an institution for a considerable length of time in order to receive a permanent recognition or achievement in the form of a degree or certificate from that respective institution. Because of this engendered effort and expectation, the organizational identification processes of university students has the potential to be made at a more permanent level (Bass, Gordon, & Kim, 2012). This is because university students are often surrounded by images, musings, information, and influence from their university on a daily basis (Clopton, 2009).

Universities provide a unique and ever-present environment for the examination of individuals fostering social identities. Much like sport organizations, universities and colleges represent more than just a collection of administrators, faculty, and students. The symbiotic relationship that exists between athletics and academics in American higher education institutions provides both intricate and powerful potentialities to strengthen the identification of an individual (Bass et al., 2012). Feelings of community coupled with the social benefits garnered from team and university identification provide impetus for their importance and continual existence in the realm of the sport management literature. With particular relevance to this research is the focus on the university student as a consumer, and the role that students' group identifications, as both a member of the university and as a fan of their university's athletic teams, holds in influencing their consumer behavior and brand perceptions.

As discussed in the literature review, previous scholars have examined the relationship between brand equity and social identity (Underwood et al., 2001), and have found that identified fans of a professional sport league are more susceptible to the goals of sponsors' marketing efforts than those individuals who are not identified with the sport league (Levin et al., 2001). The authors seek to bridge the gap between these two strands of knowledge, and further the literature that examines the role of team identification to influence sponsorship effectiveness by fostering sponsor brand equity. Thus, the scholars posit the following hypothesis:

H1: The level of identification of students with the college basketball team will have a positive impact on the brand equity of adidas.

If we are to believe that it is the objective of apparel companies to "own the campus" (Kish, 2013), we should test to what extent these apparel companies are successful in building a relationship with students who might not identify with the college sport teams, but do identify with the university. If these companies are successful in infiltrating the entire campus, students who identify with the university might develop an attachment to the apparel company because they believe there is a direct affiliation between the apparel sponsor and the university, without the intervention of the sports teams. For instance, most apparel companies have a presence in the universities' bookstores, and sell a large line of merchandise that displays a direct affiliation to the university overall, but not to the athletic team. Therefore, we could posit that the level of identification students have with the university itself might have a direct positive effect on the brand equity of adidas. Thus, the scholars posit the following hypothesis:

H2: The level of identification of students with the university will have a positive impact on the brand equity of adidas.

Imperative to this research is to investigate if adidas' investment in a large Midwestern university's athletic department to portray them visually as an adidas school has any implications on the way in which students at that university view adidas in the sportswear marketplace. By examining the effect of team identification and university identification on brand equity, the researchers aim to discover how far-reaching the image of being an adidas school has spread and what this means to students and their views of adidas' brand.

Additionally, even if individuals do not identify with the university (e.g., graduate students often identify with their undergraduate institution), they might still have a positive perception of the university, based on the prestige of the institution. Previous researchers have found that universities with a more prestigious image were able to garner greater support of the institution (Cameron & Ulrich, 1986; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Previous sport management researchers have posited perceived organizational prestige, as a separate construct from identification with the university and its athletic teams (Clopton & Finch, 2012), and within the context of education, one equally powerful to the concept of social identity in shaping individuals' behavior (Alves & Raposo, 2010). Following this logic, the authors posit a third hypothesis to examine the influence of perceived organizational prestige on brand equity:

H3: The level of perceived organizational prestige of students of the university will have a positive impact on the brand equity of adidas.

The implications can have far-reaching profitability possibilities for adidas or other sportswear brands that sponsor sport organizations. These proposed hypotheses are displayed in Figure 1.

Methods

Research Design

For the current study, students from a single NCAA Division I Midwestern university from a major athletic conference were selected as the sample. This particular university's athletic department also holds the second-largest sportswear contract with adidas in the realm of college athletics, valued at $6.375 million per year (Kish, 2014). The chosen university is home to a very prominent men's college basketball program that has had a great deal of historical success, and at the time of this sample selection the men's basketball team had been selected to compete in the NCAA tournament.

The data collection opened during the conference postseason tournament, which the men's team won, and was awarded a subsequent number one seed in the NCAA tournament. The data collection remained open throughout the tournament, and closed after the tournament's conclusion. The men's basketball team progressed to the Sweet Sixteen round of the tournament, during which adidas released several limited edition apparel and uniform items celebrating the success of the men's basketball team. These items were received with mixed results by popular media (Sanburn, 2013). However, they did provide adidas with active opportunities for sponsorship activation among a national television audience.

Sample

Participants for the study were selected using the public access records of the chosen university with the determination that each individual selected was classified as a student (N = 1,100). Public access records were used in this case in effort to obtain a random sample of the student population. Once the data were collected, email addresses were uploaded into an

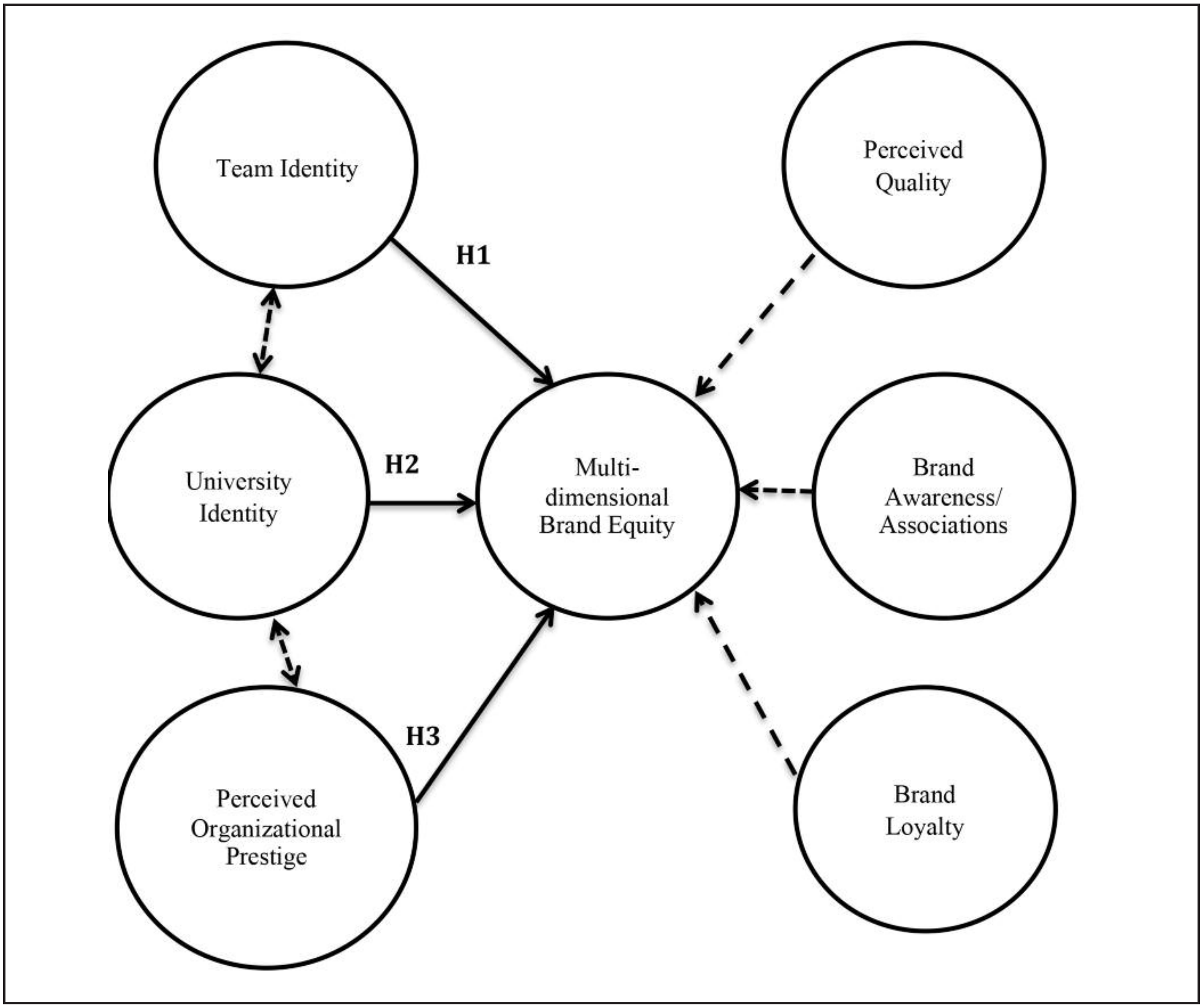

Figure 1. Hypothesized variable relationships chart.

online survey system for dissemination. Of the surveys loaded into the online dissemination platform, 85% (*N* = 936) were sent successfully, the other email requests bounced. Of those 936 students who received the email, 190 students filled out the survey, for a response rate of 20.3%. Undergraduate, graduate, male, and female students were part of the sample.

Instrumentation Measures

To measure the concepts of team identification and university identification, Wann and Branscombe's (1993) Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) and Mael and Ashforth's (1992) study of organizational identification and perceived organizational prestige in university settings were administered. The scales posit question items rated on a Likert-scale format with end-points at 6 (Strongly Agree) and 1 (Strongly Disagree).[1] The SSIS is a one-dimensional scale, used to assess team identification as a single construct, and contained seven items. The authors incorporated this scale to limit the number of items on the survey instrument in an attempt to increase electronic responses (Sheehan, 2001). While multidimensional scales might be preferential measures of team identity (Dimmock, Grove, & Ecklund, 2005; Heere & James, 2007), the authors believed for the purposes of this study a one-dimensional scale would allow for enough predictive strength to analyze the direct effect of team and university identification upon brand equity. The SSIS had an average mean score of 4.99 ($\sigma = 1.31$) with a maximum of 6.00.

For similar reasons, the one-dimensional university identification and one-dimensional perceived organizational prestige scales of Mael and Ashforth (1992) were chosen over other multidimensional measures (Heere et al., 2011). Mael and Ashforth's (1992) university identification and perceived organizational prestige scales have been widely used and tested for reliability and validity (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Both scales were adapted in a manner to fit the scope of the current study with the university identification scale consisting of four items, and perceived organizational prestige scale consisting of four items. The scales had mean scores of 4.72 ($\sigma = 1.07$) for organizational identification and 4.83 ($\sigma = 0.57$) for perceived organizational prestige, each with a maximum of 6.00. Each of the scales were found to be internally consistent, with Cronbach's alpha scores ranging from 0.864 to 0.959, indicating internal consistency (Lance, Butts, & Michels, 2006).

To measure the concept of brand equity, Yoo and Donthu's (2001) Multidimensional and Overall Brand Equity Scale was used. The scale has been widely used across disciplines, and provides a thorough examination of the factors that influence consumer-based brand equity. Question items measured the constructs of perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand awareness/associations. While the scale is deemed to be multidimensional, Yoo and Donthu propose that the items and constructs can be added up to an overall score, allowing for more simplified data analysis methods. The resulting data showed means of 4.77 ($\sigma = 0.83$) for perceived quality, 3.51 ($\sigma = 0.70$) for brand loyalty, 5.26 ($\sigma = 0.82$) for brand awareness/associations, and 4.66 ($\sigma = 0.60$) for multidimensional brand equity, all with a maximum of 6.00. Again, the scales resulted in Cronbach's alpha scores ranging from 0.855 to 0.936, which is deemed acceptable (Lance et al., 2006). Question items and the descriptive statistics for each scale used in the study are presented in Table 1.

Analysis of Data

To analyze the data for the proposed hypothesis, means values were calculated for the constructs analyzed in the study. Following the guidelines of Yoo and Donthu (2001), a linear regression analysis was calculated using multidimensional brand equity as the dependent construct with team identification, university identification, and perceived organizational prestige used as predictors. In case the hypotheses were not supported, the authors planned to conduct follow-up linear regression analyses for each separate brand equity construct to examine if the independent variables were able to explain variance in one of the separate dimensions. While a brand equity construct such as loyalty might be hard to affect, the other two dimensions of brand equity might be more easily affected by the attitudes of the students towards the team and the university. While positive evidence of an increase in brand awareness/associations or perceived quality is not sufficient to make the claim that the brand equity of the sport apparel company is increasing, it might indicate that at a lower level, it does influence how students perceive the brand. For each regression equation, team identification, university identification, and perceived organizational prestige were used as independent variables.

Results

Examining the regression analysis reveals pertinent implications to the proposed hypothesis presented in this research. The first regression used multidimensional brand equity as the dependent variable with team identification, university identification, and perceived organizational prestige as independent variables. In this instance team identification ($p = 0.753$), university identification ($p = 0.338$), and perceived organizational prestige ($p = 0.471$) were not statistically significant predictors of multidimensional brand equity. The next step was to examine if team identification, university identification, and perceived organizational prestige had an effect on one of the separate brand equity constructs. The three regression analyses calculated to examine the individual brand equity constructs as dependent variables with team identification, university identification, and perceived organizational prestige as independent variables each yielded results that were not statistically significant (Table 2). While the linear regression analyses did not produce any statistically significant results in relation to the hypothesized variables, the lack of significance is cause for further discussion.

Discussion and Implications

Discussion

Through recent sponsorship agreements, sportswear companies provide evidence that they are committed to increasing their visibility among high-profile college athletics (Kish, 2014), and are spending to own the campus (Kish, 2013). The five highest contract values average $6.405 million per year, with each lasting an excess of five years. In a highly competitive industry whose products can be deemed substitutes for one another, creating points of attachment with potential consumers has long-term competitive advantage implications (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005).

The results of the current study, however, provide evidence that adidas' sponsorship expenditure did not directly translate to sponsor brand equity among the respondents. While both team and university identification mean scores were high, these did not translate to high brand equity perceptions of adidas. The data collected for this study were gathered at a time when the university's most prominent athletic program was experiencing a period of heightened success, and team identification was in all likelihood at its height (see

Table 1
Scale Items and Descriptive Statistics

Question Item	Cronbach's α	Mean	SD
Team Identification (Wann & Branscombe, 1993)	**0.959**	**4.84**	**1.32**
[University name] basketball is very important to me.		5.00	1.31
I strongly see myself as a fan of the [university name] basketball team.		5.20	1.26
My friends and acquaintances see me as a fan of the [university name] basketball team.		5.00	1.41
During the season I closely follow the [university name] basketball team via TV, Internet, social media, or newspaper.		4.79	1.54
Being a fan of [university name] basketball is very important to me.		4.77	1.53
I dislike [university name] basketball's greatest rivals.		4.48	1.59
I often display the [university name] basketball team's name or insignia at my place of work, where I live, or on my clothing.		4.61	1.63
University Identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1992)	**0.864**	**4.70**	**1.00**
I am very interested in what others think about [university name].		4.63	1.16
When I talk about [university name], I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'.		5.06	1.16
[University name's] successes are my successes.		4.47	1.23
When someone praises the [university name], it feels like a personal complement.		4.64	1.21
Perceived Organizational Prestige (Mael & Ashforth, 1992)	**0.733**	**4.83**	**0.57**
People in the community think highly of the [university name].		5.42	0.65
[University name] is considered one of the best schools in the region.		5.31	0.73
People from other schools in the region look down at the [university name].		4.01	1.25
The [university name] is looked upon as a prestigious university to attend.		4.57	1.02
Multidimensional Brand Equity (Yoo & Donthu, 2001)	**0.849**	**4.67**	**0.59**
Perceived Quality			
Adidas is of high quality.		4.80	0.91
The likelihood that adidas is reliable is very high.		4.84	0.86
The likely quality of adidas is extremely high.		4.65	1.01
The likelihood that adidas would be functional is very high.		4.92	0.86
Adidas must be of very good quality.		4.66	1.02
Adidas appears to of very poor quality. (R)		4.76	1.04
Brand Awareness/Associations			
I know what adidas looks like.		5.57	0.80
I can recognize adidas among other competing brands.		5.47	0.89
I am aware of adidas.		5.60	0.71
Some characteristics of adidas come to mind quickly.		5.00	1.16
I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of adidas.		5.43	1.01
I have difficulty imagining adidas in my mind. (R)		5.13	1.14
Brand Loyalty			
I consider myself to be loyal to adidas.		3.04	1.42
Adidas would be my first choice.		2.70	1.41
I will not buy other brands if adidas is available at the store.		4.79	1.20

average score of 4.99 on a 6-point Likert scale). Still, the results were not statistically significant. Even when team identification, university identification, and perceived organizational prestige were used to explain variance in each of the separate brand equity components, no significance was detected.

Previous researchers have found that team identification plays a vital role in the lives of college students (Clopton, 2008, 2009). With this, it would seem an intuitive argument that the higher the level of team identification a college students exhibits, the more likely that individual will connect with all aspects of the university's athletic teams, notably their official sportswear provider. This is based upon reports from previous researchers that team identification influences sport consumer behavior (Heere, 2007; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2005). Sport sponsorship, too, has been found to increase the awareness of and attitudes

Table 2
Regression Statistics

Multidimensional Brand Equity as Dependent Variable				
Variable	**B**	**SE B**	**β**	**Significance (p)**
Team Identity	-0.011	0.034	-0.024	0.753
University Identity	-0.047	0.049	-0.079	0.338
Perceived Organizational Prestige	0.061	0.084	0.058	0.471
Perceived Quality as Dependent Variable				
Variable	**B**	**SE B**	**β**	**Significance (p)**
Team Identity	-0.012	0.044	-0.021	0.784
University Identity	-0.025	0.064	-0.033	0.691
Perceived Organizational Prestige	0.117	0.109	0.087	0.284
Brand Loyalty as Dependent Variable				
Variable	**B**	**SE B**	**β**	**Significance (p)**
Team Identity	-0.004	0.040	-0.007	0.922
University Identity	-0.003	0.058	-0.004	0.957
Perceived Organizational Prestige	0.059	0.099	0.048	0.553
Brand Awareness/Associations as Dependent Variable				
Variable	**B**	**SE B**	**β**	**Significance (p)**
Team Identity	-0.010	0.042	-0.018	0.809
University Identity	-0.091	0.061	-0.122	0.140
Perceived Organizational Prestige	0.048	0.105	0.037	0.647

toward a sponsor's brand and products (Jalleh, Donovan, Giles-Corti, & Holman, 2002).

Collegiate sport sponsorship has been reported as effective in creating cognitive awareness of the sponsor's brand (Dees et al., 2008). However, the results from this study provide evidence that adidas' sponsorship of the university, despite its large monetary value, was not effective in influencing brand equity generation among university students. In this particular case, the claim that these sponsorships allow the sportswear brands to own the campus was found to be false. The strong identification that students have with their basketball team or university in this study did not transfer to the sport apparel brand.

Further research should be conducted examining the relationships and effects of sport sponsorship contracts between sportswear companies and universities. Specifically, an analysis of different athletic departments and sportswear companies should be undertaken. One element missing from this study was an examination of what extent sport apparel companies are activating their sponsorship on campus (i.e., campus book stores, billboards, signage, etc.), which might be a required component to allow students' perception of the university and the athletic teams to affect their perception of the apparel company. Understanding and examining the value of sponsorship activation could be key in finding how these contracts could be more effective for sportswear companies, or if in fact the contracts are worth the ever-increasing high dollar and time investment.

The focus on students as the target population in this study might be seen by some as a limitation as it precludes examining the effect of university and team identity on brand equity among non-students. Brand equity might increase among youth who have an affinity with the team or university and who watch the games through the media. As they consume the games through the media they are exposed to the product of the sportswear company and develop an attachment to it. Similarly, alumni who still identify with the university and its college football team might increase their appreciation of the sportswear company.

Sponsorship activation has received increasing attention in the literature as the process of sponsorship has been found to be more intricate than originally assumed. Sport sponsorships are not simple contractual agreements, but rather intricate business relationships (Cliffe & Motion, 2005). The corporation's ability to activate its sponsorship allows it to leverage the fandom and identity of the university and athletic department's stakeholders as discussed previously (Delia, 2014). It is activation and leveraging that help foster the viewpoints of the sponsorship relationship in the minds of the consumer (Mullin et al., 2014). Scholars have examined the role of sponsorship activation in the context of large-scale sporting events (Choi, Stotlar, & Park, 2006; Papadimitriou & Apostolopoulou, 2009) however, a dearth of literature exists in long-term sponsorship activation effects, specifically among college students, and is cause for further research. It might be that the activation strategies of these sport apparel sponsors are aimed at the national television audiences (Sanburn, 2013), and not on the local fan base.

The findings from this research provide evidence that those who identify with the university and team did not, in turn, hold strong levels of brand equity for adidas. However, the sample population of the study came from a single university at a single time. Replicating this study with other unique samples from different universities could provide different results in brand equity generation. The study also employed the use of a single-dimensional team identity scale, and did not use a multidimensional scale. The use of this scale could have limited the analysis and subsequent results of the data. Additionally, the authors measured the ability of group identity to influence the brand equity perceptions of sportswear sponsors. The current study did not specifically examine consumptive behavior of students, or merchandise sales of the sportswear company. This was done because of varying degrees of disposable income of university students, but inclusion of these constructs could have lead to different results.

Implications

The rejection of the three posited hypotheses may be cause for sportswear companies to further investigate the effectiveness of their sponsorships of college sport programs. The positive relationship between a company's brand equity and its financial success has been presented in previous research (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995). However, the authors found that students who identify with both the university's athletic teams and the university itself did not report significant levels of brand equity of the official sportswear provider of the athletic department.

The findings have implications grounded in the way social identification can be a process in the shaping of brand equity of sponsors. If nothing else, adidas has the opportunity to showcase the quality of its products, increase brand awareness, and engender a sense of loyalty to the brand, components that form the construct of multidimensional brand equity (Yoo & Donthu, 2000), which has been known to have a positive relationship among consumer purchasing intentions (Cliffe & Motion, 2005; Motion, Leitch, & Brodie, 2003).

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Endnote

[1] The use of a six-point scale format was garnered from adapting the original scale formats of five-point (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Yoo & Donthu, 2001) and eight-point (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). The use of a six-point scale was also confirmed with previous literature that states the number of scale points has no impact on the scale's validity and reliability (Matell & Jacoby, 1971).

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